

Tetra Tech International Development

Independent Evaluation of the Girls' Education Challenge Phase II – Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the GEC II Portfolio

Annexes

March 2025



Client Name: FCDO

Project Name: Independent Evaluation of the GEC Phase II

Contract number: PO 10019

Partners:

- Fab Inc
- Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre at the University of Cambridge

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Acronyms

AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
AR	Annual Review
BOM	Board of Management
CAMFED	Campaign for Female Education
CBE	Community-Based Education
CSU	Cheshire Services Uganda
CuCs	Catch-up Centres
DLA	Discovery Learning Alliance
EDN	Evaluation Design Note
EGMA	Early Grade Mathematics Assessment
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
ERSF	Ethical Research and Safeguarding Framework
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict-affected States
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FM	Fund Manager
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GEC I	Girls' Education Challenge Phase I
GEC II	Girls' Education Challenge Phase II
GEC-T	GEC-Transition Window
GEF	Girls' Empowerment Forums
HDC	Hub Development Committees
HPA	Health Poverty Action
ICL	I Choose Life
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IE	Independent Evaluation

IO	Intermediate Outcome
IP	Implementing Partner
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISOP	Integrated Skills Outreach Programme
KEQ	Key Evaluation Question
KII	Key Informant Interview
LNGB	Leave No Girl Behind Window
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
ML	Midline
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OOS	Out of School
PbR	Payment by Results
PEAS	Promoting Equality in African Schools
PESTLE	Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental
PIN	People in Need
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
PwC	PriceWaterhouseCoopers
QA	Quality Assurance
RAG/ RAAG	Red, Amber, Green
REAL	Research for Equitable Access and Learning
SAGE	Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education
SAP	Southern Academic Partner
SEE	Secondary Education Examination
SeGMA	Secondary Grade Mathematics Assessment
SeGRA	Secondary Grade Reading Assessment
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SMC	School Management Committee
SOMGEP	Somali Girls Education Promotion Programme

SQ	Sub-Question
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
StC	Save the Children
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Project Name	Acronym (if applicable)	Implementing Partner	Project Location
Aarambha		People in Need	Nepal
Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia	AGES	Care International UK	Somalia
Biruh Tesfa for All		Population Council	Ethiopia
Building Girls to Live, Learn, Laugh and 'SCHIP' in Strong, Creative, Holistic, Inclusive, Protective, Quality Education	SCHIP	Viva	Uganda
Change	CHANGE	People in Need	Ethiopia
Closing the Gap		ACTED	Pakistan
Community-Based Education for Marginalised Girls in Afghanistan		BRAC	Afghanistan
Discovery Project	Discovery	Impact(Ed) International	Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria
Educate Girls, End Poverty		Relief International	Somalia
Educating Nigerian Girls in New Enterprises	ENGINE	Mercy Corps Nigeria	Nigeria
Education for Life	EfL	ActionAid International	Kenya
Empowering a New Generation of Adolescent Girls with Education	ENGAGE	Voluntary Service Overseas	Nepal
Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education		Cheshire Services Uganda	Uganda
Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient	EAGER	International Rescue Committee	Sierra Leone
Excelling Against the Odds		ChildHope UK	Ethiopia
Expanding Inclusive Education Strategies for Girls with Disabilities Kenya		Leonard Cheshire	Kenya
GEARR-ing Up for Success After School	GEARR	Promoting Equality in African Schools	Uganda
Girls Learn, Succeed and Lead		CAMFED International	Tanzania
Girls' Access to Education		Plan International UK	Sierra Leone
Girls' Education Finance: Empowerment for Girls' Education		Opportunity International UK	Uganda
iMlango		Avanti Communications Group	Kenya
Improving Girls' Access through Transforming Education	IGATE	World Vision UK	Zimbabwe
Jielimishe (Educate Yourself)		I Choose Life – Africa	Kenya
Kenya Equity in Education Project	KEEP	World University Service of Canada	Kenya
Let our Girls Succeed (Wasichana Wetu Wafaulu)		Education Development Trust	Kenya
Making Ghanaian Girls Great!	MGCubed	Plan International UK	Ghana
Marginalised no More	MnM	Street Child	Nepal
Réussite et Épanouissement via l'Apprentissage et L'Insertion au Système Éducatif	REALISE	Save the Children Fund	Democratic Republic of Congo
Rwandan Girls' Education and Advancement Programme II	REAP II	Health Poverty Action	Rwanda
Sisters for Sisters' Education	SfSE	Voluntary Service Overseas	Nepal
Somali Girls Education Promotion Programme	SOMGEP	Care International Somalia	Somalia
Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Education Success	STAGES	Aga Khan Foundation	Afghanistan

Project Name	Acronym (if applicable)	Implementing Partner	Project Location
Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Education Success Phase II	STAGES II	Aga Khan Foundation	Afghanistan
Strategic Approaches to Girls' Education	STAGE	World Education Inc.	Ghana
Successful Transition and Advancement of Rights for Girls	STAR-G	Save the Children Fund	Mozambique
Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education	SAGE	Plan International UK	Zimbabwe
Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali	STEM	Mercy Corps Europe	Nepal
Supporting Transition of Adolescent Girls through Enhanced Systems	STAGES	Link Education International	Ethiopia
Teach and Educate Adolescent Girls with Community Help	TEACH	International Rescue Committee	Pakistan
TEAM Girl Malawi	TEAM	Link Education International	Malawi
Ultimate Virtuous Cycle of Girls' Education	UVC-GE	CAMFED International	Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania

Annex A: List of IE outputs

Study 1 – Effects of Covid-19 on Access and Learning in the GEC II

Final [Report](#) and [Annexes](#)

Policy [brief](#)

Machine learning knowledge [brief](#)

[Blog](#) on learning losses in Kenya and Nepal

Study 2 – Teachers and Teaching for Marginalised Girls

Final [Report](#) and [Annexes](#)

Study [brief](#)

News [article](#) published by REAL Centre

News [article](#) published by REAL Centre

News [article](#) published in Ghanaian media

Study 3 – Aggregate impact of GEC-T projects between baseline and midline

Final [Report](#) and [Annexes](#)

Study [brief](#)

Study 4 – Educating Girls with Disabilities in GEC II

Final [Report](#) and [Annexes](#)

Study [brief](#)

[Blog](#) published on the GEC website

[Blog](#) published by UNGEI

[Blog](#) published by Inclusive Education Initiative

[Case Study](#) in British Expertise International publication “*Beyond Boundaries: The Role of UK-Based Organisations in Advancing Global Gender Equality and Social Inclusion*” (page 53)

Study 5 – Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling

Final [Report](#) and [Annexes](#)

Study [brief](#)

News [article](#) published by the REAL Centre

[Blog](#) published by UNGEI

River of Life [Summary](#)

River of Life [Blog](#) on GEC website

[Case Study](#) in British Expertise International publication “*Systems Strengthening: The UK Education providers’ contribution to the global education systems*” (page 53)

Study 6 - Value for Money of Educating the Most Marginalised Girls through the GEC

Final [Report](#) and [Annexes](#)

Standard Study [brief](#)

Summary Study [brief](#)

Study 7 - Sustaining Changes in Community Attitudes and Norms to Improve Girls' Education Outcomes

Final [Report](#) and [Annexes](#)

Study [brief](#)

Lessons Learned Study

Final [Report](#) and [Annexes](#)

Learning Question 1 Study [brief](#)

Learning Question 2 Study [brief](#)

Rapid Research & Learning Fund

University of Portsmouth

Final [Report](#) and [Annexes](#)

Narrators [Report](#) (Somali)

Population Council Kenya

Final [Report](#) and [Annexes](#)

Policy Brief for [National](#) Stakeholders

Policy Brief for Stakeholders in [Nairobi](#), [Kilifi](#), [Kisumu](#) and [Wajir](#)

National Institute of Development Research

Final [Report and Annexes](#)

Research [Summary](#) (English)

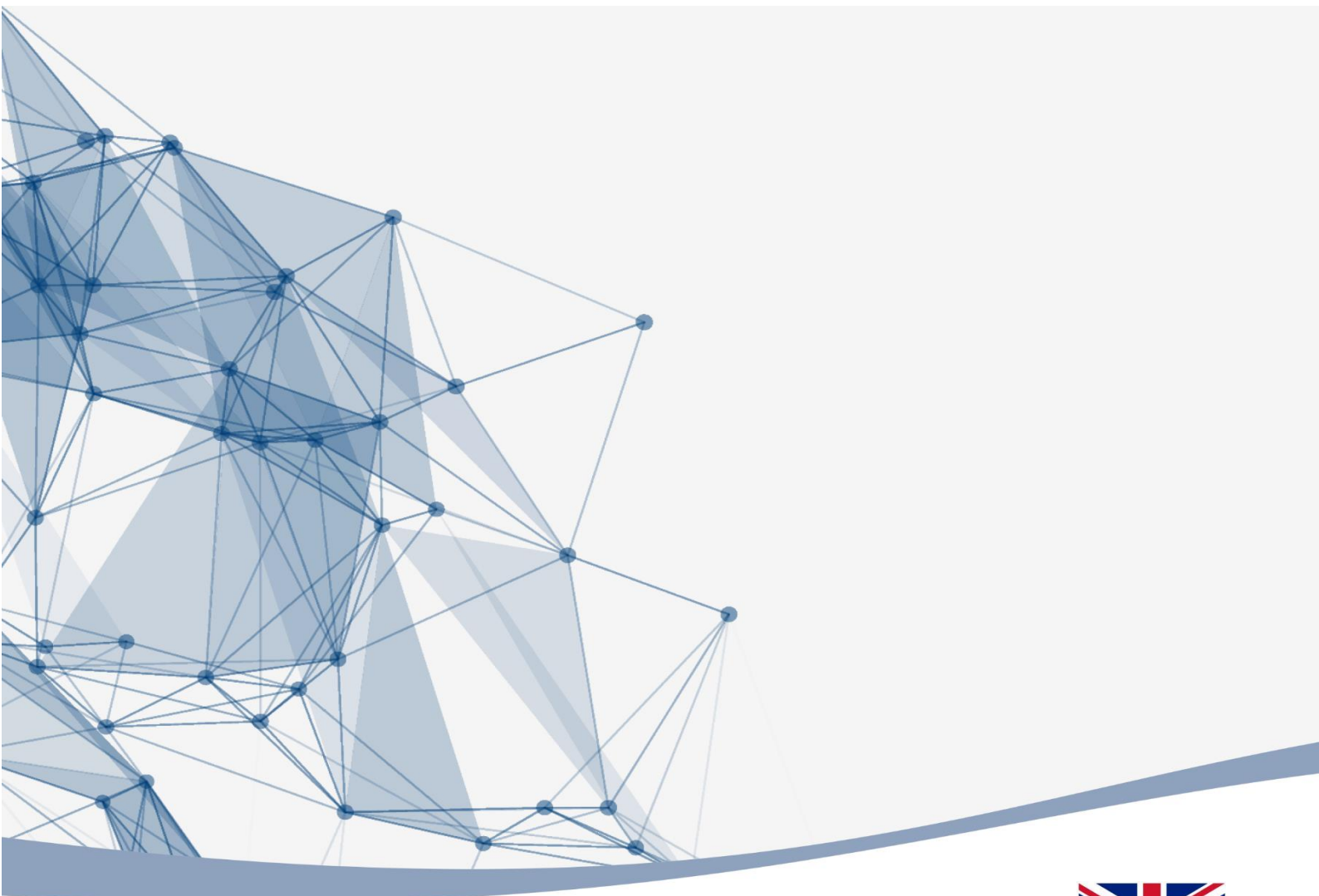
Research [Summary](#) (Nepali)

Annex B: Evaluation Design Note

Tetra Tech International Development

Design Note for the Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the GEC II Portfolio

April 2024



Design Note for the Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the GEC II Portfolio

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Contract Number: PO 10019

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April 2024

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Simon Griffiths

Programme Director

Signature:



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Acronyms

AGES	Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia
APPRO	Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSU	Cheshire Services Uganda
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DCP	Data Collection Partner
DLA	Discovery Learning Alliance
EDN	Evaluation Design Note
NGINE	Educating Nigerian Girls in New Enterprises
EQALS	Evaluation Quality Assurance and Learning Service
ERSF	Ethical Research and Safeguarding Framework
ESWG	Evaluation Studies Working Group
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FM	Fund Manager
GEC	Girls' Education Challenge
GEC I	Girls' Education Challenge Phase I
GEC II	Girls' Education Challenge Phase II
GEC-T	Girls' Education Challenge – Transition
GESI	Gender and Social Inclusion
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HIC	High Income Country
HPA	Health Poverty Action
IE	Independent Evaluation
IGATE	Improving Girls' Access through Transforming Education
IPs	Implementing Partners

KEQ	Key Evaluation Question
KII	Key Informant Interview
LMIC	Low- and Middle-Income Countries
LNGB	Leave No Girl Behind
MTRP	Medium Term Response Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
PEAS	Promoting Equality in African Schools
PiN	People in Need
PLS	Plain Language Statement
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
RAAG	Red/ Amber/ Green
REAL	Research and Equitable Access and Learning Centre
REAP 2	Rwandan Girls' Education and Advancement Programme 2
RED	Research and Evidence Division
RRLF	Rapid Research and Learning Fund (RRLF)
SAGE	Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education in Zimbabwe
SAP	Southern Academic Partners
SPAs	Senior Portfolio Advisors
SQ	Sub-question
STAGE	Strategic Approaches for Girls' Education
STEM	Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali
TEACH	Teach and Educate Adolescent Girls with Community Help
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UK	United Kingdom
VfM	Value for Money
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas

1. Introduction, context, and background to the evaluation

1.1. Introduction to this Evaluation Design Note

This is the Evaluation Design Note (EDN) for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) Phase II (GEC II) portfolio.

[Section 1](#) describes the context and background to the evaluation and provides an overview of the GEC II and the independent evaluation (IE).

[Section 2](#) describes the evaluation approach and design; and [Section 3](#) sets out the research methodology including the case study methodology.

[Section 4](#) summarises the IE Team's approach to research ethics and safeguarding. [Section 5](#) describes the governance and management arrangements for the evaluation. [Section 6](#) sets out the evaluation's work plan and deliverables, and finally [Section 7](#) provides a list of references. The Design Note is supported by seven annexes (A-G) that are referenced in the relevant sections.

1.2. Context and background

1.2.1. Context and background to the Girls' Education Challenge Phase II

GEC Phase I (2012-2017)

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) launched Phase 1 of the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC I) in 2012 to ensure up to one million of the world's most marginalised girls completed a full cycle of either primary or secondary education. The FCDO invested £355 million in the GEC I programme which was implemented over four years (2012-16) with an additional one year no-cost extension until 2017. GEC I targeted 1.4 million marginalised girls and provided funding to 37 different projects delivering activities across 18 countries.

GEC Phase II (2017-2025)

Following Phase 1, the FCDO invested a further £500 million in the GEC II programme. The purpose of GEC II over its eight-year implementation period (2017-2025) was to "support 1.5 million marginalised girls with education; to improve their lives, as well as those of their families and communities"³. All projects have been designed and delivered by Implementing Partners (IPs) and GEC II is managed through a Fund Manager (FM) consortium led by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). In 2020, the FCDO commissioned an Independent Evaluation (IE) of the GEC II to generate evidence and learning. The GEC II programme, as a whole, ends in March 2025 with the last GEC II project ending in August 2024; the FM contract ending in December 2024; and the IE contract ending in March 2025.

GEC II was delivered through 41 projects in 17 countries and was structured by two funding windows:

- **The GEC-Transitions (GEC-T) Window** provided continued support to 1 million marginalised girls through 27 GEC Phase I projects helping girls transition to the next stage of education in 15 countries (Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). These projects started implementing activities in mid-2017 with timeframes of between three and seven years.
- **The Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) Window** funded 14 projects supporting up to 500,000 highly marginalised girls in 10 countries (Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Zimbabwe). LNGB projects focused on supporting highly marginalised adolescent girls between 10-19 years of age into education or training while gaining skills, including numeracy and literacy. LNGB projects targeted highly marginalised girls included those who either never enrolled in formal schooling or dropped out before achieving basic literacy and numeracy skills. The marginalised groups of girls targeted included girls with disabilities, girls at risk of early marriage and girls who are pregnant or have children. Projects started in late 2018, and enrolled beneficiaries in cohorts, which typically lasted from 9-12 months.

³ FCDO (2020), "Business Case: Girls' Education Challenge Extension"

1.2.2. Current GEC II status

Most GEC projects have now completed implementation and have closed. As of January 2024, the following five GEC projects are still ongoing:

- VIVA Crane, Uganda (GEC-T) – end date: 29 February 2024;
- Cheshire Services Uganda (CSU), Uganda (GEC-T) – end date: 31 March 2024;
- People in Need (PiN), Nepal (LNGB) – end date: 31 March 2024;
- CARE Somalia, Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia (AGES) (LNGB) – end date: 31 July 2024; and
- LINK Education Ethiopia (GEC-T) – end date: 31 August 2024;

This evaluation will be conducted when nearly all projects have closed. The practical implications for the evaluation's implementation are considered throughout the following sections.

1.2.3. GEC II response Covid-19 crisis

From March 2020, the Covid-19 outbreak affected the United Kingdom (UK) and all GEC II projects and the countries in which they were implemented. GEC II projects had to adapt their planned activities in response to the magnitude of the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic including school closures. Projects adapted to meet the changing needs of girls whose educational experiences. At the time, it was unclear when schools might reopen and there was little information about alternative education provision by national authorities⁴. Furthermore, lockdown restrictions threatened families' livelihoods, food security and access to basic services; while girls supported by GEC II projects faced heightened vulnerability to sexual exploitation, early marriage, domestic violence, and other safeguarding issues. The GEC II programme's response was broadly categorised by three distinct phases⁵ over two years (2020-2022) of the pandemic:

- **Phase 1 – Immediate response planning (March to June 2020):** Logframe reporting requirements were suspended and projects created short-term implementation plans determined by agreed 'principles' – i.e., to prioritise support for GEC beneficiaries and their communities; prioritise girls' safety and wellbeing; take an equitable approach, recognising that the impacts of Covid-19 would disproportionately affect the most marginalised girls; and align project response plans with country response strategies. All projects paused activities and prepared immediate response plans, rapidly conducted situational analyses and proposed activities to support girls, primarily focusing on safety and wellbeing, which would then move to the continuation of learning.
- **Phase 2 – Medium-term response planning (June 2020 to July 2021):** Projects developed medium-term response plans (MTRPs), which were implemented six to 12 months after Phase 1 supporting girls to return to school and responding to potential school closures in subsequent waves of the pandemic. The MTRPs focused on ensuring girls could participate safely in learning activities and tackling new challenges arising from the continuing pandemic. Activities were aligned with projects' original interventions by using remote or socially distanced approaches.
- **Phase 3 – Reflection and adaptation (July 2021 to 2022):** Although schools were not fully open in all contexts, there was more stability and understanding of the pandemic and its effects. Projects were encouraged to reflect on what had worked and /or changed in the past six months and adapt their longer-term plans. Projects and the FM reflected on which interventions to keep and adapt through review and adaptation meetings.

While the Covid-19 crisis had a major impact on GEC II project activities, it also had substantial implications for the results they reported, their monitoring and evaluation plans and the scope of work of the IE, which are covered in the following sections.

1.3. GEC II Theory of Change

The GEC II Theory of Change (ToC) was produced as part of the FCDO's GEC Phase II Business Case⁶ in 2016. The overarching purpose of the GEC ToC at the fund level was to provide a high-level overview of the process (and causal pathways) that the programme set out to deliver and the links between changes at output, intermediate outcome,

⁴ Fund Manager/PwC (2022), "An effective crisis response: Lessons from the COVID-19 experience"

⁵ Ibid

⁶ FCDO (2020), "Business Case: Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) Extension"

outcome, and impact levels of the impact logic. The GEC II ToC expanded on the GEC I ToC to include evidence and lessons from GEC I, including the introduction of new intermediate outcomes to provide a clearer path between outputs and outcomes.

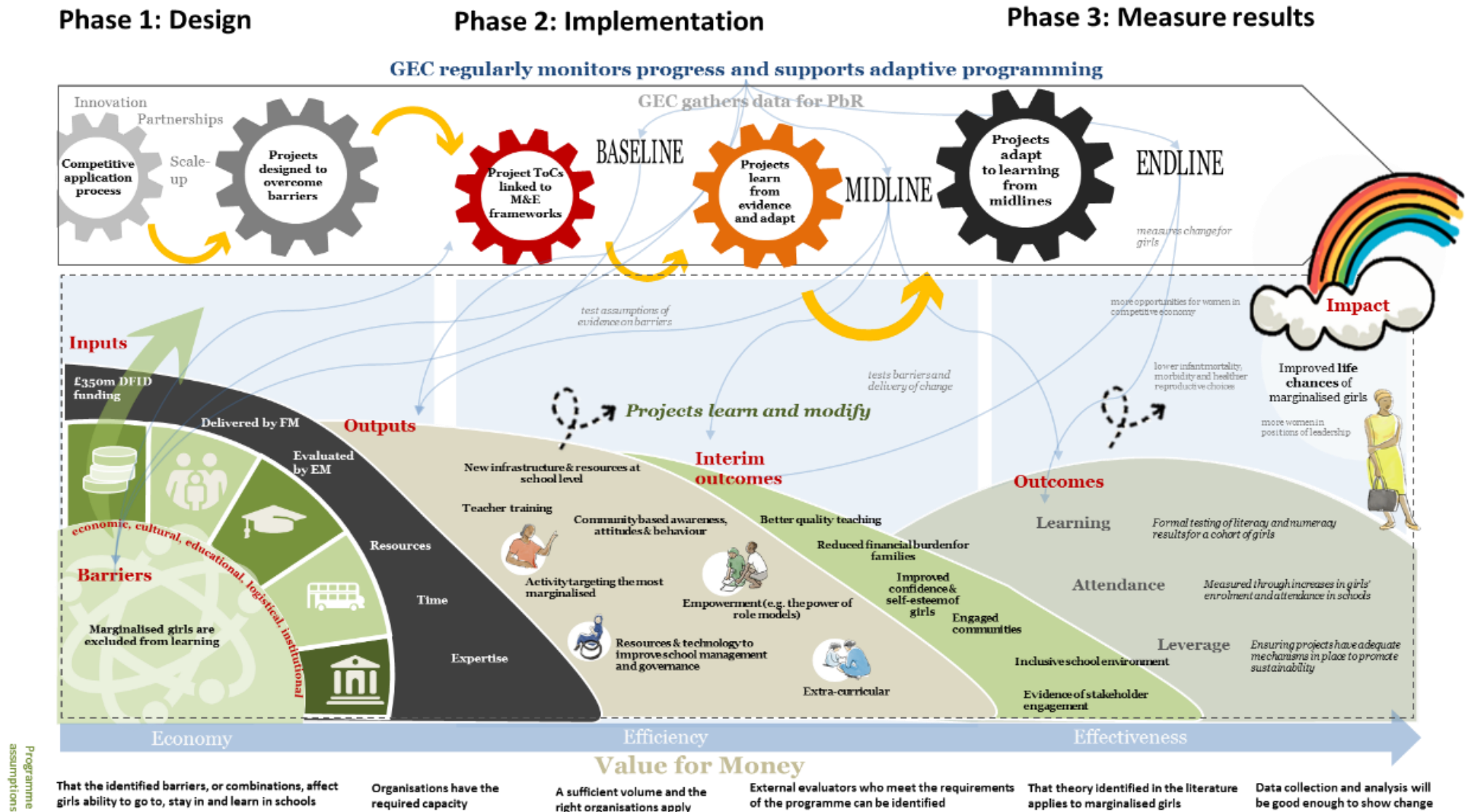
The GEC II ToC (Figure 1) central hypothesis assumes that if marginalised girls and their families are supported to overcome barriers to education at different points of girls' lives through both demand-side and supply-side strategies, then girls will stay in school for longer and increase their learning levels. It also assumes that if girls successfully transition to secondary school, they will tend to marry later, have healthier and better educated families, have higher and more secure incomes, increase their voice and agency, and be able to invest more into their communities. This would help break the cycle of inter-generational poverty and lead to improved life opportunities and greater wellbeing for girls and their families. The IE Inception Report⁷ includes a full review of the GEC II ToC.

1.3.1. Development of the GEC II ToC

The GEC II ToC focuses on macro-level changes to accommodate project ToCs consisting of specific contextual issues, timeframes, and diverse types of interventions. Its broad, high-level central hypothesis of change allows the fund-level ToC to remain relevant to a highly diverse set of projects, countries, and target groups. Throughout the life of GEC II, no changes were made to the ToC, including during the Covid-19 crisis, because it was perceived that the overarching ToC was still valid. So, to date, the GEC II ToC remains unchanged since the Business Case in 2016. [Annex B](#) provides detailed information about the development of the GEC II ToC. The GEC II ToC does not differentiate between the GEC-T and LNGB funding windows and their portfolios of projects. However, the FM developed a specific ToC for the LNGB portfolio (see [Annex B](#)) following the 2019 Annual Review, which has a more explicit focus on out-of-school, older adolescent girls and on their transition pathways into formal and informal education. No specific ToC for the GEC-T portfolio has been produced to date.

⁷ Tetra Tech (2021), "Independent Evaluation of the Girls' Education Challenge Phase II: Inception Report"

Figure 1: GEC II Theory of Change (Business Case, 2016)



1.4. GEC II Logframe, results, and targets

1.4.1. GEC II Logframe (2024)

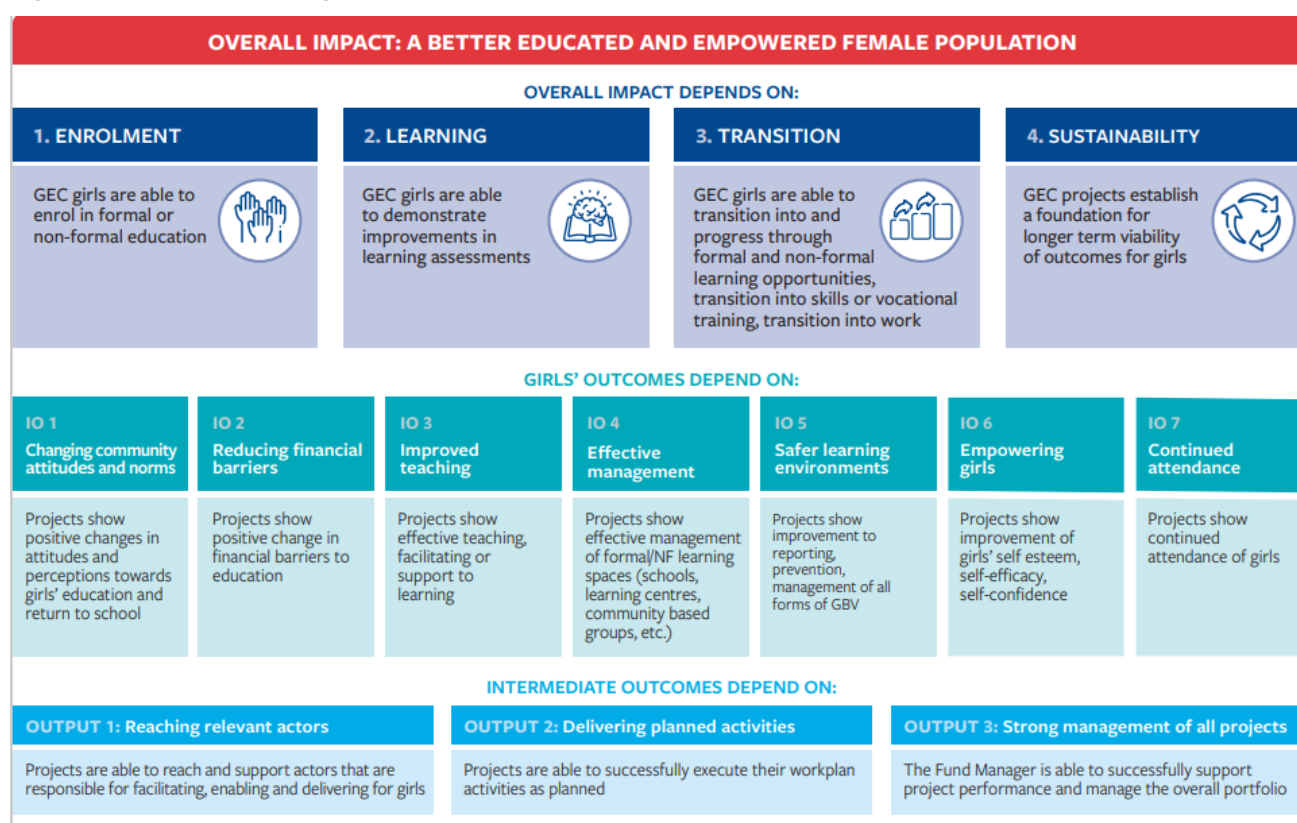
Contrary to the GEC II ToC, the GEC II Logframe has undergone substantial and frequent changes since the first year of Phase II: the number, scope, and definitions of the Logframe outcome and intermediate outcome indicators have been revised multiple times. This happened in particular (but not exclusively) as a result of the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on project implementation, and monitoring, and evaluation activities. [Annex B](#) provides details of the changes to the GEC II Logframe indicators.

GEC II has one higher-level impact objective: a better educated and empowered female population. This impact is meant to be achieved through the contributions of four overarching outcomes:

- Enrolment:** Girls are enrolled in formal or non-formal education – contrary to the definition of enrolment used in GEC I, this includes enrolment in any type of GEC II activity, in or out of school.
- Learning:** Girls supported by the GEC are able to demonstrate improvements in learning assessments.
- Transition:** Girls supported by the GEC are able to transition into and progress through school, transition into skills or vocational training and transition into work.
- Sustainability:** GEC projects establish a foundation for the longer term viability of outcomes for girls.

The current GEC II outcomes, intermediate outcomes and key outputs are shown in the latest Logframe in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Current GEC II Logframe (Annual Review, 2023)



Intermediate outcomes were included as an intermediary step between outputs and outcomes⁸. The seven intermediate outcomes, which are common to the GEC-T and LNGB windows, are as follows:

⁸ "A key learning from GEC 1 was the difficulty in assessing whether the programme is on track to meet its outcome targets from the annual output assessments. This was particularly problematic for measuring learning outcomes, as this target was measured through the project evaluations and therefore not reported on annually. As a result, a number of GEC 1 projects missed their learning and attendance outcome targets despite performing well against output measures and workplans." FCDO Annual Review Report (2017), p.7.

1. Changing community attitudes and norms
2. Reducing financial barriers
3. Improved teaching
4. Effective management
5. Safer learning environments
6. Empowering girls
7. Continued attendance

Although all GEC-T and LNGB projects sought to contribute to the high-level impact and four overarching outcomes, some projects aimed to achieve a subset of the seven intermediate outcomes, with the exception of attendance (Intermediate Outcome 7) which is a mandatory indicator for all GEC II projects. Intermediate outcome indicators were developed on a project-by-project basis, which means that projects may have measured and /or reported their progress in different ways within one intermediate outcome category. Unlike the evidence and reporting requirements for the learning and transition outcomes (which are based on projects' external evaluations), reporting on intermediate outcomes uses a single rubric applied by the FM portfolio team considering both evaluation and monitoring evidence⁹.

1.5. Overview of the GEC II Independent Evaluation

In 2020, the FCDO commissioned an Independent Evaluation (IE) of the GEC II to generate evidence and learning to understand what has worked well or less well, how, why, for whom and in which contexts. This evaluation is being conducted by a consortium of partners: Tetra Tech International Development Europe; the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre at the University of Cambridge; Fab Inc; Southern academic partners¹⁰ and national /regional research partners (depending on the location of the IE Team's research). The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the IE requires the IE Team to deliver:

- Seven in-depth thematic studies designed and implemented iteratively to respond to the emerging evidence and learning needs of the FCDO and FM.
- A Rapid Research and Learning Fund (RRLF) – a ringfenced fund to commission research relevant to GEC II and the FCDO's evidence and learning priorities.
- An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the GEC II Portfolio.
- A Lessons Learned Study covering GEC Phases I and II.

1.5.1. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios

The evaluation will assess the effectiveness of GEC II projects that were designed and implemented through the GEC-T and LNGB Windows. It will cover GEC II project activities implemented from the start of Phase II in 2017 up to March 2024.

1.5.2. Current status of the IE Studies

Table 1 below provides a summary of the current status of the IE Team's work – Studies 1-5 have been completed with Study 6 (Value for Money (VfM)) and Study 7 (Sustainability) ongoing. This portfolio evaluation will make full use of the analysis and findings from the previous IE studies as part of our evaluation approach. GEC II projects have participated in the IE studies as case studies. As far as possible, different projects were selected for different studies and for this evaluation to avoid selecting the same project for multiple studies.

⁹ Fund Manager (2022), "Girls' Education Challenge Revised Logframe Milestone"

¹⁰ Seven Southern academic institutions are part of the IE consortium including: Centre for the Studies for the Economies of Africa in Nigeria; Institute of Social and Policy Sciences in Pakistan; University of Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania; Institute for Integrated Development Studies in Nepal; Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO); Africa Population and Health Research Centre in Kenya; and Centre for Social Research at Chancellor College in Malawi.

Table 1: Status of GEC II IE work

IE Scope of Work	Status (End Date)	Case Study Projects (Window)
Study 1: <i>Access and Learning</i>	Complete (Feb-22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EDT Kenya (GEC-T) • Mercy Corps Nepal (LNGB)
Study 2: <i>Teachers and Teaching</i>	Complete (Dec-21)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AKF Afghanistan (GEC-T) • BRAC Afghanistan (GEC-T) • Plan Ghana (GEC-T) • IRC Sierra Leone (LNGB)
Study 3: <i>Aggregate Impact of GEC-T Projects between Baseline and Midline</i>	Complete (Aug-22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NA/ Desk-based assessment (GEC-T)
Study 4: <i>Educating Girls with Disabilities in GEC II</i>	Complete (May-23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VSO Nepal (LNGB) • LINK Malawi (LNGB) • Viva/ CRANE Uganda (GEC-T)
Study 5: <i>Education for Marginalised Girls Beyond Formal Schooling</i>	Complete (Oct-23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WEI Ghana (LNGB) • ActionAid Kenya (LNGB) • PiN Nepal (LNGB)
Study 6: <i>VfM of Reaching the Most Marginalised GEC Girls</i>	Analysis /Reporting (Jul-24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PiN Nepal (LNGB) • PiN Ethiopia (LNGB) • LINK Malawi (LNGB)
Study 7: <i>Sustaining Changes in Community Attitudes and Norms to Improve Girls' Education Outcomes</i>	Fieldwork (Feb-25)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VSO Sisters for Sister Nepal (GEC-T) • Camfed Zimbabwe (GEC-T)
Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the GEC II Portfolio	Evaluation Design (Mar-25)	GEC-T & LNGB
GEC Phase I & II Lessons Learned Study (2012-2025)	Start Apr-24 (Mar-25)	NA (GEC Phase I & II)
Rapid Research and Learning Fund (RRLF):		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Portsmouth/ Consilient Research (Somalia) 	Complete (Dec-22)	NA (GEC Phase I)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population Council (Kenya) 	Complete (Jan-23)	NA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Institute for Development Research (Nepal) 	Complete (Jun-23)	LNGB

2. Evaluation approach

2.1. Background and evolution of the evaluation approach

2.1.1. Background to the evaluation

In September 2022, the FCDO approved key changes to the IE's scope of work and deliverables for the remainder of the contract, which ends in March 2025. The FCDO decided to reduce the number of in-depth studies from eight to seven and drop the second round of the Rapid Research and Learning Fund managed by the IE team. Instead of this work, the FCDO required the IE Team to deliver evaluations of the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios and a lessons learned study covering both phases of the GEC. These changes should provide the FCDO with greater accountability for the large investment it has made in GEC II and provide valuable evidence about what worked well or less well, why, for whom and in what contexts.

2.1.2. Evolution of the evaluation approach

The evaluation will answer the Key Evaluation Question (KEQ) and sub-questions (SQs) set out below, which were developed by the IE Team through several discussions with the FCDO and the FM. The evaluation questions were initially developed with reference to the six Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) criteria for evaluation: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. Following meetings with the FCDO and the Evaluation Studies Working Group (EWSG) in November 2023, it was decided that the evaluation of the two portfolios should **focus solely on their effectiveness**, with the other criteria not covered in this particular evaluation for the following reasons:

- The FM's Value for Money (VfM) work has already covered the efficiency criterion through the VfM scorecards developed for each GEC II project and VfM is also the main focus of IE Study 6.
- The impact criterion was removed following discussion with the FCDO because the GEC II was designed to focus on improving outcomes for a specific cohort of girls within its lifetime rather than wider impacts that take more time to materialise.
- The relevance criterion is embedded in the effectiveness evaluation questions (which reflect a broad definition of effectiveness used since the start of the GEC).
- The coherence criterion – i.e., the compatibility of the interventions with other existing interventions in a country or sector – is not a focus, given that the evaluation focuses on performance at the portfolio level.
- The sustainability criterion is covered by the IE Study 7 (focusing on community-based aspects of sustainability) and various FM sustainability outputs¹¹. Sustainability may also be included as a focus of the Lessons Learned Study (to be confirmed when the ToR is developed) reviewing sustainability over both phases of the GEC.

Following written feedback and further revisions, the FCDO approved the evaluation questions in February 2024. The approved ToR for this evaluation is available in [Annex A](#).

2.1.3. GEC II programme implications for the evaluation

Changes in results areas, definition and measurement of outcomes and intermediate outcomes over the course of the GEC II

The GEC outcomes and intermediate outcomes have been subject to change in their definitions and measurement /reporting requirements since the start of the GEC II. For example, participation was only introduced as an outcome in 2021, and was revised and renamed as enrolment in 2023. While participation was originally a count of the number of the number of girls participating in formal or non-formal education, its scope was later broadened to counting all girls enrolled in GEC II project activities. Similarly, the way Learning is measured has changed considerably following the Covid-19 outbreak and resulting school closures and movement restrictions, with projects being given more flexibility in how they could measure and report on learning between their midline and endline evaluations.

This Evaluation Design Note includes a chronological mapping (see [Annex B](#)) of the results and measurement/ reporting requirements that projects were tasked with delivering at different stages in the life of GEC II. This has been

¹¹ See for example the first iteration of the GEC *Portfolio in Practice* series produced by the GEC Fund Manager, *Advancing sustainability across a portfolio: A deep dive into the Girls' Education Challenge Sustainability Framework* (July 2023).

used to inform the sampling strategy for the project case study selection. To ensure the evaluation is fair, reasonable, and accurate, the IE Team will evaluate the performance of the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios in delivering the results projects were tasked with delivering at any given time. This will reflect any changes in the result areas, how they were assessed and the contextual conditions that may have affected the scope and focus of projects' activities (and results), especially the global Covid-19 pandemic.

Learning is the only outcome within the scope of the effectiveness evaluation that has been consistently reported at the portfolio level since the start of GEC II

Learning has been reported consistently at the portfolio level since 2019, which corresponds with the timing of the first midline evaluations (for GEC-T projects). As mentioned above, participation /enrolment was only included as a Logframe outcome in 2019, and projects were not set transitions targets before 2022. Sustainability is out of scope of this evaluation (see ToR in [Annex A](#)), and so learning is the optimum outcome to use as a primary selection criterion for sampling the project case studies.

A key limitation is that the measurement of learning has faced major changes in the way it is measured following the new Logframe implemented from 2022 onwards in response to the end of the Covid-19 pandemic. LNGB projects generally used different approaches to assess learning changes for their midline and endline evaluations compared to GEC-T projects. Most GEC-T midline evaluations were conducted before the Covid-19 outbreak, and as such follow the original approach to assessing learning progress through differences in standard deviations over and above a comparison group. But most GEC-T endline evaluations took place over 2020-2021, when no learning assessment data could be collected, and *ad hoc* qualitative evidence was used to measure learning. Other GEC-T project endline evaluations that took place in 2022 and later measured learning using the four lines of evidence introduced in 2022. In contrast, most LNGB endline evaluations of their cohorts took place after the Covid-19 pandemic from 2022 onwards and were less affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. This inconsistency, and the difference between LNGB and GEC-T projects, is why the IE Team have used midline learning results as a primary selection criterion for GEC-T project case studies, while endline learning results have been used to select LNGB project case studies (see [Section 3.4.1](#)).

The measurement and reporting of intermediate outcomes are project-specific, so these results have not been used as a selection criterion for selecting project case studies

As mentioned above, GEC projects had the choice of selecting three to five intermediate outcomes to measure and report against. Indicators and related targets were then developed by each project and validated by the FM. This led to a lack of consistency in the way intermediate outcomes have been measured and reported across projects. A consistent approach to reporting of intermediate outcomes at the portfolio level consisting of intermediate outcome categories and RAAG ratings was introduced in 2022, following the revision of the Logframe milestones. As a result, progress towards intermediate outcome targets has not been used as a criterion for selecting GEC-T and LNGB projects for the case studies (see [Section 3.4.1](#)).

2.2. Purpose and objectives of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the GEC II portfolio

2.2.1. Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

The evaluation's purpose is to assess the overall effectiveness of the two project portfolios funded through the GEC-T and LNGB Windows. The evaluation intends to meet the FCDO's need for accountability and learning as the GEC II approaches the end of its life. The evaluation will assess what the two portfolios as a whole have achieved while acknowledging that there have already been independent evaluations for all projects. So, the evaluation objectives are to:

1. Provide the FCDO with the comprehensive portfolio level evidence it needs to account for its investment in GEC Phase II, including what worked well and what did not work, and where; and
2. Generate learning that captures the extent to which the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios have impacted on girls' education, how, why and under what contextual conditions.

The primary stakeholder audiences for the evaluation includes the FCDO's GEC II programme team, FCDO's Education Advisors and the FM including the FM's Senior Portfolio Advisers (SPAs), and the IPs delivering individual projects. Secondary stakeholder audiences include other departments and teams within the FCDO, including the Evaluation Department and Research and Evidence Division (RED), international donors, agencies, and stakeholders

working and investing in education, including researchers, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and other international education practitioners.

2.2.2. Consultation during the evaluation design phase

Throughout the evaluation design phase, the IE Team consulted with the FM and FCDO via e-mail or virtual meetings – this included consultation with the FM's Evaluation team who provided important information and clarifications about changes in the programme's Logframe indicators. The IE Team will seek to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication with completed, ongoing and planned work by the IE/ FM/ FCDO, through ongoing consultation, especially with the FM's Evaluation Team.

The IE Team will share the draft of this EDN with the Evaluation Study Working Group (ESWG) and receive written feedback by email. Following FCDO approval of the EDN, the IE team will immediately consult with the FM and IPs whose projects have been selected for the case studies to facilitate the start of the research phase.

2.3. Key principles

At each stage of the evaluation, we will ensure that our evaluation approach and methodology is fully compliant with the FCDO (2013) Evaluation Policy; OECD-DAC evaluation principles, evaluation criteria, and quality standards for development evaluation; and the quality assurance standards and criteria set by the FCDO's Evaluation Quality Assurance and Learning Service (EQuALS). The following principles will underpin our evaluation approach:

- The evaluation should make the optimal use of all available data, evidence, learning and programme management information about the GEC II produced by the IPs, FM, and the IE (through previous and ongoing studies). This will enhance the evaluation's level of rigour, ensure appropriate triangulation of our analysis, and avoid unnecessary and duplicative research.
- The evaluation approach should take a highly consultative approach throughout the design, research, analysis, and reporting phases to help validate our interpretation and analysis of data, evidence and information and ensure our findings and conclusions are accurate and credible.
- Ensure an independent and objective evaluation by transparently setting out our evaluation and research methodologies, their limitations and the strength of the evidence underpinning our analyses, findings, and conclusions.

We are committed to aligning our evaluation approach with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and its five principles of: *ownership*, *alignment*, *harmonisation*, *results*, and *mutual accountability*. This evaluation will enhance the FCDO's accountability and ownership of its investment in GEC II; and enable the evidence and learning generated about the GEC's results and what works in improving girls' education to be used by the FCDO and its partners to improve the effectiveness of future girls' education policies and programmes.

2.3.1. Overall approach

This evaluation design will be framed by evaluation questions. These questions frame the scope and focus of the evaluation, data collection, analysis and findings and conclusions. They also provide the structure for the Evaluation Framework (see [Annex C](#)), which structures the research and analysis to ensure that the evidence and its sources, analysis, and methods directly and efficiently respond to the evaluation questions.

The evaluation will primarily use an **evidence synthesis approach**, reviewing the evidence reported in projects' independent evaluation reports, building on harvesting and synthesis work conducted by the IE Team for previous IE studies and drawing on other project /programme management information. This will be supplemented with primary research to provide additional evidence in response to the evaluation questions. Multiple sources of data and evidence will be used to assess the outcomes and intermediate outcomes realised by targeted beneficiary groups and sub-groups; and the types of interventions that projects reported as proving effective in delivering their results.

This evaluation of the effectiveness of the GEC II portfolio will focus on all Logframe outcome and intermediate outcome results (except sustainability) reported by projects. The starting point for the evaluation is the 'effects' reported by projects in the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios i.e., the GEC II Logframe outcome and intermediate outcome indicators that all projects reported on through their independent evaluation reports and monitoring reports. Projects' performance in delivering against the targets set by the FM provide an initial indication of whether they were effective or not in delivering their objectives as set out in the GEC II ToC. All results will be

evaluated including those without targets at the portfolio level e.g., transition outcomes before 2022. As far as possible, the IE Team will summarise and describe projects' performance against these targets and use this to frame the assessment of what type of interventions worked well or not, for whom, how, why and in what contexts. As shown in [Annex B](#), the definitions and targets for the GEC II outcome and intermediate outcome indicators changed substantially over the life of the programme. The IE Team will critically review the extent to which the changes in the definition of the Logframe indicators were appropriate given the reasons provided at the time e.g., the disruption caused by Covid-19 at the time. The IE Team will also assess what the projects' results practically mean for the girls supported by GEC II in terms of their literacy and numeracy levels, transition on to employment or education, participation in the GEC II activities and intermediate effects on girls, their schools, families, and communities – this is particularly important for reported results for which targets were not set.

The use of an experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation design is not appropriate for evaluating the effectiveness of the GEC II portfolio. Both the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios consist of projects delivering multiple interventions of different types, targeting diverse beneficiaries across a wide range of regional, national, and local contexts. Due to the diversity of the portfolios and the lack of data from comparison groups, the use of an experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation design is not appropriate.

The GEC II ToC is not sufficiently detailed or granular to support a theory-based evaluation, but the ToC will be used to frame the evaluation's conclusions and the extent to which the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios have achieved their objectives. The current GEC II ToC provides the high level rationale for the programme accommodating high levels of diversity of project interventions, beneficiaries, and contexts – it remains unchanged since the GEC II Business Case in 2016. Only the LNGB Window has its own bespoke ToC, which was developed in 2020 and has not changed since. While the GEC II ToC is useful for framing the overall objectives and results areas, its focus on high-level changes means it is not sufficiently detailed or granular to support a theory-based evaluation of the GEC II portfolio. Programme theory has not been used to determine key decisions about the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios over their lifetimes. However, the overall GEC II ToC and LNGB ToC will be used to frame the evaluation's conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios in delivering their objectives as set out in the ToCs.

Project-level ToCs will be used to frame an in-depth analysis of their performance for those projects selected for further case study research. Project-level ToCs should be context-specific and responsive to changes such as those required during the Covid-19 crisis. It is unclear to what extent project ToCs were reviewed and revised as part of their learning and adaptation management processes.

2.4. Evaluation criteria and Key Evaluation Questions

2.4.1. Evaluation criteria

As set out in the ToR (see [Annex A](#)), this is an evaluation of the effectiveness of the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios. This evaluation will focus on the effectiveness of the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios i.e., the extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups¹². This evaluation criterion has been used to frame the development of the evaluation questions (below) that define the scope and focus of the evaluation.

2.4.2. Key Evaluation Questions and sub-questions

The Key Evaluation Question (KEQ) and sub-questions (SQs) were developed during the ToR development phase (see [Annex A](#)). The effectiveness evaluation will be framed around one high-level **KEQ**:

- What outcome results did the GEC-T and LNGB deliver, and what worked well /less well and why?

The KEQ and SQs are in-line with the OECD-DAC 'effectiveness' evaluation criterion. This KEQ is built around **six SQs** each considering different dimensions of the effectiveness of GEC II projects. These dimensions will be unpacked to explain how and why they affected the overall effectiveness of the portfolio in achieving its objectives and outcomes.

All sub-questions are relevant to both windows, except for SQ 1.4 which only covers the LNGB window. They have been defined as follows:

¹² OECD (2021), *Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/543e84ed-en>.

- SQ 1.1: What outcome results did the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios deliver between baseline and endline?
- SQ 1.2: What intermediate outcomes did the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios deliver?
- SQ 1.3: What were the unexpected or unintended results across the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios?
- SQ 1.4: To what extent and how did the LNGB portfolio reach and benefit the most marginalised?
- SQ 1.5: To what extent and how did external contextual factors¹³ for different projects across the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios influence their performance?
- SQ 1.6: What were the implementation factors behind GEC-T and LNGB projects' success or lack of success?

2.5. Evaluation design

The evaluation design consists of a portfolio-level assessment supported by in-depth research with a sample of project case studies.

Portfolio assessment: the portfolio assessment will be focused on identifying and analysing the differences and similarities of effects and changes to beneficiaries' outcome and intermediate outcome results across the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios. Projects will not be assessed individually. However, to assess the effectiveness of the two, the IE Team will analyse evidence at the project level for the purpose of producing findings that can be generalised about the portfolio as a whole. The portfolio assessment will involve a desk-based review of documentary evidence supported by interviews with IPs and key strategic stakeholders. The desk-based review of documentary evidence will use all available data, evidence and management information that is relevant to the evaluation questions – including evidence produced by IPs (e.g., independent evaluations produced by external evaluators), the FM, and the IE Team and relevant secondary contextual data. It will draw extensively on the FM and IE studies, research, analysis, and learning produced to date (including thematic studies, learning briefs, VfM reports, etc.). This will enhance data triangulation, reduce potential duplication, and maximise the efficiency of the research and analysis within the time and budget available for the evaluation.

Project case studies: the purpose of the project case studies is to examine in more depth than the portfolio research and analysis how and why some projects successfully delivered their respective results (i.e., outcomes and intermediate outcomes) and why, while other projects were less successful. In response to the SQs, the case studies will enable the IE Team to unpack how and to what extent the type of interventions, target beneficiaries, different contextual factors, and the capacities of IPs to deliver their activities acted as drivers or barriers to projects delivering their results. Case study projects will be purposively selected (see [Section 3.4.1](#)) to provide diverse cases in terms of their success in delivering their results, types of beneficiaries, context, and organisational capacities which reflects the diversity across the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios. The case studies will involve a desk-based review of documentary evidence, secondary data analysis and primary qualitative research with project beneficiaries, stakeholders, and IP staff.

Political Economy Analysis (PEA): as part of our context analysis (in response to SQ 1.5), the project case studies will include PEA of the barriers, enablers and key stakeholders and structures that have influenced projects' performance and success in delivering their results.

Gender, Equity & Social Inclusion (GESI): cutting across all evaluation questions, the evaluation will integrate a GESI lens throughout to, as far as possible, identify which target groups (and sub-groups) benefited and did not benefit, why and under what conditions.

2.5.1. Research and analysis approach

The diverse nature of the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios and the holistic approaches of GEC II projects makes it difficult to identify specific patterns and trends before starting primary data collection. Ideally, the IE Team would conduct desk-based analysis of the portfolios and review all available relevant secondary data before starting any primary research. This would enable the IE Team to identify gaps and contradictions in the secondary data and inform the design of the primary data collection to help fill gaps and resolve contradictions by gathering data from different stakeholders to support triangulation and analysis. Phasing the research and analysis in this way would also help inform the selection of the project case studies to ensure that the selected projects provided the best opportunities to

¹³ By 'external factors' are meant the most prominent contextual factors that have influenced (as drivers or barriers) the projects' delivery of GEC outcomes, e.g., conflict, political economy, social norms, institutional factors, environmental factors, etc.

address key gaps in the existing evidence base. But, due to the limited time available between the completion of this Evaluation Design Note and the end of the GEC II/ IE programme in March 2025 a completely phased research and analysis approach is not possible. However, during the **design phase**, the IE Team will be able to phase the work in a limited way by:

1. Conducting portfolio analysis and desk-based review of secondary data during the evaluation design phase to inform the development of the approach and methodology set out in this EDN [status: completed].
2. Using the preliminary findings from the portfolio analysis to develop the sample frame and select projects for the case studies (see [Section 3.4.1](#)) during the evaluation design phase to allow enough time to start preparing for the fieldwork [status: completed].
3. Continuing the portfolio analysis and review of secondary data before approval of the EDN¹⁴ and prioritising the projects shortlisted for case study selection. Prioritising the shortlisted projects enabled the IE Team to validate the primary selection criterion (i.e., performance in achieving their learning targets), and will inform the design of detailed research plans for each project [status: in progress]. This process involves:
 - Using the evaluation questions and Evaluation Framework to identify results, trends, patterns, contradictions, and gaps in the documentary evidence.
 - Using the preliminary findings to inform the design of detailed research plans for each of the case study projects including the sampling frames (by respondent and location) for the primary data collection and to design the research instruments – both the sample frames and research instruments are needed to support the research permission process, which is time-sensitive in some of the project case study countries.

As soon as the FCDO has approved the EDN, the IE Team will finalise preparations for the fieldwork so that data collection can be completed before the end of August 2024 including consultation with IPs whose projects have been selected as the case studies¹⁵. It is important that the fieldwork avoids school holidays if the research requires the participation of school staff or research with girls in school or in education centres. GEC II projects and fund management activities scale down rapidly after March 2024 with only two projects active after this date. So, it is preferable that the research phase starts as soon as possible to maximise opportunities to gain access to IP and FM team members while they are available.

During the research phase, the IE Team will also adopt a phased approach by taking the following steps:

1. Conducting the case study primary data collection through a combination of key informant interviews, focus group discussions, stakeholder interviews and synthesis of secondary contextual evidence.
2. Continue with the desk-based review of secondary data to systematically extract data and analysis from project documentation, IE studies, and FM learning products and programme management information.
3. Synthesise and analyse the evidence from the document review against the evaluation questions.
4. Identify outstanding gaps in the evidence base and /or contradictions in the analysis.
5. Conduct interviews with IPs and key strategic stakeholders at the portfolio level to address outstanding evidence gaps and contradictions¹⁶.
6. Synthesise and analyse the evidence from the project case studies with the portfolio-level evidence. Relevant examples and learning from the project case study research will be referred to and incorporated into the overall findings of the portfolio-level evaluation report. The IE Team will not be producing individual project case study reports or annexes.

The evaluations of the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios will use similar evaluation designs and research methodologies. However, the research and analysis for each portfolio will be conducted separately and the findings presented separately in the evaluation report. The findings from the evaluation of both portfolios will be compared at a high level as part of the Conclusions in the evaluation report.

¹⁴ The IE Team acknowledges there is a risk of redundant work should the FCDO Evaluation Design Note not be approved, and significant changes required. However, this risk has been mitigated by restricting the ongoing portfolio analysis and secondary data review to only the proposed case study projects.

¹⁵ This is likely to include IPs whose GEC projects have already closed. Although it is easier to engage with staff and stakeholders supporting active projects, these projects may not be suitable for selection depending on the evaluation design, sampling strategy and selection criteria.

¹⁶ These interviews would ideally be conducted at the end of the research phase. However, due to the GEC II ending in March 2024, it is likely that gaining access to key staff within IP organisations and stakeholders could become more difficult the longer time elapses.

2.5.2. Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the GEC II Portfolio Framework

The Evaluation Framework (see [Annex C](#)) identifies the most appropriate sources of data and research and analytical methods in responding to each of the evaluation questions. The primary function of the evaluation framework is to frame and focus the research and analysis to ensure that the evidence and its sources, analysis, and methods directly and efficiently respond to the evaluation questions.

2.5.3. Alignment with the ToR

There are no major departures in this Design Note from the approved ToR for this evaluation. For clarity, the KEQ and SQ 1.1 have been rephrased from “What results did the GEC-T and LNGB deliver” to “What *outcome* results did the GEC-T and LNGB deliver”.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Overview

This evaluation uses primary and secondary data, collected through a set of complementary methods, and applied to a diverse sample at portfolio and project levels. Following the Evaluation Framework (see [Annex C](#)). Table 2 below, presents the methods that will be applied, according to their data source, level of analysis and evidence type. These are detailed in the following sections.

Table 2: Data sources, methods, and evaluation questions

Source	Method	Scope	KEQ1	SQ1.1	SQ1.2	SQ1.3	SQ1.4	SQ1.5	SQ1.6
Secondary	Desk-based document review	GEC II portfolio (N = 41)							
		GEC II case studies (n = 6)							
	Secondary analysis	GEC II portfolio (N = 41)							
		GEC II case studies (n = 6)							
Primary	Key Informant Interviews (strategic stakeholders, IP staff)	GEC II portfolio (N = 41)							
	Key Informant Interviews (Community Leaders and other stakeholders)	GEC II case studies (n = 6)							
	Focus Group Discussions (primary and secondary beneficiaries)	GEC II case studies (n = 6)							

3.2. Secondary research

Secondary research will serve as an important source of evidence for this evaluation. The IE team will conduct a desk-based review of secondary data to systematically collect, collate, and map existing evidence against the KEQ and SQs. Secondary research evidence is derived from several sources, including, but not limited to:

- **FM programme evidence**, including the programme Logframe, Quarterly Project Report Cards, Annual Reports, VfM Scorecards, Portfolio in Practice reports, Learning Briefs, and other programme management information;
- **IP project evidence**, including internal project documentation (e.g., project ToCs), monitoring reports and independent evaluations;
- **FCDO evidence**, including the GEC II Business Case and Annual Review Reports.
- **IE evidence**, including in-depth studies and studies produced through the RRLF; and,
- **Country-level education evidence**, including national learning benchmarks, to support case study analysis.

Evidence sourced through the desk-based document review will serve as an evidence base for analysis in response to the evaluation questions, while also informing the primary research the IE Team conducts at the portfolio level and through the project case studies.

3.2.1. Secondary research conducted during the design phase

During the design phase, the IE Team conducted secondary research to inform the development of the approach and methodology for this evaluation. The IE Team was unable to take a phased approach to the research and analysis due to limitations in the time available to complete this evaluation (see [Section 2.5.1](#)). This required the IE Team to select the case study projects during the design phase rather than take a phased approach and selecting projects after completing the desk-based review of documentary evidence. The primary selection criteria for the case studies were the projects' reported results and their achievements against the targets set by the FM. However, the definition of GEC II outcomes and the targets projects were set changed several times over the life of GEC II, largely in response to the Covid-19 crisis. So, the IE Team reviewed all Annual Reports produced by the FM and the Business Case and Annual Review Reports produced by the FCDO to identify and map these changes at different stages in the life of the GEC II. From this review, the IE Team identified the projects' learning results as the most reliable primary selection criterion for the case study sampling framework. This required the IE Team to review all reported learning results and projects' performance against the targets set at the time of their midline and endline evaluations to determine initial project selection (see [Section 3.4.1](#)).

The IE Team also used the portfolio analysis conducted for previous IE studies to inform project selection at each stage of the sampling process – this was supplemented by additional portfolio analysis and a desk-based review of documentary evidence as required. The IE Team continued to conduct portfolio analysis and a review of secondary data for the shortlisted case study projects to inform the ongoing development of detailed research plans need to facilitate the research permission process. This is a time sensitive process in some of the case study countries and as such could not wait until the research phase (see [Section 2.5.1](#)).

3.3. Primary research for the Portfolio Assessment

Complementing the secondary research, primary portfolio level research will deepen the IE Team's understanding of the patterns of effects and changes across the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios. The IE Team will conduct key informant interviews (KIIs) with strategic stakeholders and IP staff.

- **Strategic stakeholders:** the IE Team anticipates conducting semi-structured KIIs with strategic stakeholders, including FCDO programme staff, FM staff, and other strategic stakeholders. These interviews will be used to understand how and to what extent portfolio-level results aligned with GEC II objectives and the extent to which contextual and implementation factors influenced projects' performance and the results they delivered.
- The IE team are developing a list of strategic stakeholders and will share this with the FM and the FCDO for their inputs. The number of interviews will be determined once the lists of interviewees has been confirmed.
- **IP staff:** the IE Team will conduct a semi-structured KII with at least one representative from each IP who is able to provide insights at the strategic level of their project – as opposed to the case studies, where we anticipate interviewing IP staff involved in the day-to-day implementation of the project.
- This evaluation overlaps with the IE Study 7, which also involves conducting KIIs with IPs delivering GEC-T projects. We will coordinate with the IE Study 7 Team to minimise the burden on these IPs.

All interviews will be conducted by one member of the IE Team via an online platform (e.g., Zoom/ Microsoft Teams). A tracking sheet to log successful completion of interviews will be maintained, including any refusals (if applicable), or any instances of non-response.

3.4. Primary research for the project case studies

This evaluation uses case studies at the project level to explain in more depth how and why some projects successfully delivered their results while other projects were less successful. The case studies mainly draw on primary research, conducted through KIIs and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), targeting a range of stakeholders (see [Section 3.1](#)). The case study research will be informed and supplemented by the secondary desk-based research of case studies projects' secondary evidence.

3.4.1. Project case study sampling framework

Purpose

The purpose of the sampling framework is to identify a selection of GEC II projects as case studies for in-depth research that informs the evaluation's response to the overarching KEQ and SQs set out above. The IE Team has purposively selected a sample of GEC II projects as case studies for in-depth primary research to help explain to what extent, how and why different design, implementation and contextual features have influenced the success or lack of success of projects in delivering the GEC's results i.e., outcomes and intermediate outcomes. The case studies will be used to illustrate the diversity of IPs, projects and contexts that characterise the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios enabling the evaluation to unpack the range of drivers and barriers behind the performance of the projects.

The evaluation will draw from a total of six case studies, three projects for each of the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios. Due to time constraints six projects was the maximum number that could be included as case studies for the evaluation. This is to allow sufficient time to: design the research instruments and project sampling frameworks; obtain national research permissions; conduct the fieldwork as soon as possible to avoid national school holidays; and complete the analysis and reporting before the end of the IE programme in March 2025.

Sample population and sample frame

The sample populations for the project case studies consists of all 41 GEC II projects i.e., 27 GEC-T and 14 LNGB projects. These provide two sample populations for the case study research supporting the evaluations of each portfolio. From these two sample populations, the IE Team developed the case study sample frame, including key characteristics for each of the projects. For each project, the IE Team collated project data, including project descriptors (e.g., duration), learning results, implementation factors (e.g., VfM scorecards), contextual factors (e.g., project country fragile and conflict-affected state or setting (FCAS) status), and project type (e.g., budget size).

Several GEC projects have participated in the IE studies as case studies. The IE Team has taken a highly collaborative approach to conducting the studies and IPs have responded by investing their time and resources in supporting this work. The sampling strategy for the project case studies considers the extent to which IPs are currently involved in Studies 6 and 7. It is important that IPs are not overly burdened with requests for support especially if their projects have already closed and /or they are currently involved in an IE study. The case study selection also provides an opportunity to conduct in-depth research into projects that may not been included so far as part of the IE's studies.

Selection criteria

From these sample frames, the team developed shortlists for each portfolio and selected cases by applying the selection criteria and selection process set out below.

Learning results as the primary selection criterion for the project case studies

Projects' learning results were used as the primary selection criterion to align with the KEQ: *what results did the GEC-T and LNGB deliver, and what worked well /less well and why?*

The GEC II's learning results are the most consistent results reported throughout the evaluation period. Projects' learning results provide the best success criterion for sampling purposes because of the changes to other Logframe outcomes and intermediate outcomes over the life of GEC II. Transition and intermediate outcomes were inconsistently defined and applied, limiting their applicability as standard selection criteria. While these results were not included as case selection criteria, they will be assessed through this evaluation.

The learning results used as the primary selection criterion were different for the GEC-T portfolio compared to the LNGB portfolio. GEC-T projects were initially selected by their midline learning results because most projects' endline evaluations were conducted during the Covid-19 crisis when learning assessments could not be conducted. So, GEC-T midline learning results (produced in 2020) provide the most reliable learning assessments for the purpose of selecting the GEC-T project case studies. However, this does not mean that the evaluation of the GEC-T portfolio will be solely focused on the projects' learning results reported in their midline evaluations. The evaluation will cover all reported outcomes and intermediate outcomes and draw on evidence from the whole lifetime of GEC-T projects including their endline evaluations regardless of the evidence used to support their reported results.

LNGB projects' endline evaluations were mostly conducted from 2022 onwards when learning assessments were conducted. So, for the LNGB portfolio sample frame, LNGB's endline learning results have been used as the primary selection criterion.

The following sample selection process was applied to the two sample frames:

1) Remove ineligible cases

- a. Ineligible cases included:
 - Prematurely closed projects due to data and respondent availability constraints, including BRAC Afghanistan and Save the Children Mozambique.
 - GEC-T projects with inconclusive or missing learning results in their midline evaluation reports.
 - LNGB projects with inconclusive or missing learning results in their endline evaluation reports.
 - Projects implemented in Afghanistan due to access constraints.
- b. A total of ten GEC-T¹⁷ projects and three¹⁸ LNGB projects were removed.

2) Sort by level of learning performance to create a 'longlist'

- a. Projects were sorted by their performance against their learning targets to facilitate selection. Of the three case studies selected for each window, one case study will represent projects that 'Fully Achieved Targets /Exceeded Targets', one case study will represent projects that 'Half-Achieved Targets /Met Targets' and one case study will represent projects that 'Did Not Achieve Targets'. Sorting projects into these three performance categories will enable the in-depth research to explore how and why some projects were able to deliver better results than others and what role contextual factors, organisational capacity and project design features played in determining the effectiveness of projects in delivering their reported results.
 - The projects were assessed and classified against their prescribed learning measures and targets at the time of implementation. The classifications used do not reflect any evaluative judgement related to project performance.
 - **GEC-T projects** that met both their literacy and numeracy midline learning targets were classified as 'Fully Achieved Targets', while those that met neither were classified as 'Did Not Achieve Targets'. Projects that met only one of their literacy or numeracy targets or that made 'good progress'¹⁹ in both literacy and numeracy, were classified as 'Half-Achieved Targets'.
 - Unlike GEC-T projects, **LNGB projects** typically conduct baseline and endline evaluations (including learning assessments) for each cohort of girls they support. They are not required to evaluate every cohort and the number of cohorts evaluated varies by project. Some projects only report on their learning results once, which are reflected in the FM's Annual Report, while others report on their learning results multiple times, which are included in more than one Annual Report. This means that the classification of learning results for LNGB projects is different to GEC-T projects as follows:
 - Projects that exceeded learning targets reported in at least one Annual Report, and either met targets or did not report performance in the other Annual Reports were classified as 'Exceeded Targets'.
 - Projects that met learning targets reported in Annual Reports and did not report any other results in another Annual Report were classified as 'Met Targets'.
 - Projects that did not meet learning targets reported in at least one Annual Report were classified as 'Did Not Achieve Targets'.
- b. A total of four GEC-T projects were classified as 'Fully Achieved Targets', three as 'Half-Achieved Targets' and eight as 'Did Not Achieve Targets'.
- c. A total of two LNGB projects were classified as 'Exceeded Targets', four as 'Met Targets' and five as 'Did Not Achieve Targets'.²⁰

¹⁷ Excluded GEC-T projects are: AKF Afghanistan (inaccessible location); BRAC Afghanistan (inaccessible location); Avanti Kenya; LINK Ethiopia; Save the Children Mozambique; Save the Children DRC (no midline evaluation); ChildHope Ethiopia Opportunity Uganda; Plan Sierra-Leone (inconclusive learning results at midline). Relief Somalia as also excluded due to their midline evaluation using alternative learning targets that do not make results comparable with other GEC-T projects.

¹⁸ Excluded LNGB projects are: AKF Afghanistan (inaccessible location); IRC Sierra Leone (learning not assessed at endline); PiN Ethiopia (inconclusive endline).

¹⁹ 'Good progress' is defined by the FM has having achieved between 50% and 100% of their literacy or numeracy target.

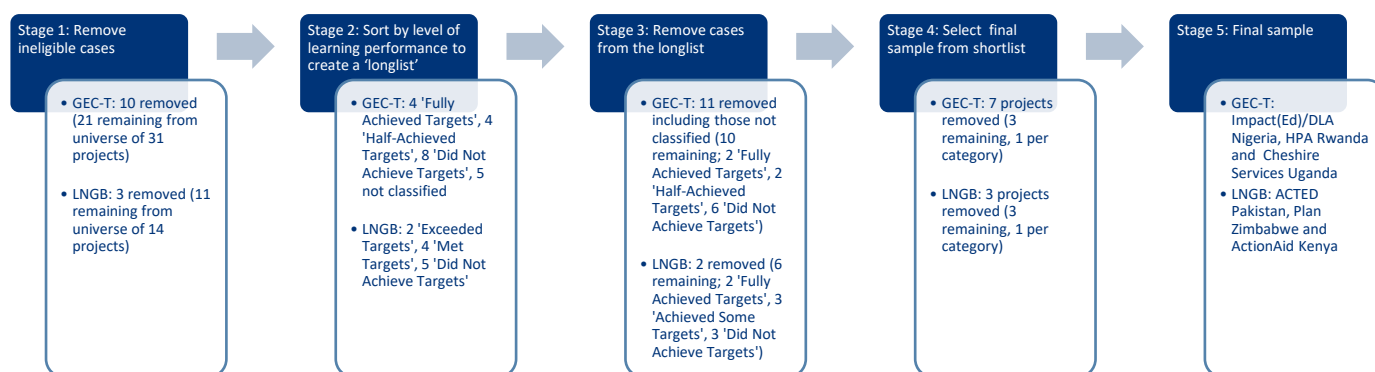
²⁰ Population Council Ethiopia's *Biruh Tesfa* for All initially was classified as 'Met Targets'. However, the evaluation team classified it as 'Did Not Achieve Targets' because the FM's 2022 VfM analysis raised substantive concerns with the validity of the project's reported learning results. The project subsequently received a 'red' VfM RAAG Rating.

3) Remove cases from the longlist which are multi-country projects with mixed country-level learning results and projects which have been sampled as case studies in IE Studies 6 and 7.

- a. Projects that have been included as project case studies for previous IE studies were removed to avoid over-burdening those IPs with further requests for support and to provide an opportunity to conduct research on alternative GEC II projects and countries that have not been included in IE studies to date.
- b. GEC-T projects:
 - Impact (Ed)/Discovery Learning Alliance (DLA) Kenya and Impact (Ed)/DLA Ghana were removed from the 'Did Not Achieve Targets' list due to Impact (Ed)/DLA Nigeria falling in the 'Fully Achieved Targets' category.
 - The two projects delivered by Camfed International and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) Nepal were removed because they have already been included in the ongoing IE Study 7 (sustainability)²¹.
 - Two eligible GEC-T projects were identified in the 'Fully Achieved Targets' category, two projects in the 'Half-Achieved Targets' category and six projects in the 'Did Not Achieve Targets' category.
- c. LNGB projects:
 - LINK Malawi and PiN Nepal were removed because of their inclusion as project case studies in IE Studies 6 and 7.
 - Two eligible LNGB projects were identified in the 'Exceeded Targets' category, three projects in the 'Met Targets' category and four projects in the 'Did Not Achieve Targets' category.

Figure 3 below shows the key stages in the sample selection and the number of projects selected at each stage.

Figure 3: Flow diagram showing the number of projects at each stage of the sampling process



The **shortlist of GEC-T and LNGB projects** before the final selection are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Shortlist of GEC-T and LNGB projects prior to the final selection

Learning Results Category	GEC-T projects	LNGB projects
Fully Achieved Targets (GEC-T) Exceeded Targets (LNGB)	Impact (Ed)/DLA (Nigeria): <i>Discovery Project</i>	ACTED (Pakistan): <i>Closing the Gap: Educating marginalised girls in Sindh and FATA</i>
	Mercy Corps (Nepal): <i>Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali (STEM)</i>	Street Child (Nepal): <i>Marginalised No More</i>
Half-Achieved Targets (GEC-T)	Health Poverty Action (HPA) (Rwanda): <i>Rwandan Girls' Education and Advancement Programme 2 (REAP 2)</i>	PLAN (Zimbabwe): <i>Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education in Zimbabwe (SAGE)</i>

²¹ Only Camfed in Zimbabwe has been selected as a case study in Study 7, but other Camfed projects were excluded as well to avoid IP overburden.

Learning Results Category	GEC-T projects	LNGB projects
Met Targets (LNGB)	Mercy Corps (Nigeria): <i>Educating Nigerian Girls in New Enterprises (ENGINE)</i>	IRC (Pakistan): <i>Teach and Educate Adolescent Girls with Community Help (TEACH)</i>
		WEI (Ghana): <i>Strategic Approaches for Girls' Education (STAGE)</i>
Did Not Meet Targets (GEC-T & LNGB)	CSU (Uganda): <i>Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education</i>	ActionAid (Kenya): <i>Education for Life</i>
	I Choose Life (Kenya): <i>Jielimishe (Educate Yourself)</i>	CARE (Somalia): <i>AGES</i>
	Promoting Equality in African Schools (PEAS) (Uganda): <i>GEARR-ing Up for Success After School</i>	Population Council (Ethiopia): <i>Biruh Tesfa for All</i>
	Plan (Ghana): <i>Making Ghanaian Girls Great!</i>	VSO (Nepal): <i>Empowering a New Generation of Adolescent Girls through Education in Nepal</i>
	Viva/CRANE (Uganda): <i>Building Girls to Live, Learn, Laugh and 'SCHIP' in Strong, Creative, Holistic, Inclusive, Protective, Quality Education</i>	
	World Vision (Zimbabwe): <i>Improving Girls' Access through Transforming Education (IGATE)</i>	

From the shortlist, the IE team selected one project from each of the three categories for the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios. The final sample was selected to reflect the portfolios' diversity considering the following project characteristics (see [Annex D](#) for details of shortlisted projects):

- Learning results: the extent to which learning gains were realised relative to targets.
- Intervention activities: whether the project applied different intervention activities to different cohorts to facilitate comparisons between projects.
- Project region or country context: whether the project was implemented in an FCAS setting. The IE team avoided selecting two projects in the same country or selecting all projects in either Asia or Africa.
- Project scale: whether the project was larger or smaller than the typical project within the portfolio. Some projects that were much larger than others (e.g., the largest LNGB project was selected over one that was mid-size), and the IE Team tried to strike a balance in scale across the final selected projects.
- Project targeting: whether the project targeted all girls or specific beneficiary subgroups e.g., girls with disabilities.
- FM VfM assessment: how the project scored on the FM's 2022 VfM assessments relative to alternatives or other selected cases.

Within categories and within each portfolio's sample frame, the IE team selected projects that provided the greatest contrast. The project-specific rationale for selection is described in [Annex D](#).

GEC-T and LNGB selected samples

The selected **GEC-T project case studies** are:

1. Impact (Ed)/ DLA (Nigeria): Discovery Project
2. HPA (Rwanda): *REAP 2*
3. CSU (Uganda): *Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education*

The selected **LNGB project case studies** are:

1. ACTED (Pakistan): *Closing the Gap: Educating marginalised girls in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*
2. PLAN (Zimbabwe): *Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE)*

3. ActionAid (Kenya): *Education for Life*

Next steps

Gathering project management information from IPs and the FM for the project case studies

Following approval of the case study selection, the IE Team will begin engaging with relevant FM and IP counterparts who delivered /are delivering projects selected for the case studies – this includes engaging with IPs' offices in case study countries in situations where IPs still have an active presence after the closure of their GEC project) and are willing to help facilitate the research. The aim is to gather all relevant project information and to establish contact with relevant project staff to help facilitate the planning and access to key stakeholders and beneficiaries for the in-depth research. This could prove challenging for those projects that have been closed for some time, especially for the GEC-T case study projects Impact (Ed)/ DLA project (closed December 2020) and the HPA project (closed August 2020). The IE Team and FM have already coordinated to ensure that the IE Team has information for IP contacts and target schools /communities, which the IE's local data collection partners (DCPs) will use to plan for the fieldwork.

[Section 3.6](#) provides an assessment of the challenges, risks, and mitigation strategies the IE Team will use associated with this evaluation, including challenges related to conducting research on projects that have been closed for a long time.

Stakeholder mapping for the project case studies

The IE Team will use the project information provided by the FM and IPs, and documentary evidence to conduct a desk-based stakeholder mapping exercise for the project case studies. The stakeholder mapping exercise will first identify the individuals, groups and organisations that influence, interact with and /or are influenced by the project, providing a comprehensive picture of the project's touchpoints. The IE Team will then map the stakeholders against the KEQ, SQs and identified evidence gaps based on the type of evidence expected given their roles relative to the project. This will then inform target sample construction, including site selection, and respondent prioritisation.

Developing tailored research plans for each project case study

The IE Team will use the project documentation and the stakeholder mapping exercise to finalise the research plan (and data collection strategy) for each project case study, in line with the Evaluation Framework, including sampling frames for different research respondents, sites and methods. Each project case study research plan will provide details of:

- Priority types of respondents (see [Section 3.4.2](#) below) for the case study research i.e., respondents who are best placed to provide feedback from their experience on the effectiveness of the project that addresses gaps in the portfolio and project evidence, for example, how and why different types of interventions worked and for whom;
- Approach to engaging key respondents in the case study research – this could involve using project lists of beneficiaries /households (if the IP gained consent as part of the registration purpose to share personal information with third-party researchers and independent evaluators like the IE Team); using project lists of target schools /communities that the IE Team's local data collection partners can use to identify potential research respondents through a snowballing approach – for LNGB projects whose target beneficiaries are out-of-school girls this will most likely involve engaging with Community Leaders initially; and for GEC-T projects whose target beneficiaries are mostly girls who are /were in school, this will involve initially engaging with school head teachers and teachers;
- Sample frames by type of respondent /research method and data collection strategies including locations, timescales; and
- Research instruments ready for piloting by the local data collection partners.

If access or logistics (e.g., obtaining in research permissions) pose too great a barrier to completing the fieldwork in time then the IE Team may consider alternative projects from the shortlist in consultation with the FM and the FCDO.

3.4.2. Case study data collection

Respondent sampling and methods

The primary research for the case studies will largely involve qualitative research, including KIs and FGDs. We cannot confirm the precise sample, both respondents and volume, at this time, as it will be informed by the desk-

based document review and stakeholder mapping. Nonetheless, we understand broadly the types of respondents the IE Team will sample.

Key Informant Interviews will be conducted with:

- Community Leaders (e.g., traditional leaders, faith-based leaders) to understand the community perceptions of the results delivered by the project, and how and why community-based interventions worked well or less well, and other contextual /implementation factors that may have affected the performance of the project. Interviewing Community Leaders will be most important for projects that were delivering a large amount of community-based activity – such as the LNGB projects that generally targeted out-of-school girls and delivered activities within their communities. Therefore:
 - Primary research for GEC-T projects that typically targets girls who were in school will not initially include Community Leaders unless there is strong rationale to do so.
 - Primary research for LNGB projects that typically targeted out-of-school girls through community-based activities will include Community Leaders – they will also act as a primary point of access and coordination for our local data collection partners. The specific types of Community Leaders to be engaged will be project specific as set out in the tailored research plan.
- IP implementation staff (at Headquarters and if available in-country) to understand the reported results, including unintended or expected results; the role of external contextual factors in implementation; project design considerations, including targeting strategy; and the effects of implementation factors (such as organisational capacity) on the delivery process.
 - For both GEC-T and LNGB projects, IP representatives will be the first point of contact to help facilitate the evaluation process. Through this engagement, the IE Team will identify relevant IP implementation staff at various levels to interview. The IE Team will seek to speak to two-three IP staff who may be currently employed by the IP or have moved to different teams within the same organisation, or even to different organisations entirely. The selected GEC-T and LNGB projects all include IPs who maintain a presence in the GEC countries. The IE Team will confirm this with IPs at the start of the research phase.
- Government officials, such as representatives from relevant education line ministries, to understand how projects worked within the context of the existing educational system, including the extent to which contextual factors (including institutional and political economy factors) might have affected project performance and capacity to deliver its results.
 - For both GEC-T and LNGB, government officials will be identified through two methods: 1) IP implementation staff will be asked to identify the government officials they coordinated or collaborated with; 2) the IE Team's will work through its local data collection partners to engage government officials who are responsible for the catchment areas where project activity sites are located.

Focus Group Discussions will be conducted with:

- Primary beneficiaries, including girls and boys (as relevant to the project), to understand how and to what extent the projects contributed to changes in their outcomes. FGDs will also explore contextual and implementation-related factors, such as whether projects sufficiently adapted to respond to contextual changes to enable them to successfully deliver their results.
 - GEC-T primary beneficiary respondents will depend on the age groups targeted by the projects. The IE Team may be able obtain beneficiary contact sheets (depending on GDPR compliance) to support the selection of respondents in school and out of school. If beneficiary contact sheets are not available then the IE Team will use the lists of schools /communities targeted by the project and take a snowballing approach. This will involve initial engagement with head teachers for beneficiary girls who are still in school and with Community Leaders for girls who are out of school or have transitioned to further education or employment.
 - LNGB primary beneficiary respondents will be engaged through a similar process as GEC-T primary beneficiary respondents as set out above except that the local data collection partners' initial engagement is likely to be with Community Leaders due to projects' focus on supporting out-of-school girls. Community Leaders are likely to have been engaged by IPs as part of the initial beneficiary targeting and selection process, as well as throughout the implementation process, and therefore could be deeply knowledgeable about who beneficiaries were and where they might currently live.

- Secondary beneficiaries, including boys, parents /caregivers, head teachers and teachers, and wider community members involving separate FGDs depending on role e.g., conducting separate FGDs with head teachers and teachers. These FGDs will help explain how, why and to what extent projects contributed to changes in respondents' lives, as well as perceived changes in primary beneficiaries' lives. These FGDs will also explore contextual and implementation-related factors affecting project delivery and performance.
 - For both GEC-T and LNGB secondary beneficiaries, respondents will be identified through a snowball approach drawing on project lists of targets schools /communities provided by the FM and IPs.

FGDs will be organised by gender identity and then, where feasible, age. Sampling for FGDs will be undertaken purposively to ensure that a cross-section of beneficiaries is represented providing opportunities to make their voices heard. The IE Team including its local data collection partners will accommodate people with disabilities to facilitate their participation.

Research instrument design

The IE Team will use the desk-based document review to inform the design of the research instruments for the project case studies. The research instruments will address evidence gaps identified through the secondary research. Instruments will be structured against the KEQ and SQs with standard lines of questioning that are then tailored to the specific method, context, and respondent. At this stage, the IE Team does not anticipate developing and deploying digital tools. If this changes, the team will ensure that the methodology for development and deployment aligns with the *FCDO Digital Strategy 2018 to 2020: Doing development in a digital world*.

Pre-testing and piloting

For the case study research, the IE Team will pilot and test all research instruments. Instruments will be initially developed in English and then translated into relevant local languages. We will then test the instrument using two techniques, pre-testing, and pilot testing.

- Pre-testing through structured group discussions with diverse groups of target respondent types. For example, for instruments targeting beneficiaries, pre-tests will be held with groups of individuals according to gender identity, age, and education. These exercises will test whether the instruments are accessible, understandable, and aligned with their intended objectives.
- Piloting by using the instruments with a sub-set of the target sample in real field conditions to test whether they are feasible to implement when accounting for contextual realities.

The draft research instruments will be reviewed by IPs for the case study projects (depending on IPs' capacity) and our experts from the IE's southern academic partners supporting this evaluation. The draft research instruments will not be submitted to the FCDO for review and approval as agreed with the FCDO.

Data Collection Partner training

The IE Team will ensure that all local data collection partners conducting in-country data collection to support the case study research receive rigorous training. Training will take place prior to pre-testing and piloting instruments. Training modules will generally include: introduction to the GEC programme and case study project, IE work and objectives of the research; practicalities and logistics of the research; ethical research, data management and safeguarding protocols; an overview and detailed run through of the research instruments, including requesting any feedback on the instruments or translations; practice interviews/ role play sessions; and any other support as needed.

3.5. Approach to analysis, triangulation, and synthesis

3.5.1. Data analysis

Data translation, transcription, and cleaning

Data translation, transcription, and cleaning will be conducted by the local data collection partners. Consideration will be made of how and when research instruments will be translated from English into local languages, how primary data will be recorded – e.g., hand-written notes, typed notes, audio recording, visual recording – and how data will be translated back into English, where necessary. All primary data transcripts will be anonymised, transcribed (e.g.,

transcribed from written text to computer/ digital copy) and translated into English (where necessary) as soon as feasible after collection. Primary data will be cleaned, including checking for anonymity, missing data that may have occurred throughout processes associated with writing, transcribing (from audio to written transcript), translation (into and from English into local language), storage, transmission (sharing from the primary data collectors to the IE team), or uploading/ digitalisation of any data.

Data coding and analysis

The coding framework will be developed both deductively – as the fieldwork is going on – and inductively – once the data are being reviewed and coded on an ongoing basis.

Across all respondents, the preliminary coding framework will be designed according to a thematic framework, given the following rationale:

- As an initial step, high-level codes will be developed to respond to all evaluation and research questions. This coding framework will be designed as the fieldwork is going on and tested against an initial set of transcripts to ensure the codes are aligned with the emerging data.
- Once the coding phase is underway, the IE Team will adopt an inductive approach to reviewing the coding framework and adding more specific codes – particularly any that may be context-specific and detailed.

The qualitative coding will be conducted by two teams of approximately 4-6 coders working on the two portfolio datasets. These teams will be assembled by Tetra Tech International Development Europe. The coders will receive an in-depth two-hour training on the coding framework as well as NVivo software (covering aspects such as linking transcripts to respondent IDs, developing new codes, etc.). Following this, the teams will 'pilot' the coding of 1-2 transcripts each to ensure an understanding of the coding framework and check for consistency in coding. The coders and their respective Evaluation Leads will meet once or twice per week as needed to discuss challenges, emerging findings, or topics of interest.

This process describes a “deductive” analysis of the qualitative data. However, the data analysis timeline will integrate the inductive themes whose identification will be an iterative and ongoing process.

Once the coding has reached near-completion, the teams will begin the analysis phase to review emerging patterns, trends, and differences. In particular, the coding framework will play a key role in organising the findings from the portfolio-level analysis and project case study analysis for triangulation and synthesis as set out below.

Triangulation and synthesis

Each phase of the research will involve the triangulation and synthesis of findings that emerge from:

- Desk-based review of project independent endline evaluation reports;
- Desk-based review of other project monitoring documentation, FM learning products and programme management information, and IE studies.
- Interviews with IPs and strategic stakeholders; and
- Primary research conducted for the project case studies.

While different sources of data, evidence and information have different purposes to this evaluation, the synthesis process (framed by the KEQ and SQs) will ensure that only relevant data and evidence is extracted and that potential biases (see below) are fully considered as part of the triangulation process.

A carefully structured approach to the synthesis of different types of analysis and findings emerging from different types of data or from different types of sources will take the following steps:

1. The **evaluation questions and evaluation framework** provide the broad structure, scope, and focus of the research against which the relevance and quality of the evidence should be assessed.
2. The **structure of the primary research** should be clearly and consistently set out with regards to: the selection of the types of respondents; the design of the research approaches and research instruments; and approaches to the analysis of the data. This ensures that each team of researchers collects data in a consistent way so that it can be compared and synthesised appropriately.

3. At each stage in the research and analysis process, the emerging themes, patterns, relationships, and explanatory processes should be **systematically organised into a consistent structure and format** to facilitate a coherent discussion of on how different types and sources of data should be interpreted.
4. **Syntheses workshops** will be held at key stages throughout the research. The purpose of the synthesis workshop is to discuss the interpretation of the analyses and the findings that have emerged. The overarching objective of the workshop and any intermittent synthesis discussions is to reach consensus for each of the key findings and its supporting narrative. This process may require further structured validation from stakeholders outside of the evaluation team, including with the FCDO and FM.

Syntheses workshops and the involvement of a range of external stakeholders provide an **opportunity to harmonise potentially diverging views** regarding the interpretation of the findings that have emerged from the analysis. A strong narrative will then be rigorously developed on the basis of contextual insights of different stakeholders as well-structured analysis of primary and secondary data by the IE Team.

5. Synthesis discussions will consider as systematically as possible:
 - Potential **sources of heterogeneity**, including research methodologies, the narrative versus quantitative nature of the synthesis, different degrees of data validity, varying cultural sensitivities and diverse contextual factors;
 - Potential **sources of bias** that particular types of data and information are susceptible to especially given the different purpose of some data sources (e.g., FM Learning Briefs, IP monitoring reports, independent project evaluation reports) compared to the purpose of this evaluation. The triangulation of findings and analyses from a range of different sources should be used to validate different perspectives of the same finding to mitigate the risk of bias in the data;
 - The identification of **adverse synthesis effects** – effects that were identified as likely to have been lost during the synthesis process; for example, if two equally valid sources of data entailed different findings and there was a tendency to conclude that this was a non-finding leading to the researcher investigating a third source instead; and
 - **Mitigation strategies** to ensure that findings are as accurate and relevant as possible and that the importance of each piece of evidence has been appropriately weighted.
6. This process may uncover **contradictory findings** that emerge from two or more sets of data that are of similar quality and robustness. In these instances, the IE Team will investigate the data and conduct further analysis to conduct higher level-triangulation and to try and understand why the contradiction may have emerged. It is quite possible that contradictions may not be explained, in which case these will be clearly and transparently presented.
7. The final set of synthesised findings and conclusions should be supported by a **consolidating phase**, reassessing the strength of the evidence supporting the results of the evaluation in light of the primary research findings.

The synthesis of analysis and findings arising from a complex evaluation such as this involves a dynamic and iterative process of comparing findings and discussing differences to achieve some form of consensus on the conclusions from the study. This is an iterative process, which will also be undertaken in a systematic way to ensure transparency in the interpretation of different types of data that inevitably will be of varying quality and reliability.

3.6. Key evaluation challenges, limitations, risks, and mitigation strategies

Table 4 below outlines potential challenges, limitations and risks to the evaluation, and the corresponding mitigation strategies the IE team will put in place. [Section 4.3](#) outlines our approach to ongoing risk mapping of risks related to ethical research and safeguarding risks, methodological risks and operational risks throughout the implementation period, and their mitigating actions.

Table 4: Evaluation challenges/ limitations, risks, and mitigation strategies

Challenges/ Limitations	Risks	Likelihood of Risk	Impact (Severity) of Risk	Mitigation strategies	Residual Likelihood After Mitigation	Residual Impact After Mitigation
In some countries e.g., Zimbabwe, securing the required government research permission could take a long time.	Delays in obtaining research permission would delay the fieldwork with implications for the analysis and reporting. The evaluations are scheduled to complete in early March 2025, however, the contract end date for the IE is now March 2025 having been brought forward by the FCDO from June 2025. This does not provide room for delays if the end of March 2025 is a hard stop /end of the contract.	High	High	In countries where research permission is likely to be time-consuming (e.g., Zimbabwe) we will prioritise that immediately and build on our experience of seeking research permission in Zimbabwe for Study 7. For those countries where research permission is likely to take longer, this fieldwork will be scheduled towards the end of the fieldwork phase. The data coding and analysis will be undertaken on a rolling basis to ensure that the bulk of the analysis can be conducted despite delays to one project case study. If the IE team anticipates that the delay is too long then an alternative project could be considered from the shortlist (or even the longlist) with consideration of which country the project is implemented in and the research permission requirements, which are much simpler and quicker in some countries.	Moderate	Moderate
Accessing certain case study communities to conduct face-to-face interviews due to ongoing instability or insecurity.	There are ethical risks in conducting research with conflict-affected communities, as participation in the research could expose them to undue harm (e.g., by traveling to FGDs) or disclosing opinions that could exacerbate community tensions (e.g., perceived inequitable distribution of support). There are also ethical risks in encouraging staff members, including local DCPs to conduct face-to-face research in environments	Moderate	High	During this design phase, we are conducting a comprehensive risk analysis that will map ethical and safeguarding, methodological and operational risks (see Section 4.3). This process will involve weighing risks and benefits and developing mitigating strategies. We believe that the protection of participants from harm, particularly to communities at risk of violence, should always outweigh methodological benefits (e.g., lack of sampling bias). In such cases, we will note possible biases in the research and evaluation reports and ensure that the findings are framed and caveated with these biases in mind. This process will also ensure that we maintain a strong Duty of Care responsibility to any evaluation team members.	Moderate	Moderate

Challenges/ Limitations	Risks	Likelihood of Risk	Impact (Severity) of Risk	Mitigation strategies	Residual Likelihood After Mitigation	Residual Impact After Mitigation
	where safety risks are present.					
Lack of project data on outcomes and /or intermediate outcomes.	Not all projects collected data on outcomes and intermediate outcomes or did so in different ways. It may be difficult to retrospectively define and identify the effects of different intervention types to assess what worked well or less well.	Moderate	High	<p>The evaluation design process is building on the existing mapping of intermediate outcomes and outcomes reported by each project (carried out for IE Study 5 Education for Marginalised Girls Beyond Formal Schooling) to assess how comprehensive the data is and how it can be used.</p> <p>Groups of similar projects may be created where possible to assess effects on intermediate outcomes (thereby compensating for the lack of complete and consistent data sets).</p>	Moderate	Moderate
Lack of data on individual interventions within projects.	Projects have implemented packages of interventions whose effects have been evaluated in the aggregate at the project level.	Moderate	High	<p>Our proposed purposeful sampling of projects will allow the effectiveness of different types of interventions to be assessed, depending on the availability and coverage of project level data.</p> <p>Case studies (and the primary research) will include lines of inquiry and sample allocation specifically aligned with different intervention types.</p>	Low	Moderate
All but 5 projects (3 for GEC-T, 2 for LNGB) have closed except for one of the selected project case studies (CSU Uganda). IPs may not engage with the evaluation or only provide minimal support because of a lack of capacity.	Conducting case study primary research where projects have already closed or are closing soon will require engagement with IPs who may no longer be established in the field or may be concentrating on other activities. It may be difficult to access some data or resolve data queries as a result. It may also prove difficult to access stakeholders and beneficiaries to participate in the	Moderate	Moderate	<p>The evaluation will prioritise early engagement with all IPs whose projects have been selected for case studies to encourage them to support the evaluation. All IPs have an active presence in the case study countries – this will be confirmed with individual IPs at the start of the research process. CSU Uganda (which closes in March 2024) has already confirmed it will continue to operate and is willing to support the evaluation.</p> <p>It will also be important to ensure the IE Team has up-to-date contact information for all IPs and in particular their target / treatment schools and communities to allow primary qualitative research to be conducted with the right beneficiary groups including for</p>	Low	Low

Challenges/ Limitations	Risks	Likelihood of Risk	Impact (Severity) of Risk	Mitigation strategies	Residual Likelihood After Mitigation	Residual Impact After Mitigation
	primary research.			those GEC projects that have closed. If an IP is unwilling or unable to support the evaluation then the IE Team will consider the following options with the FCDO: (1) continuing without IP engagement; (2) selecting an alternative case study project with an IP who is willing /able to engage; and (3) reducing the number of case studies as a last resort.		
For those projects that have been closed for a long time – i.e., Impact (Ed)/ DLA project (closed December 2020) and the HPA project (closed August 2020) – it could be difficult to identify beneficiary girls supported by the projects.	Finding beneficiary girls to participate in the case study primary research could be difficult for those projects that closed a long time ago because they may have left school, transitioned to employment and /or left their home community. The likelihood of this risk depends on the age range /school phase of the projects' beneficiary girls and whether they were in school or out of school when the projects supported them. Both Impact (Ed)/ DLA and HPA projects are GEC-T projects and	Moderate	Moderate	Both Impact (Ed)/ DLA and HPA projects are GEC-T projects and targeted primary and secondary school aged girls. This reduces the risk that all beneficiaries will have left school and transitioned elsewhere. However, when developing the research plans it will be important to ensure that potential sampling bias is mitigated if it becomes difficult finding girls who benefited from project interventions that targeted girls in secondary school who may have moved away since then. Our approach to engaging will include using project lists of beneficiaries /households (if the IP gained consent as part of the registration purpose to share personal information with third-party researchers and evaluators like the IE Team); using project list of target schools /communities that the IE team's local data collection partner can use to identify potential research respondents through a snowballing approach.	Low	Moderate
Unavailability of FM staff to support the study due to the planned scale down after March 2024.	Some FM staff involved in GEC II have already moved to other assignments at the time of writing this report. Currently engaged staff are occupied with close-out activities. It may be difficult to continue to	Moderate	Moderate	The IE Team will make every effort to engage with (current or former) FM staff early on in the research process. Gathering up-to-date contact information will be key, and a 'snowballing approach' will be used to reach staff who have already moved on to other assignments or companies. The IE team is also finalising a Gantt Chart outlining the type and level of support required from the FM over the remaining 12 months of the IE	Moderate	Low

Challenges/ Limitations	Risks	Likelihood of Risk	Impact (Severity) of Risk	Mitigation strategies	Residual Likelihood After Mitigation	Residual Impact After Mitigation
	access information, resolve queries and obtain FM inputs into the IE evaluation report for QA /validation purposes.			contract to enable the FM to plan its resources accordingly.		
Several GEC-T projects ended early on in Phase II e.g., in 2020. Recall bias or a lack of recall from stakeholders and beneficiaries could become an issue for projects that closed some time ago e.g., the Mercy Corps projects in Nepal and Nigeria.	The study will seek to obtain feedback from various stakeholders, including FM staff, IP staff and beneficiaries. A long time may have elapsed since their latest involvement in the GEC, especially for the staff of projects who have closed. This creates a risk of recall/memory bias.	High	Moderate	<p>Potential recall /memory bias will be closely monitored during primary data collection. Prompts will be included in interview research instruments to let respondents self-assess the quality of their recollection. As much as possible, evidence (including secondary evidence) will be triangulated and cross-checked to mitigate the effect of potential bias on findings.</p> <p>The final evaluation report will clearly detail the intended and achieved sample, along with any implications to methodological rigour.</p> <p>At the very start of the research phase, when we engage IPs and the FM, if it is proving difficult to engage the right stakeholders and beneficiaries with the experience needed to provide the feedback needed then we may have to consider alternative projects from the shortlist and projects from the longlist including projects previously excluded because they have been included in previous IE studies.</p>	Moderate	Moderate
Under-reporting of negative perceptions of programming and desirability bias.	Respondents may be hesitant to report negative perceptions of programming – for example, ineffective activities or unethical behaviour by programme staff – out of concern of being disqualified from future programming (beneficiaries). Additionally, programme and project staff may	High	Moderate	<p>The IE Team will clearly establish and communicate its role as an independent evaluator who does not make decisions over programming. We will follow rigorous privacy and anonymisation protocols in line with our Ethical Framework to ensure that respondents, of any type, cannot be connected to data presented in any reporting.</p> <p>Additionally, the IE Team has strong internal expertise on research and evaluation of challenging topics (e.g., safeguarding in schools), including in challenging settings. We will develop research instruments that are</p>	Moderate	Low

Challenges/ Limitations	Risks	Likelihood of Risk	Impact (Severity) of Risk	Mitigation strategies	Residual Likelihood After Mitigation	Residual Impact After Mitigation
	<p>be implicitly incentivised to minimise negative perceptions of their own programming out of concern for their careers or future funding.</p> <p>Prevalence data for Intermediate Outcomes-related results (e.g., changes in harmful norms), related to experience and perceptions may be inaccurate.</p>			<p>relevant and appropriate to the context and consider potential reporting sensitivities.</p> <p>Enumerators and research staff will be fully trained in collecting data on sensitive topics, how to build trust and rapport with participants, and how to ensure privacy and confidentiality to maximise participant safety and comfort. Only women will interview female participants, and men will interview male participants. If a risk assessment identifies this particular risk as high, appropriate data collection approaches may be adopted, including use of Audio Computer Assisted Self Interviewing.</p>		
Limited timeframe to promote evaluation use and influence	Evaluation reporting is scheduled for early 2025, with final report approval in March 2025. This corresponds with the end of the IE contract. There is therefore limited time to disseminate learning.	High	Moderate	<p>The IE Team will take all reasonable efforts to move the evaluation end date forward. To that end, the team is moving implementation forward while the design is under approval review (e.g., by preparing permissions applications).</p> <p>The IE Team will also produce learning products in tandem with the final report, identifying opportunities to disseminate learning before the final report is fully completed and approved.</p>	Moderate	Moderate
Selected case studies are not feasible owing to contextual or programmatic constraints	Selected case studies may need to be excluded due to constraints such as IP refusal to coordinate or limitations noted in this table (e.g., permissions). With limited timelines, replacements described in Table 3 could not be feasibly included.	Moderate	Moderate	<p>The IE Team has begun contacting the IPs to coordinate participation. At the same time, the IE team has begun mapping out activity sites and research respondents. The IE team is confident it could implement the case studies without coordinating with the IPs.</p> <p>Mitigation strategies for other contextual or programmatic factors, such as access constraints and permissions are detailed in the table above.</p> <p>The IE Team has started preparing for the unlikely eventuality that a case study needs replacing by: a) identifying cases located in countries with less intensive permissions processes; b) identifying local Data Collection Partners, including those that</p>	Low	Low

Challenges/ Limitations	Risks	Likelihood of Risk	Impact (Severity) of Risk	Mitigation strategies	Residual Likelihood After Mitigation	Residual Impact After Mitigation
				either conducted the endline evaluations or have worked with Tetra Tech previously; and c) prioritising document reviews to understand activity sites, potential stakeholders, and other related details.		

4. Research ethics and safeguarding

4.1. Research ethics

This section summarises the IE's approach to research ethics and safeguarding. A full description of our approach can be found in the GEC IE Ethical Research and Safeguarding Framework (ERSF) in [Annex E](#).

Evaluation activities will fully comply with the guiding concepts and principles set out in the IE's ERSF document, the FCDO (2013) Evaluation Policy, the FCDO (2019) Ethical Guidance for Research, Evaluation and Monitoring Activities, the UK Data Protection Act (2018) and other applicable FCDO frameworks and guidance.

Depending on the context, certain groups may face barriers to participation or representation of their views in the evaluation, for example, due to their gender, age, ethnicity, disability, caste, religion, geographic location, ability, and socio-economic status. All evaluation activities will, therefore, be undertaken in a way that respects the rights and autonomy of marginalised groups. This will include adaptations to research processes where feasible to accommodate the participation of different groups, including selecting participants, informed consent, deployment of research instruments, and feedback and communication processes.

Evaluation activities will also be undertaken in line with the principle of 'Do no harm', with care taken to ensure that children, their parents/ guardians, and other stakeholders who participate are not exposed to harm, stigmatised or, further marginalised or discriminated against during or after their participation in the research (whether directly or indirectly).

4.1.1. Overview of the IE ethical framework

The GEC IE ERSF guides all GEC IE research and data collection protocols. The ethical guidelines contained in the framework adhere to important national and international standards. It addresses key ethical principles and standards, including:

- Obtaining ethical approval;
- Obtaining informed consent and assent (from children);
- Ensuring confidentiality and privacy protocols are maintained;
- Protecting research participants from harm (including vulnerable participants);
- Ensuring interviewer safety and wellbeing;
- Data storage protocols; and
- Establishing feedback and complaints mechanisms.

The ERSF contains guidance on how to conduct research during an emergency (i.e., such as during a pandemic or health emergency). The Framework underwent a comprehensive review and update in December 2023 to ensure the processes for managing research ethics and safeguarding issues is robust.

4.1.2. Ethical considerations and approach to ethics for evaluation of the effectiveness of the GEC II portfolio

The design and implementation of all deliverables will be conducted according to ethical principles outlined in the GEC IE ERSF. The following sections summarise the key ethical considerations relevant to the IE and this evaluation.

Selection of local data collection partners

All data collection will be carried out by local data collection organisations that form part of the IE Team delivering this evaluation. As soon as the project case study sample has been approved, the IE team will start commissioning local data collection organisations to carry out the primary research. This will involve obtaining quotations from two to three partners through a limited tender process to ensure that the researchers with right experience and expertise are recruited for the fieldwork. All researchers will receive training on all aspects of the research including piloting of the research instruments to ensure high quality data is collected. See [Section 5.2.3](#) for further details.

Obtaining informed consent

All participants will be asked if they fully and meaningfully consent prior to an interview or other research activity taking place. In line with international and national ethical research standards, only adults aged 18 years will be asked to provide informed consent. Children under the age of 18 will provide assent, and their parents or guardians will be required to provide consent on their behalf. Adults with a cognitive impairment may be considered unable to provide consent. In such instances it may be necessary to follow an assent process (as for participants under the age of 18) with consent sought from the person's relevant carer or guardian to include the individual in the research in an ethical and safe way.

Confidentiality and privacy protocols

- Adults participating in the any data collection will be asked to provide informed consent prior to their participation. A Plain Language Statement (PLS) will be produced and translated into local languages and will contain information about the content and purpose of the interview, possible benefits and risks of participation, the anticipated uses of the data, and how data will be stored and kept secure.
- If conducting face-to-face data collection, interviewers will read out the PLS and will also give a written copy to the respondent. Participants will be asked to provide written consent by signing a consent form. If conducting remote data collection, verbal consent will be obtained (pending ethical approval).
- Consent will also be obtained to audio record the interview in cases of qualitative data collection (i.e., KIs).

Protecting research participants from harm

- Enumerators and interviewers will participate in comprehensive ethical research and safeguarding training that will involve attention to avoiding harm, including recognising signs of distress (including verbal, non-verbal and physical cues, and in the case of remote interviews, how to assess emotional distress without visual cues) and how to respond.

Closing the loop and feedback mechanisms

The IE team will use existing and clear feedback and complaint mechanisms, and this will be managed in conjunction with local data collection partners. Details of the feedback and complaints mechanisms will be included in research protocols, including in PLSs and consent forms and all research participants will be advised of the procedures and contact details for confidentially filing a complaint or providing feedback on the activities and conduct of interviewers.

The feedback mechanism will be managed directly by the IE Programme Manager. Any feedback or complaints will be carefully documented and addressed in a sensitive, timely and appropriate way, and in line with Tetra Tech's safeguarding, whistleblowing, and anti-bribery policies. Safeguarding complaints will be handled in line with the process set out in [Section 4.2](#). Findings and recommendations that emerge from the feedback and complaints process will be shared with the complainants in an accessible manner.

All IE personnel (including sub-contractors) are also provided with details of how to raise any complaints or concerns of their own regarding the conduct of IE staff or sub-contracted organisations. It may sometimes be the case that staff fear reprisals as the result of reporting suspected abuse within their own organisation. In these cases, they will be able to draw upon Tetra Tech's independent whistleblowing policy and procedures²².

4.1.3. Ethical research permissions and approvals

All research and evaluation activities for this contract will be implemented after obtaining the necessary research permissions and approvals required from relevant authorities at national, regional, or local levels in the countries where research is to be conducted. Local data collection partners will support this process where it is needed and where necessary, we may request FCDO support in the provision of a letter, or other documentation, to support our application.

As soon as the project case study sample is approved, the IE team will immediately start the research application process prioritising those countries that involve more complicated processes and longer time periods e.g., Zimbabwe. The IE team will use its previous experience, current projects in those countries, and tried and tested local data

²² Available at: <https://intdev.tetracheurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Whistleblowing-Policy.pdf>

collection partners to facilitate the research permission process. [Table 5](#) below summarises the requirements, timescales and risk of delays associated with the each of the six countries in our project case study sample frame.

Table 5: Summary of research permission requirements and timescales for project case study sample

Case Study Country	IP presence in-country?	Research permission requirements	Timescale for permissions process (in weeks)	RAAG rating for risk of delays
Kenya (Action Aid/ LNCB)	Yes (TBC)	Administrative level only. Managed easily by DCP	1-2 weeks	Green
Rwanda (HPA/ LNCB)	Yes (TBC)	Submission to National Council for Science and Technology and review by Rwanda National Ethics Committee	3-4 weeks (estimate)	Orange
Nigeria (Impact (Ed)/ DLA/ GEC-T)	Yes (TBC)	Local Government Authority area level only. Managed easily by DCP	1-2 weeks	Green
Pakistan (Acted/ GEC-T)	Yes (TBC)	Local level authority (Tehsil) for Qualitative research only. To be confirmed based on the research areas.	TBC	Green-Orange
Uganda (CSU/ GEC-T)	Yes (Confirmed)	Submission to Mildmay Uganda Research Ethics Committee and then the National Council for Science and Technology	6-8 weeks (estimate)	Orange-Red
Zimbabwe (Plan/ LNCB)	Yes (TBC)	Submission to Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe and then the Research Council of Zimbabwe	2-3 months Requires letter from Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education	Red

Project countries with the most complicated research permission processes and longest timescales will be prioritised in terms of submitting the applications (and developing the research permissions as part of the submission process). Also, the fieldwork for these countries will be scheduled towards the end of the fieldwork phase. The IE Team is currently establishing the presence of IPs in the case study countries who may also be able to help facilitate the research permission process, and if willing, may also be able to help facilitate the fieldwork. If at any point there is a risk that the research permission process will take too long then we will consider alternative projects including those in countries with simpler and quicker research permission processes depending on whether they align with our sampling strategy and selection criteria (see Table 11 and Table 12 in [Annex D](#)).

4.2. Safeguarding and Duty of Care

4.2.1. Overview of our approach to safeguarding

Clear safeguarding processes will be put in place to ensure appropriate handling of any reports of harm to children or adults, whether in relation to the behaviour of IE staff, FM, IP staff, members of the community in which the evaluation is conducted, or others. All IE staff and consultants delivering the evaluation will be expected to adhere to these safeguarding processes.

All IE staff and consultants will be covered by Tetra Tech's appropriate insurances, including public liability and professional indemnity; travel insurance and medical cover; repatriation & life insurance; emergency medical assistance; access to medical and psychological assessment providers where required; access to additional in-country security provision where required; and 24/7 access to the Tetra Tech Risk Management and Compliance Team.

4.2.2. Our safeguarding protocols

Our safeguarding protocols include the following key processes and procedures:

- All concerns and allegations of abuse or breach of the Safeguarding or related Tetra Tech policies, whether internal to the research team or external should be reported to the Safeguarding Focal Point (i.e., the IE Programme Manager) using the formal Safeguarding Incident Report Form in the first instance.
- The Safeguarding Focal Point will liaise with the IE Principal Investigator to discuss an appropriate response as necessary. All reports received will be escalated to the Fund Manager's Safeguarding team and the FCDO as soon as possible (ideally within 24 hours).
- The first priority will be for the Safeguarding Focal Point to ensure that the vulnerable or affected person by abuse is at no risk of further harm. Depending on the context, this may include immediately reporting the incident to the appropriate authorities, or if the alleged perpetrator is a research team member, immediately removing them from their position while the incident is investigated.
- If for any reason, a staff member does not feel comfortable reporting to the Safeguarding Focal Point, they should report their concern directly to the IE Principal Investigator, Evaluation Manager or follow the Tetra Tech whistleblowing reporting procedures within a 24-hour reporting period.

It is not unusual for welfare concerns to be disclosed by research respondents to interviewers. Welfare concerns are most often historic incidents experienced by the respondents such as abuse experienced in the family or marital home, corporal punishment experienced at school, or children who have suffered illness and malnutrition as a result of living with elderly relatives and do not require any further action. The IE will manage these reports as detailed above with the reports being submitted using the Safeguarding Incident Report Form to the IE Programme Manager for escalation to the Fund Manager's Safeguarding team and the FCDO.

Table 6 below contains a summary of the IE team's safeguarding roles and responsibilities.

Table 6: Safeguarding guidance and roles and responsibilities

Team Member	Responsibility
Simon Griffiths, Principal Investigator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holds the ultimate accountability over the programme, including application and adherence to safeguarding and ethical research protocols, to the FCDO. • Available to receive reports of breaches or suspected breaches of the policy if individuals do not feel comfortable reporting concerns to Safeguarding Focal Point.
Louise Cathro, GEC IE Programme Manager, Safeguarding Focal Point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for implementation of and adherence to safeguarding processes in line with this framework and Tetra Tech corporate policies, including through completion of Tetra Tech Safeguarding checklist. • Responsible for being the first port of call to receive all concerns and allegations of abuse or breach of the policies (Safeguarding Focal Point). • Responsible for escalating any concerns or risks to the Principal Investigator as appropriate in line with the reporting process. • Responsible for escalating reports received to the Fund Manager's Safeguarding team and the FCDO as appropriate in line with the reporting process.
Sidra Butt - Mughal, Evaluation Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountable for safeguarding processes being implemented across the team on a day-to-day basis. • Responsible for overseeing integration of safeguarding risks into the risk register and ensuring their mitigation. • Available to receive reports of breaches or suspected breaches of the policy if individuals do not feel comfortable reporting concerns to Safeguarding Focal Point.
All GEC IE team members and other staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comply with code of conduct, safeguarding and whistleblowing policies and the safeguarding framework. • Escalate all concerns as per procedures in line with the reporting process. • Act as safeguarding ambassadors for the programme, proactively promoting safeguarding principles.

4.3. Ethical and safeguarding risks and challenges

The IE Team recognises that each research and evaluation activity may be linked to specific ethical and safeguarding risks and challenges. Throughout the design phase and during the pre-fieldwork activities whilst developing the project case study research plans and research instruments, and whilst recruiting local data collection partners, the IE

will conduct a comprehensive risk assessment that will map the following types of risks, and develop corresponding mitigation strategies:

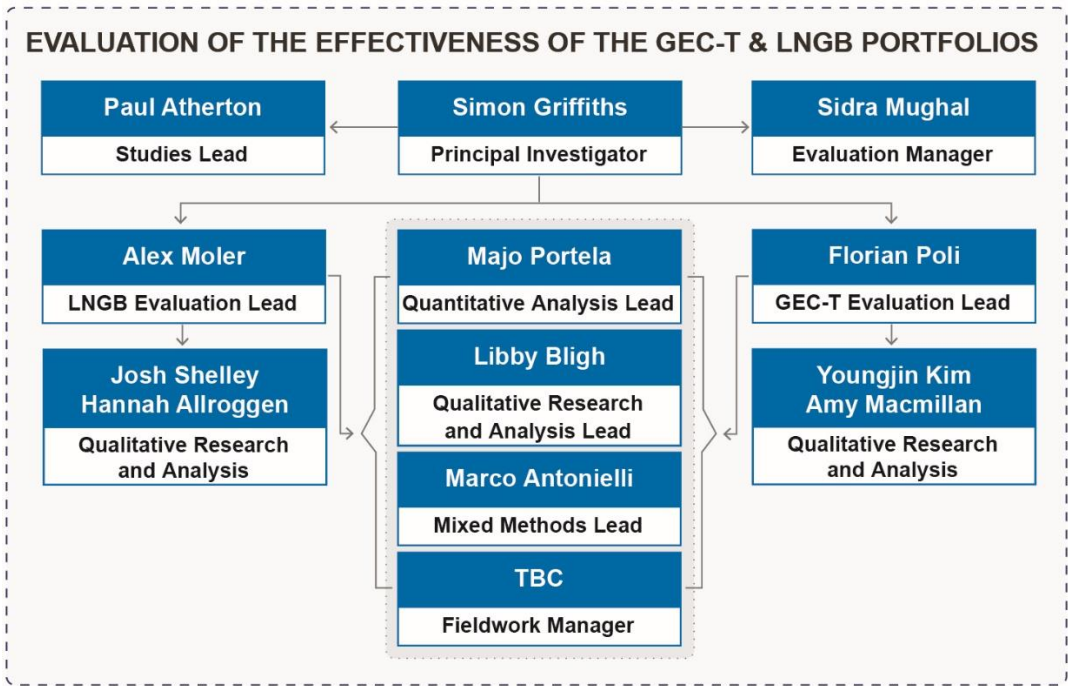
- Ethical or safeguarding risks or challenges identified, including for key population groups (e.g., children, and women and girls in vulnerable groups including those with disabilities or living with HIV/AIDS).
- Risks specific to the methodology or research instruments used that may reduce the validity and reliability of the research or evaluation findings, including possible sampling bias.
- Operational risks, including the capacity and capabilities of the IE team's local research partners and their researchers and enumerators and those that may delay the implementation of data collection or impact on budgets.

5. Governance and management

5.1. Team for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the GEC II portfolio

The evaluation will be led by a core evaluation team, with input from members of the wider team delivering the evaluation and research activities. Additional support will be brought in as needed, particularly during the analysis phase. Figure 4 below details the evaluation team structure and roles.

Figure 4: Structure of the core evaluation team



The IE Team will hold weekly team meetings to discuss progress, share information and raise any issues.

As the IE Team, we will take measures to maintain the independence of the study and avoid conflicts of interest. We will regularly liaise with the FM, IPs and FCDO to gather the information we require for our study. This includes a transparent process for obtaining and reviewing FCDO and ESWG feedback at relevant phases of the evaluation. The IE Team for this evaluation is led by a Principal Investigator (Simon Griffiths), and includes in-house Tetra Tech staff and experts from the IE Team’s southern academic partners and field researchers provided by the IE Team’s local data collection partners who are contracted directly by Tetra Tech.

The FCDO will be responsible for signing off all evaluation deliverables. Further details about arrangements for maintaining independence across wider IE activities are set out in the FM-IE Memorandum of Understanding²³.

5.2. Engagement with partners

5.2.1. FCDO

Engagement with the FCDO is prescribed by the overarching contract for the IE and relevant documents.

The IE Team will liaise with the FCDO through existing channels established between the IE Team and the FCDO Evaluation Lead for the GEC II (Matthew Harvey). Regular communication will be through the Programme Manager (Louise Cathro) with oversight provided by the Principal Investigator (Simon Griffiths). The FCDO will approve this

²³ The FM-IE Memorandum of Understanding is available on request.

Evaluation Design Note before the research phase commences. Each study deliverable will be subject to quality checks from the FCDO and the ESGW.

5.2.2. Implementing partners

The IE has developed an IE Engagement Plan which provides guidance on the anticipated engagement for both the IE team when engaging with IPs on evaluation studies as well as for IPs supporting the IE and evaluation studies. The IE recognises that IPs are extremely busy, and the plan outlines whether the level of engagement is low, moderate, or high with the intention of avoiding engagement being burdensome but recognising the important contributions from IPs for the success of the studies. The IE Engagement Plan is provided in [Annex G](#).

The IE Team will discuss the level of engagement anticipated in the study with IPs as early in the process as possible so that this can be factored into their planning for those projects that are able to engage with the study. The IE Team will seek to agree with the IPs a focal point of contact or preferred channel of communication at the outset of a study. This will avoid the IE Team losing touch with IPs when there are staff changes.

The IE Team will provide regular updates and feedback to IPs throughout the study process. Updates will be provided at key stages, such as research design, data analysis and reporting stages.

5.2.3. Data collection partners

Data collection will be carried out by the local data collection partners contracted for this evaluation. As soon as the project case study sample has been approved, the IE team will start commissioning the local data collection partners. Depending on the country and region and time constraints, this could involve a combination of obtaining quotations from two to three partners through a limited tender process or obtaining a quotation from a tried and tested local data collection partner. As part of this process, we will review the CVs for proposed researchers and conduct interviews if required to ensure they have the correct qualifications and experience to carry out the field research. Immediately following contracting, the study team will hold a kick-off meeting with each DCP to provide an overview of the study and talk through the processes to be followed including any points needing specific care and attention.

All researchers and facilitators will be supervised by research staff in each of the selected countries where we will collect primary data. They will receive substantive training prior to piloting and fieldwork, including in research ethics and safeguarding, to ensure compliance with the IE ERSF.

This training will be designed and delivered by our local data collection partners in consultation with their in-country Fieldwork Managers and supported by the Evaluation Leads and Evaluation Manager. Data collection partners and their Fieldwork Managers will report to the Evaluation Leads on all technical matters and Louise Cathro (Programme Manager) on all contractual or management matters. The Fieldwork Managers in each context will oversee fieldwork in each of the selected countries and ensure the integrity of the fieldwork processes and quality of final data.

5.2.4. Southern academic partners

The IE team will also be supported by southern academic partners (SAPs) who ensure that the study design and research instruments are relevant to wider programmatic and policy efforts in their respective geographies. The SAPs will support the IE team with the interpretation of the data by validating our analysis, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. We will engage our southern academic partners as soon as the project case study sample has been approved early in the research phase. It may be advantageous to select SAPs from within one or more of the case study countries. As with the data collection partners, quotations and CVs are requested from known and trusted SAPs and based on ToRs outlining the scope of work to be completed. The CVs will be reviewed to ensure the personnel nominated have the qualifications and experience required to complete the work. Once selected and contracted, we will hold a kick-off meeting with the SAP to update them on the processes to be followed during the study and provide clarity where needed, on the points in the study where their engagement is key.

5.3. Quality assurance

5.3.1. Quality assurance approach

All evaluation outputs and reports will be subject to the IE's rigorous quality assurance processes. Central to our protocols is a 'getting it right first time' approach.

Our quality assurance protocols require that each deliverable (including drafts) is reviewed prior to submission to the FCDO. Initial review is carried out by the GEC-T and LNGB Evaluation Leads (respectively Florian Poli and Alex Moler) and the Principal Investigator (Simon Griffiths) who also has ultimate accountability for the evaluation. The deliverables are then quality assured by the IE team including the Studies Lead (Paul Atherton), Team Leader (Monazza Aslam), Deputy Team Leader (Shenila Rawal) and Technical Director (Pauline Rose) who will quality assure all evaluation deliverables before their submission to FCDO. The Evaluation Manager will carry out final formatting checks prior to submission. All deliverables are also quality assured by the ESWG consisting of the FCDO, FM and an independent monitoring and evaluation expert, which will also involve a meeting with the ESWG to discuss comments and feedback on a deliverable. The SAPs play an important role in using their local knowledge, expertise and experience to quality assure and validate the IE team's deliverables and research instruments. All IPs included as project case studies will be provided with the opportunity to review and provide feedback on draft reports for points of clarification.

5.3.2. Approach to managing potential conflicts of interest

Tetra Tech's "*Conflict of Interest Ethical Wall Policy and Procedures*" outlines the requirements for handling Sensitive Information and Ethical Wall principles. All partners and members (i.e., employees and active sub-contractors) are expected to comply with these procedures. Furthermore, each employee agrees to report to the appropriate person any past, present, or future relationship that may result in an actual or potential conflict of interest. Any violation of this policy will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of the individual's role in the IE team and/or contractual relationship with Tetra Tech.

5.3.3. Data management, quality assurance and protection

Any project specific deliverables (written documents, data collected, audio-visual materials, etc.) created under this contract shall be owned by Tetra Tech, and ultimately transferred to the FCDO as per its head contract terms and conditions. We will store data securely and will ensure that all consultants and subcontractors also do so. We will comply with GDPR clauses of the FCDO contract, and these are mirrored in our consultancy and subcontractor contracts. Our data quality assurance process uses the following approach:

- The Evaluation Design, Research Methodology and Evaluation Framework (see [Section 0](#)) clearly sets out the evidential /analytical /reporting purpose of all data collected, how it will be collected (i.e., methods), by whom, when (and with what frequency) and from what sources.
- The IE team will recruit enumerators and researchers who: (a) have the education levels, language abilities, previous research experience and familiarity with the focus areas to conduct the research safely and accurately; and (b) fully understand the subject they are collecting data on (including its sensitivities), the fieldwork methodology (including integrated quality control processes), how to use the research instruments (through piloting) and all research ethics guidelines and safeguarding protocols we put in place.
- The IE team will carry out rigorous training of enumerators and researchers prior to piloting of instruments and fieldwork commencing. Training modules will generally include: introduction to the GEC programme, IE work and objectives of the research; practicalities and logistics of the research; ethical research, data management and safeguarding protocols; an overview and detailed run through of the research instruments, including requesting any feedback on the instruments or translations; practice interviews/ role play sessions; and any other support as needed.
- The IE team will ensure robust quality control of fieldwork and data including: supervisors checking completed questionnaires, field notes and transcripts; supervisors accompanying researchers on at least 10% of the data collection activities and noting and feeding back where standards were not met; supervisors back-checking at least 20% of the data collection activities; debrief meetings at the end of a fieldwork day; and a systematic and transparent approach to data entry, cleaning, processing and disclosure control.
- The approach to data analysis, triangulation, and synthesis (see [Section 3.5](#)) enables us to identify, explore and address any bias, inaccuracies, and contradictions in the data transparently and systematically.

5.3.4. Risk management

The IE Programme Manager (Louise Cathro) maintains an overall Risk Register²⁴, which is submitted as an integral part of the quarterly progress reports and annual progress report to the FCDO. The Risk Register (including mitigation

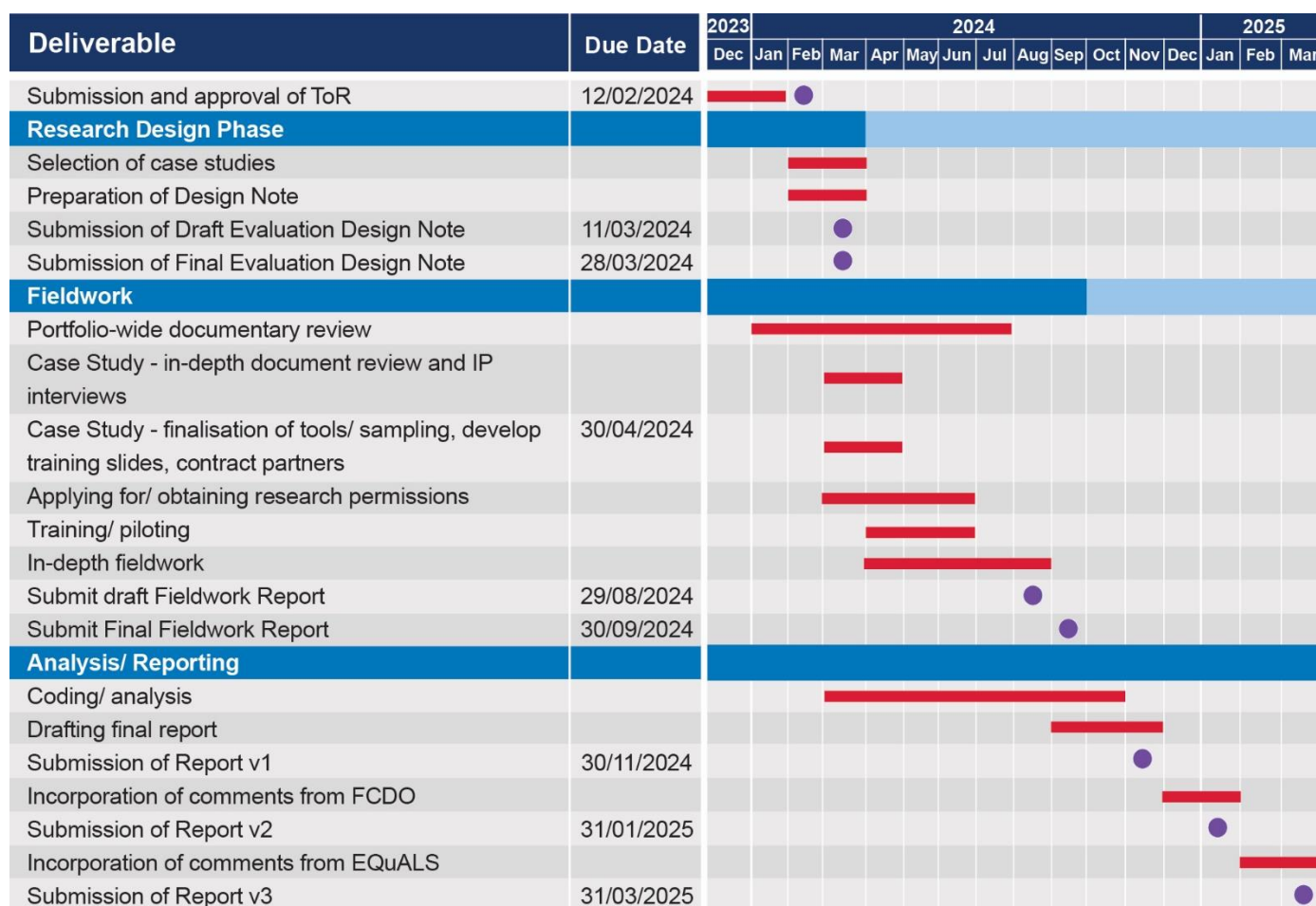
²⁴ The IE Risk Register is available on request.

actions to reduce risks) covers all evaluation and research activities /studies including this evaluation. Should unacceptable levels of risk emerge, the Programme Director (Simon Griffiths) will raise these immediately with FCDO.

6. Workplan and deliverables

This section describes the workplan, with the time required to meet each deliverable. The work plan has been designed to incorporate time required for stakeholders to provide their feedback, as well as the subsequent time needed for the IE team to respond to comments and integrate feedback. The dates by which we would submit and receive FCDO approval on key deliverables for each phase of the study are listed in [Figure 5](#) below.

Figure 5: Work plan and timeline for key deliverables



6.1. Overview

6.1.1. Commitment to user-friendly and actionable deliverables

All deliverables will be written in clear, non-technical language to ensure they are accessible to different audiences. Our approach to producing **user-friendly actionable deliverables** is as follows:

- **Clear and concise reporting structure:** at the planning stage for each GEC IE activity, we will develop and agree with FCDO a report structure that is clear and concise.
- **Plain English:** all our reports and other written outputs will be user-friendly, written in Plain English and copy-edited to publishable quality using language that is clear and accessible for non-research audiences.
- **Grounded and action-orientated recommendations:** our findings will be independent and objective. However, from the IE team's experience formulating actionable recommendations will be best achieved by working collaboratively with FCDO and other relevant stakeholders to ensure that the translation of evidence of past performance into recommendations for the future is grounded in an acute understanding of a wider range of contextual factors and strategic priorities.

Strong internal quality assurance: as a minimum, all deliverables are reviewed, and quality assured by the Project Manager and Project Director (who is the ultimate point of accountability on the contract). Our quality criteria consist of defensible design; independence; impartiality; useful recommendations; gender/social inclusion /conflict sensitivity; as well as technical criteria of clarity, reliability and validity and ensuring there is a clear link between findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

6.2. Evidence use and influence

The IE team prepares a Dissemination and Communications Plan for each study. The plan details the communication products to be prepared as well as the channels for dissemination to either internal or external stakeholders. This evaluation has an important learning objective. Therefore, in addition to the final report and annexes and evaluation brief, further communications products could include webinars to share findings and recommendations, summary briefs, blogs, and news articles. The main outputs from this evaluation (final report, annexes, and evaluation brief) will be published and uploaded on the GEC website as well as the GEC webpage on the Tetra Tech website and will be promoted through GEC and Tetra Tech social media channels.

As indicated in [Section 1.2.1](#), the GEC IE Programme will complete in March 2025 (revised by the FCDO from June 2025 in March 2024). While the sections below outline the IEs methods and research instruments to be used to disseminate knowledge, there is a limit to the scope of knowledge dissemination and research uptake activities that can be completed by the IE following completion of this evaluation as the IE is limited by the contract end date. However, Tetra Tech will support and participate in a limited number of communications and dissemination activities after the end of the IE contract to support the FCDO in maximising the uptake, use and influence of the evidence and learning generated through this portfolio evaluation.

6.2.1. Key stakeholder audiences and evidence utilisation needs

The primary audience for the evaluation includes the wider GEC II family comprising FCDO's GEC programme team, FCDO's Education Advisors, the FM, and the IPs for individual projects. Secondary audiences include other departments and teams within the FCDO, including the Evaluation Department and RED, international donors, agencies and stakeholders working and investing in education, including researchers, NGOs, CSOs, and other international education practitioners.

The IE team has developed an internal Dissemination and Communications Strategy which outlines the plan for the communication and dissemination of knowledge from the GEC IE evidence and learning outputs. The strategy also outlines tools and methods to deliver the learning and knowledge products.

The overall aim is to make strategic use of GEC partners and networks in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and high-income countries (HICs); for this reason, the IE team has grouped key stakeholders into four groups: users, partners, amplifiers, and influencers. Table 7 below details the stakeholders in each group.

Table 7: Stakeholders by group

Stakeholder group	Stakeholders
Users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LMIC governments and sector organisations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National, regional, local governments in LMICs FCDO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior departmental decision makers, including Chief Economist Ambassadors / High Commissioners Ministers Special advisors
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners implementing GEC II and their networks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fund Manager IE team IE partners Southern academic partners Academic partners

Stakeholder group	Stakeholders
Amplifiers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FCDO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls' education team / Education policy team National education advisors Multilateral agencies (United Nations Girls' Education Initiative/ Education Cannot Wait/ Global Partnership for Education (GPE)/ United Nations Children's Fund) Professional associations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the UK and other HICs In programme countries and other LMICs
Influencers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bilateral and Multilateral donors/ Development Banks Non-governmental development organisations Research organisations/ academic networks Consultants/ practitioners Other agencies that operate in the global south in the field of education

The IE team will work with the FCDO GEC programme team and other key stakeholders to coordinate all engagement, communication and dissemination activities that are possible before the end of March 2025. For example, the IE team will engage with FCDO and IPs on a regular basis through regular meetings of the GEC II community, ad-hoc meetings, and other agreed forms of engagement.

6.2.2. Possible dissemination products and key channels

Dissemination products and key channels for dissemination will be pre-agreed with FCDO, the FCDO GEC programme team and other key stakeholders. Table 8 provides an overview of potential communications products that may be developed from the evaluation as well as the channels for dissemination. A Communication and Dissemination Plan outlining the evaluation outputs, stakeholder audience, channel for dissemination and related timeline for this portfolio evaluation is provided in [Annex F](#).

Table 8: Expected communication products and channels

	Primary audiences			Secondary audiences	
	FCDO GEC II team	FCDO Education Advisors & FM	IPs	Other government stakeholders	Organisations working on girls' education
Products					
Reports	X	X	X		
Executive Summaries	X	X	X	X	X
Presentations	X	X	X	X	X
Evaluation Brief	X	X	X	X	X
Blogs	X	X	X	X	X
Case Studies	X	X	X	X	X
News articles/ Newsletters	X	X	X	X	X
Raw primary data	X	X			
Channels					
Email	X	X	X		
Websites (GEC / Tetra Tech)	X	X	X	X	X
Social media platforms	X	X	X	X	X
Events	X	X	X	X	X
Presentations/ webinars	X	X	X	X	X
Face-to-Face/ workshops	X	X	X		
Infographics	X	X	X	X	X

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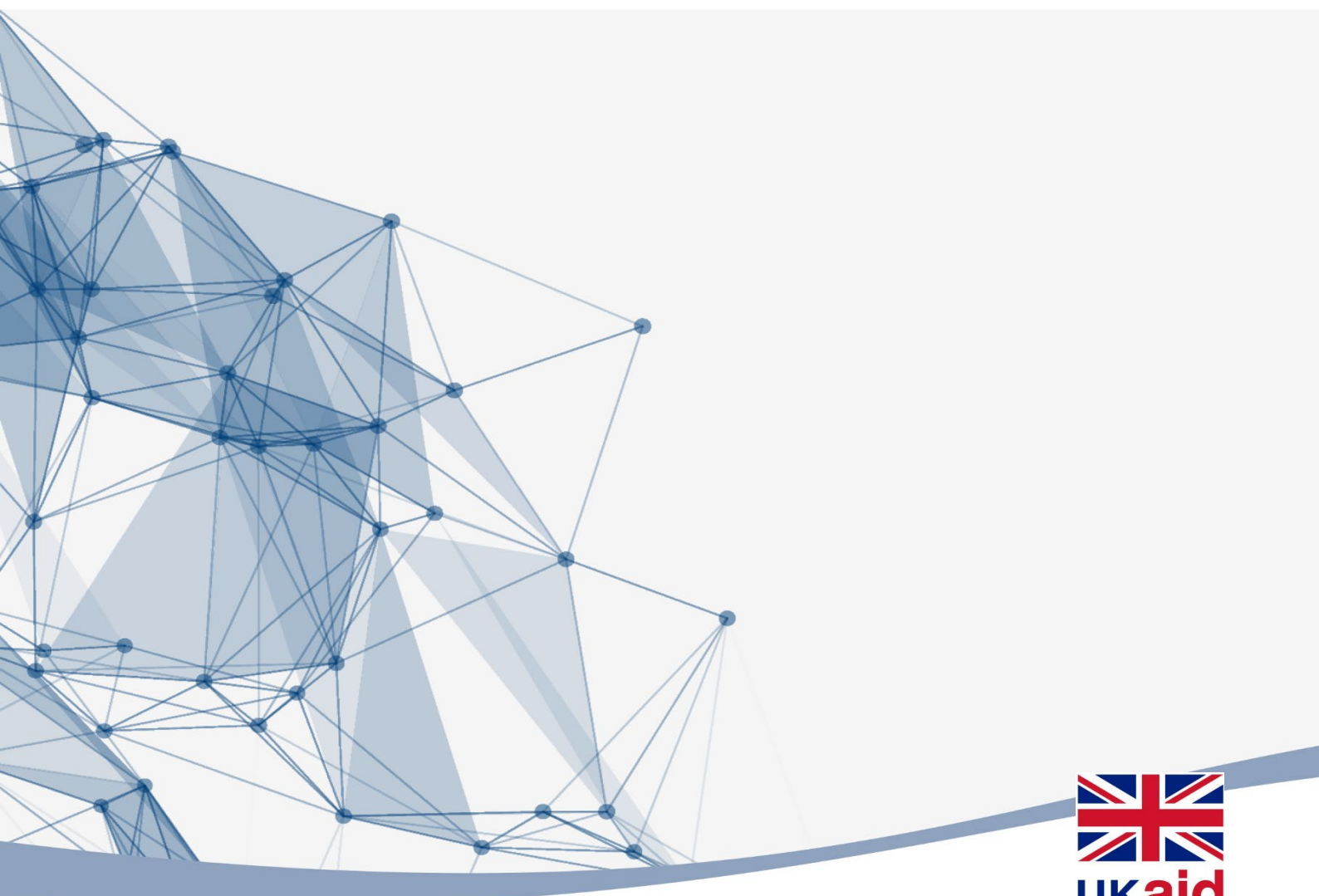
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Annex A: Terms of Reference – February 2024 approved version

Tetra Tech International Development

Independent Evaluation of the Girls' Education Challenge Phase II - Terms of Reference for the Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the GEC-Transition and Leave No Girl Behind Windows

February 2024



Client Name: FCDO

Project Name: Independent Evaluation of the GEC Phase II

Contract Number: PO 10019

Partners:

- Fab Inc
- Research and Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre at the University of Cambridge

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February 2024

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This document has been approved for submission by Tetra Tech International Development Project Director, based on a review of satisfactory adherence to our policies on:

- Quality management;
- HSSE and risk management;
- Financial management and Value for Money (VfM);
- Personnel recruitment and management;
- Performance Management and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E).

Simon Griffiths

Programme Director

Signature:



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Acronyms

EQuALS	Evaluation Quality Assurance & Learning Service
ESWG	Evaluation Studies Working Group
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FM	Fund Manager
GEC II	Girls' Education Challenge Phase II
GEC-T	Girls' Education Challenge – Transition
IE	Independent Evaluation Supplier
IP	Implementing Partner
KEQ	Key Evaluation Question
LNGB	Leave No Girl Behind
OECD-DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
RRLF	Rapid Research and Learning Fund
SQ	Sub Question
ToR	Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

This document sets out the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the independent effectiveness evaluations of projects within the GEC Transitions (GEC-T) and Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) Windows for Phase II of the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC II). The evaluation is timed to coincide with the final stage of Phase II, which ends in 2025.

The evaluation includes a two-stage preparatory phase:

- 1) The first stage consists of the development of this ToR during November to December 2023, including:
 - Details of the context for the evaluation;
 - Evaluation objectives and Key Evaluation Questions;
 - Overview of evaluation methods and data;
 - Evaluation deliverables;
 - Evaluation team and evaluation management; and
 - Ethics and safeguarding considerations.
- 2) The second stage consists of the development of a detailed Evaluation Plan during January to March 2024, which responds to the ToR. This will be set out in an Evaluation Design Report, including:
 - Full details of the evaluation design and methods;
 - Data sources;
 - Full details and justification of the sampling strategy;
 - Draft research instruments (topic guides for key informant interviews, etc.);
 - Types of analysis to be undertaken;
 - Workplan and budget;
 - An Evaluation Use & Influence Plan;
 - Evaluation team and evaluation management; and
 - Provisions for ethics and safeguarding aligned with the details of the work plan.

The evaluation (including data collection, analysis, and reporting) will be implemented between April 2024 and February 2025.

1.2. Context

1.2.1. The Girls' Education Challenge Phase II

The Girls' Education Challenge Phase II (GEC II) programme is an eight-year (2017-2025) programme supported by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Phase I of the programme (2012-2016) supported 1.4 million marginalised girls in completing a full cycle of either primary or secondary education through 37 different projects. Phase II (2017-2025) is a £500 million programme working with 41 projects across 17 countries with activities across two funding windows:

- 1) **GEC Transitions (GEC-T)** continued support for 27 GEC Phase I projects to help girls' transition to the next stage of education in 15 countries (Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe). These projects started implementing activities in mid-2017 with timeframes of between three and seven years.
- 2) **Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB)** funded 14 projects for up to 500,000 highly marginalised girls in 10 countries: (Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Zimbabwe). LNGB projects focused on supporting highly marginalised adolescent girls between 10-19 years of age into education or training and gaining skills, including numeracy and literacy.

Highly marginalised, as defined in the previous IE study on this topic¹ includes those who either never enrolled in formal schooling or dropped out before achieving basic literacy and numeracy skills, including girls with disabilities, girls at risk of early marriage and girls who are pregnant or have children. Projects started in late 2018, enrolled beneficiaries in cohorts, and typically lasted from 9 – 12 months.

Project activities were undertaken by Implementing Partners (IPs), contracted to the FCDO and managed by a Fund Manager (FM) consortium led by PricewaterhouseCoopers. As of December 2023, the following five projects are still ongoing:

- 1) VIVA Crane, Uganda (GEC-T)
- 2) Cheshire Services Uganda, Uganda (GEC-T)
- 3) LINK Education Ethiopia (GEC-T)
- 4) People in Need, Nepal (LNGB)
- 5) CARE Somalia (AGES) (LNGB)

The FCDO contracted Tetra Tech International Development as the Independent Evaluation supplier (IE), leading a consortium with the REAL Centre at Cambridge University, Fab Inc., and various Southern academic² and data collection partners. The IE's scope of work includes:

- 1) Seven in-depth thematic studies designed and implemented iteratively to respond to the emerging evidence and learning needs of the FCDO and FM.
- 2) A Rapid Research and Learning Fund (RRLF) – a ringfenced fund to commission research relevant to the GEC and the FCDO.
- 3) An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the GEC-T and LNGB Windows.
- 4) A Learning Synthesis assessing the evolution of the GEC between and across Phases I and II.

The current status of these studies is summarised in [Table 1](#) (Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the GEC-T and LNGB Windows highlighted in bold).

Table 1: Status of GEC II IE and RRLF Studies

IE Studies /RRLF	Status (end date)	Window
1. Access & Learning	Complete (Feb-22)	GEC-T & LNGB
2. Teachers & Teaching	Complete (Dec-21)	GEC-T
3. GEC-T Impact Assessment of Learning and Transition Outcomes [at midline]	Complete (Aug-22)	GEC-T
4. Educating Girls with Disabilities in GEC II	Complete (May-23)	LNGB (& GEC-T)
5. Education for Marginalised Girls Beyond Formal Schooling	Complete (Oct-23)	LNGB
6. VfM of Reaching the Most Marginalised GEC Girls	Fieldwork (Jul-24)	LNGB
7. Sustainability	ToR (Feb-25)	GEC-T & LNGB (TBC)
8. Effectiveness Evaluation of the GEC-T & LNGB windows	ToR (Mar-25)	GEC-T & LNGB
9. GEC Phase I & II Lessons Learned (2012-2024)	Start Sept-24 (Apr-25)	NA (GEC Phase I & II)
RRLF – University of Portsmouth /Consilient Research (Somalia)	Complete (Dec-22)	NA (GEC Phase I)
RRLF – Population Council (Kenya)	Complete (Jan-23)	NA
RRLF – National Institute for Development Research (Nepal)	Complete (Jun-23)	LNGB

The effectiveness evaluation will use relevant analysis and findings from the IE studies shown in [Table 1](#), and supplement this with additional primary research where relevant to answer the Key Evaluation Questions³.

GEC II is wholly funded by the UK and has operated independently of other programmes. The studies are, therefore, commissioned by the FCDO alone rather than through a joint approach with other donors.

A key consideration for the timing of the effectiveness evaluation is finding a balance between leaving enough time for results to emerge from project implementation and ensuring there are some projects to engage with (because they

¹ Study 5 in Table 1 below

² Our seven Southern academic partners include: Centre for the Studies for the Economies of Africa in Nigeria (CSEA); Institute of Social and Policy Sciences (I-SAPS) in Pakistan; University of Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania; Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS) in Nepal; Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO); Africa Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC) in Kenya; and Centre for Social Research (CSR) at Chancellor College in Malawi.

³ For example, the synthesis of learning and transition outcome results will rely on findings from Study 3, which quantitatively assessed GEC-T projects' performance in delivering learning and transition outcomes for the beneficiary girls between baseline and midline.

are still in progress or have only recently closed). A further issue is the need for emerging conclusions to inform the Lessons Learned Study (Study 9) to be produced from September 2024 – March 2025. Whilst only five projects are currently active, it will be important to consider (as far as possible) closed projects as well as active projects as part of our evaluation design to ensure we select a robust and unbiased sample for our primary research. Although it is easier to engage with staff and stakeholders supporting active projects, these projects may not be suitable for selection depending on the evaluation design, sampling strategy and selection criteria. Our sampling strategy and selection criteria will be set out in the Evaluation Design Report.

1.2.2. Wider context for the Girls' Education Challenge

The GEC supports the FCDO's commitment to promoting 12 years of quality education for all children. It reflects a global context in which an estimated 63 million girls (5-15 years) were out of school⁴. Lack of education can have life-long and inter-generational consequences. Lower education and skills, as well as gender norms, are important reasons why young women are much less able to transition into safe and productive work. Fewer employment opportunities and a lack of positive role models affect individual and family decision making, leading to more limited investments in the education and skills needed for higher waged occupations.

The poorest girls are less likely to learn, even if they make it to school. According to studies cited in the GEC II Business Case, globally, nearly 781 million adults lacked basic literacy skills in 2012, of which nearly 64% were women, a percentage unchanged since 2000⁵. Highly marginalised girls face multiple barriers, locking them out of opportunities to reap the social, health and economic dividends of education as adults. It is estimated that only 1% of women with disabilities in the developing world are literate.

Investing in girls' education delivers significant economic, health and social benefits for the girls themselves, their families, and the wider community. It contributes to the achievement of multiple Sustainable Development Goals. It is likely that the benefits of education to marginalised girls are higher.

1.2.3. Target results for the GEC II

GEC II has one higher-level impact objective: a better educated and empowered female population. This impact is meant to be achieved through the contributions of four overarching outcomes:

- 1) **Enrolment:** GEC girls are able to enrol in formal or non-formal education. For GEC-T, this is measured by the total number of girls enrolled in school with GEC-T support, and for LNGB, the total number enrolled in any activity (including but not limited to schooling).
- 2) **Learning:** GEC girls are able to demonstrate improvements in learning assessments.
- 3) **Transition:** GEC girls are able to transition into and progress through formal and non-formal learning opportunities, transition into skills or vocational training and transition into work.
- 4) **Sustainability:** GEC projects establish a foundation for longer term viability of outcomes for girls.

Intermediate outcomes have been included as an intermediary step between outputs and outcomes. The seven intermediate outcomes, which are common to the GEC-T and LNGB windows, are as follows:

- 1) Changing community attitudes and norms;
- 2) Reducing financial barriers;
- 3) Improved teaching;
- 4) Effective management;
- 5) Safer learning environments;
- 6) Empowering girls;
- 7) Continued attendance.

Although all GEC-T and LNGB projects sought to contribute to the high-level impact and four overarching outcomes, some projects only aimed to achieve a subset of the seven intermediate outcomes.

Previous IE studies found that Implementing Partners were not required to quantitatively link intermediate outcomes to outcomes, i.e., the measurement of intermediate outcomes did not necessarily involve the same beneficiary girls as

⁴ From the GEC II Business Case. According to the latest estimates from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), approximately 132 million girls are out of school worldwide (January 2022).

⁵ UNESECO (2014), "Adult and Youth Literacy", UIS Fact Sheet, September 2014, No.29

those reported as part of the measurement of outcomes (e.g., through learning assessments). However, the external evaluations of some projects, as well as the IE studies, have used qualitative research to assess how and to what extent intermediate outcomes translated into GEC outcomes. The IE team will review and use all available evidence in this respect and fill gaps through primary qualitative research to test these connections in answering the effectiveness evaluation questions.

Changes in results areas and outcomes over the course of the GEC II and impact on the evaluation of the effectiveness of the GEC-T and LNGB Windows

The four GEC outcomes and seven intermediate outcomes mentioned above have been subject to change in their definitions and measurement /reporting requirements since the start of the GEC II. For example, Participation was only introduced as an outcome in 2021, and was renamed Enrolment in 2023. While Participation was originally a count of the number of GEC girls able to participate in formal or non-formal education, its scope was later broadened to counting all girls enrolled in GEC activities. Similarly, the way Learning is measured has significantly changed following the Covid-19 outbreak and resulting school closures and movement restrictions, with projects being given more flexibility in how they could measure and report on learning between midline and endline.

The Evaluation Design Report will include a chronological mapping of the results and measurement /reporting requirements that projects were tasked with delivering at different stages of the life of the GEC. To ensure the evaluation is fair, reasonable, and accurate, the IE team will evaluate the performance of the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios in delivering the results they were tasked with delivering at any given time. This will reflect any changes in the result areas, how they were assessed and the contextual conditions that may have affected projects' scope and focus of their activities (and results), for example, the global Covid-19 crisis.

It is worth noting that the GEC Fund level ToC and the LNGB ToC⁶ have been designed to accommodate the high level of diversity of project interventions across the portfolio. Although useful for framing the overall objectives and result areas anticipated at these levels, they are not appropriate (i.e., sufficiently detailed, and accurate) to support a theory-based portfolio evaluation⁷. In the context of this study, the ToCs will mainly be used to frame the overall rationale for the programme and the two funding windows. Likewise, for those projects selected for further case study research (for example), project-level ToCs will be used to frame an in-depth analysis of their performance.

2. Evaluation objectives

2.1. Rationale

The rationale for the summative evaluation reflects the FCDO's need for accountability and learning, particularly to assess what the portfolio (i.e. window) as a whole has achieved (there have already been individual, external evaluations for most projects). The evaluation objectives are, therefore, to:

- 1) Provide the FCDO with the comprehensive portfolio level evidence it needs to account for its investment in GEC Phase II, including what worked well and what did not work, and where; and
- 2) Generate learning that captures the extent to which the GEC-T and LNGB Windows have impacted girls' education, how, why and under what contextual conditions.

The primary audience for the evaluation includes the FCDO's GEC programme team, FCDO's Education Advisors and the FM, and the IPs for individual projects. Secondary audiences include other departments and teams within the FCDO, including the Evaluation Department and Research & Evidence Division, international donors, agencies and stakeholders working and investing in education, including researchers, NGOs, CSOs and other international education practitioners.

2.2. Key Evaluation Question and Sub-Questions

The evaluation will answer the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQ) and sub-questions (SQs) set out below, which were drafted by the IE team through iterative discussions with the FCDO. An initial draft was prepared by the IE team and

⁶ The GEC-T window does not currently have its own standalone ToC.

⁷ A ToC workshop was held in December 2020 with the FM, FCDO and the IE to revisit the ToC's assumptions following the change in the context triggered by the Covid-19. No changes to the ToC were made, as it was perceived that the overarching ToC was still valid.

shared with the FCDO and the Fund Manager. It was then discussed in a workshop with the FDCO on 7 November 2023. Following the workshop, the questions were revised and discussed again during the FCDO-IE team meeting on 28 November. Following written feedback on the first version of the ToRs from Evaluation Studies Working Group (ESWG) members, the IE responses to key comments as well as final scope of evaluation questions were then agreed on 2 February 2024.

2.2.1. Evaluation criteria

The questions were initially developed with reference to the six OECD-DAC criteria for evaluation: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. Through discussions with the ESWG, it was decided that the evaluation of the two portfolios should focus solely on **effectiveness**, with the other criteria not covered in this particular evaluation for the following reasons:

- FM's Value for Money (VfM) work has already covered the **efficiency** criterion through the VfM scorecards developed for each GEC II project. With nearly all projects closing when the evaluation fieldwork starts and a lack of available project data, there will be little additional analysis the IE could do on this beyond attempting to validate the FM's work. VfM is also the main focus of another IE study (Study 6 in [Table 1](#)).
- The **impact** criterion (focusing on longer-term, wider societal effects) was removed following discussion with the FCDO because the GEC II was designed to focus on improving outcomes for a specific cohort of girls within its lifetime rather than wider impacts that take longer to realise.
- The **relevance** criterion (whether interventions are doing the right things and responding to beneficiaries' and wider needs) is embedded in the effectiveness evaluation questions (which reflect a broad definition of effectiveness used since the start of the GEC).
 - Studies 1-7 from [Table 1](#) that included a focus on GEC-T projects also involved research on the relevance of GEC activities to beneficiary needs, which covered access and learning (Study 1), teachers and teaching (Study 2) and, supporting marginalised girls with disabilities (Study 4). The GEC-T portfolio evaluation will make full use of analysis and findings from these studies.
 - Studies 1-7 from [Table 1](#) that included a focus on LNGB projects also involved research on the relevance of GEC activities to beneficiary needs, which covered access and learning (Study 1); supporting marginalised girls with disabilities (Study 4), education pathways for marginalised adolescent girls beyond formal schooling (Study 5), and value for money (Study 6).
 - The effectiveness evaluation will make full use of analysis and findings from these studies.
- The **coherence** criterion – the compatibility of the interventions with other existing interventions in a country or sector – is not a focus, given that the evaluation focuses on performance at the portfolio level. However, internal coherence within each portfolio will be covered by this study, that is the overall coherence of the scope and focus of the projects in each portfolio against their high-level objectives⁸.
- The **sustainability** criterion is covered by the IE Study 7 and various FM sustainability outputs⁹. Sustainability will also be included as a focus of the Lessons Learned study, looking at sustainability over both phases of the GEC.

The questions aim to demonstrate what the window has achieved (for accountability purposes) and what has helped or hindered this (for learning).

2.2.2. Questions

The effectiveness evaluation will be framed around one high-level key evaluation question: **What results did the GEC-T and LNGB deliver, and what worked well /less well and why?**

This KEQ will itself be built around six sub-questions that each consider different dimensions of the effectiveness of GEC II projects. These dimensions will be unpacked to explain how and why they affected the overall effectiveness of the portfolio in achieving its objectives and outcomes.

All sub-questions are relevant to both windows, except for SQ 1.4 which will only cover the LNGB window. They have been defined as follows:

⁸ Typically, the LNGB focus on reaching the marginalised girls and transition into work or back into school, and the GEC-T objective of supporting girls to transition through a whole cycle of education.

⁹ See for example the first iteration of the GEC *Portfolio in Practice* series produced by the GEC Fund Manager, *Advancing sustainability across a portfolio: A deep dive into the Girls' Education Challenge Sustainability Framework* (July 2023).

- SQ 1.1: What results did the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios deliver between baseline and endline?
- SQ 1.2: What intermediate outcomes did the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios deliver?
- SQ 1.3: What were the unexpected or unintended results across the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios?
- SQ 1.4: To what extent and how did the LNGB portfolio reach and benefit the most marginalised?
- SQ 1.5: To what extent and how did external contextual factors¹⁰ for different projects across the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios influence their performance?
- SQ 1.6: What were the implementation factors behind GEC-T and LNGB projects' success or lack of success?

Effectiveness will be assessed in terms of which approaches were most successful, which worked better in particular contexts, and with which target groups. Results will be analysed in terms of changes between baseline and endline for key outcomes (learning, enrolment, and transition). As far as possible, the evaluation will look beyond average effects to assess changes in outcomes for girls from different subgroups and with different initial circumstances (e.g. whether they have a disability, are the poorest, married early, have children or are pregnant). The evaluations will also assess any significant unexpected or unintended results at the project level through additional qualitative research (see below).

It is anticipated that comparisons of approaches, contexts and target groups will be made between projects rather than between different interventions within single projects. This reflects the fact that a key data source for the evaluation – project evaluations – provides evidence at the project rather than intervention level.

However, if project-level evaluations provide information on intervention results (e.g. where a project focused predominantly or solely on a single type of intervention), then a qualitative assessment of which interventions or packages of interventions worked well or less well, for whom, how and why may be possible. The extent to which this is possible will be set out in the Evaluation Design Report.

The evaluation will also assess the portfolio as a whole to investigate whether there are patterns of contextual characteristics that help to explain different project level results. This may include comparing groups of projects with similar results, approaches, or contexts to generate insights.

Relationship of the LNGB portfolio evaluation to Study 5: Education for Marginalised Girls Beyond Formal Schooling

Study 5 and other IE studies (see Table 1) that included LNGB projects produced valuable learning on LNGB that will be of use in informing evaluative judgements about how well the portfolio of projects performed. However, the KEQs informing the portfolio evaluation have a different focus to the Research Questions (RQs) for Study 5 and are designed to produce evidence-based judgements about the performance of the portfolio as a whole based on the results delivered and how well different types of projects and interventions worked. For reference, the Study 5 RQs were as follows:

RQ1: How do LNGB projects mitigate barriers that the most marginalised adolescent girls face in education

RQ2: To what extent and how have LNGB projects influenced the most marginalised adolescent girls' academic and non-academic outcomes?

RQ3: How have LNGB projects influenced the most marginalised adolescent girls' transition to formal schooling and/or work opportunities and agency in making decisions?

Finally, the study findings will be compared at a high level across the two windows to assess areas where their effectiveness is similar and where it differs. This will be done as part of the Conclusions of the study.

¹⁰ By 'external factors' are meant the most prominent contextual factors that have influenced (as drivers or barriers) the projects' delivery of GEC outcomes, e.g., conflict, political economy, social norms, institutional factors, environmental factors, etc.

3. Evaluation methods and data

3.1. Evaluation approach

The effectiveness evaluation will primarily use an evidence synthesis approach, reviewing the evidence reported in projects' external evaluation reports, building on previous harvesting and synthesis work from the previous studies and other project /programme management information. This will be supplemented with additional primary research where relevant to provide additional evidence for some KEQs. These sources will be used to provide a comprehensive summary of the outcomes and intermediate outcomes delivered across the portfolio, the target groups and sub-groups; the types of interventions delivered by projects, and the types of interventions that projects reported as proving effective in delivering their results.

The absence of comparison/control group data for the LNGB portfolio, specifically, means that a counterfactual-based evaluation design for the whole effectiveness evaluation is not realistic. Nonetheless, the broad range of existing evaluation data and reports available to the IE team should provide sufficient evidence to generate robust conclusions. This approach has previously been used successfully in the [GEC Phase 1 Innovation Window: Endline Report](#), which was purely desk-based and used project data and external evaluation reports.

3.2. Datasets and sources

The evaluation will take account of a range of evidence, including the following sources, where appropriate. The precise methods to be used in implementing the evaluation will be detailed in the Evaluation Design Report.

- 1) Synthesising evidence from the IE's evaluation studies 1 – 7 (see Table 1) as well as evidence and learning materials produced by the FM (reviewing their content critically and building on their content rather than duplicating it).
- 2) Synthesising evidence from project level evaluation reports, including baseline, midline and endline reports to draw conclusions about portfolio level performance.
- 3) **Reviewing other relevant documents** to obtain wider contextual evidence where relevant for the analysis. This may include quarterly and annual monitoring reports, project reporting cards or internal FM management information.
- 4) **Collecting qualitative primary data, including key informant interviews and/or focus groups with the FM, IPs, and wider project stakeholders** (e.g., schools and local and national education authorities), depending on the issue. This additional source will allow the evaluation to answer questions on portfolio effectiveness more fully than would be possible through just a synthesis of existing evidence, providing richer information on which packages of interventions worked well, under what kinds of conditions, how and why.

The specification of this element will be set out in the Evaluation Design Report and will depend on an assessment of what is available from sources 1-3 and remaining evidence gaps. As Study 7 on Sustainability may also involve interviews with IPs, it will be important to ensure a joined up approach to avoid duplication and confusion.

Table 2 below summarises the number of evaluation reports, quantitative data sets and evaluation scorecards¹¹ available for GEC-T projects (from a total of 31¹² projects). IE Studies 1 to 4, which focused on GEC-T, were only based on baseline and midline data.

¹¹ These scorecards developed by the FM were only used at midline and dropped at endline following Covid-19. They include RAG ratings of projects' performance against intended outcomes and results.

¹² There are 27 GEC-T projects, including two (Camfed and DLA) which operate in three different countries and are counted here as separate projects.

Table 2: Summary of available project data for the GEC-T window (out of 31 projects)

Evaluation data and reports available	Baseline	Midline	Endline
Evaluation report available	31	28	25 ¹³
Quantitative data available ¹⁴	31	27	15
Learning assessment data available	31	28	6 ¹⁵
Scorecard available	n/a	27	0 ¹⁶

The table indicates a broad range of data for the evaluation, despite significant gaps in the evidence base, especially in endline learning and wider quantitative data. Baseline, midline and endline evaluation reports are available for 25 out of 31 GEC-T projects, and baseline, midline and endline quantitative data are available for 15 projects¹⁷. There is also additional data in the form of the evaluation scorecards produced at the midline for 27 projects.

Table 3 summarises the evaluation data and reports available to the IE team for the LNGB portfolio evaluation. Most evaluations only envisaged baseline and endline assessments, given that LNGB interventions typically lasted one year or less. In total, the evaluations covered 36 cohorts out of a total of 50 from 14 projects. Up to Study 5, the team had access to baseline data from 30 cohorts, as well as midline or endline evaluation data from 22 out of the 27 cohorts which planned to conduct a follow-up evaluation. Since then, data from two additional endline evaluations have been received and furthermore are expected to be conducted in 2024.

Table 3: Summary of available project data for the LNGB window

A: Evaluation data and reports available	B: No. of projects	C: No. of cohorts ¹⁸
Evaluation data		
Endline data only	10	21
Baseline and endline data	10	20
Baseline, midline and endline data	3	3
Evaluation reports		
Endline evaluation reports only	12	25
Baseline and endline evaluation report	12	22
Baseline, midline and endline evaluation report	3	3

The information reviewed in

¹³ Among the six GEC-T projects for which endline is not available at the time of writing these ToR, three have closed early: BRAC (Afghanistan), HPA (Rwanda) and Save the Children (Mozambique). The endline of the other three projects will take place in 2024: CSU (Uganda), LINK (Ethiopia) and Viva (Uganda).

¹⁴ This covers quantitative evaluation data collected at the project level other than learning assessments (e.g., household or school visit survey). 16 (out of 31) GEC-T projects do not currently have endline quantitative data, among which four do not have an endline and two have not submitted it yet. Four projects explicitly did not collect endline quantitative data, while another six seem to have done so, but they have not been found on the GEC SharePoint folder. This will be clarified with the FM.

¹⁵ For two projects, World Vision (Zimbabwe) and WUSC (Kenya), learning data was collected but is not available on the GEC SharePoint folder. The endline of other projects has been affected by the Covid-19 outbreak, with 19 projects having not included any primary collection of learning assessment data in their endline design.

The exact number of projects for which endline learning assessments is available will be clarified with the FM and mapped in the Evaluation Design Report.

¹⁶ Evaluation scorecards were dropped at endline following the redesign of evaluation requirements after Covid-19.

¹⁷ Several projects stopped collecting quantitative and/or learning evaluation data at endline, which explains the reduced number of endline evaluation data and reports.

¹⁸ All but one project had multiple cohorts. The difference between columns B and C is explained by project data or evaluation reports being available for more than one cohort.

Table 2 comes from eight LNGB countries: Ethiopia (projects implemented by Population Council and PiN Ethiopia), Ghana (World Education project), Kenya (Action Aid International project), Malawi (LINK project), Nepal (PiN Nepal, Street Child projects) Pakistan (ACTED, IRC Pakistan projects), Sierra Leone (IRC Sierra Leone project) and Zimbabwe (Plan Sage project).

The table also indicates a broad range of data for the evaluation, with baseline and endline evaluation reports and data available for most of the 14 LNGB projects. This information was produced by independent evaluators commissioned by each IP separately. These cover a large number of cohorts of girls, with baseline and endline data on 20 cohorts and baseline and endline evaluation reports for 22 cohorts.

As identified in previous IE studies, there are some limitations to the GEC project data. For instance, not all IPs measured or reported data on intermediate outcomes consistently. Furthermore, there is some variation in the depth and quality of the evaluations. This may create some challenges (for instance, the evidence for some KEQs may be stronger than others). However, there is a broad range of secondary data, analysis, and evidence available through the completed IE studies and FM learning products as well as project monitoring and external evaluation reports. The addition of further primary research by the IE to fill evidence gaps means it should still be possible to achieve the overall objectives for the evaluation.

4. Evaluation deliverables

4.1. List of deliverables

Table 4: Evaluation deliverables and timescales

Deliverable	Timescale
TOR submitted for Evaluation Studies Working Group (ESWG), EQuALS review	21-Dec-23
Evaluation design report approved	29-Mar-24
Data collection completion report approved	29-Aug-24
Evaluation report v1 submitted to FCDO	31-Oct-24
Evaluation report v2 submitted for ESWG, EQuALS review	29-Nov-24
Evaluation report v3 (final) approved by FCDO	31-Jan-25
Evaluation brief approved by FCDO	28-Feb-25

Interim updates on progress and emerging findings will be provided to the GEC programme team in addition to these formal deliverables.

The IE prepares a dissemination and communications plan for each study. The plan details the communication products to be prepared as well as the channels for dissemination to either internal or external stakeholders. As indicated in Section 2.1.1, as the purpose of this evaluation is for learning, we will aim to share knowledge on what each window has achieved and what has helped or hindered this. Therefore, in addition to the final report and annexes and evaluation brief, communications products may include webinars to share findings and recommendations, summary briefs, blogs, and news articles. The outputs from this evaluation will be published to the GEC website as well as the GEC webpage on the Tetra Tech website and will be promoted through GEC and Tetra Tech social media channels.

A plan will be prepared for this evaluation in advance of completion and shared with the FCDO and FM for review and comment. We will coordinate communication and dissemination activities with the FM and FCDO, in order to harmonise knowledge sharing and use joint events to ensure we reach as wide an audience as possible.

4.2. Risks and challenges

An initial assessment of risks and challenges for the evaluation is provided in [Table 4](#). This list may be added to during the evaluation design process. Strategies to mitigate these risks will be set out in the Evaluation Design Report.

Table 5: Risks and challenges to be addressed in the evaluation design.

Risk / challenge	Details	Implications
1. Lack project data on intermediate outcomes and outcomes	Not all projects collected data on outcomes and intermediate outcomes or did so in different ways. It may be difficult to retrospectively define and identify the effects of different intervention types to assess what worked well or less well.	The evaluation design process will build on the existing mapping of intermediate outcomes and outcomes measured by each project (carried out for Study 5 Education for Marginalised Girls Beyond Formal Schooling) to assess how comprehensive the data is and how it can be used. Groups of similar projects may be created where possible to assess effects on intermediate outcomes (thereby compensating for the lack of complete and consistent data sets).
2. Lack of data on individual	Projects have implemented packages of interventions whose effects have	Purposeful sampling of projects may allow the effectiveness of different types of interventions

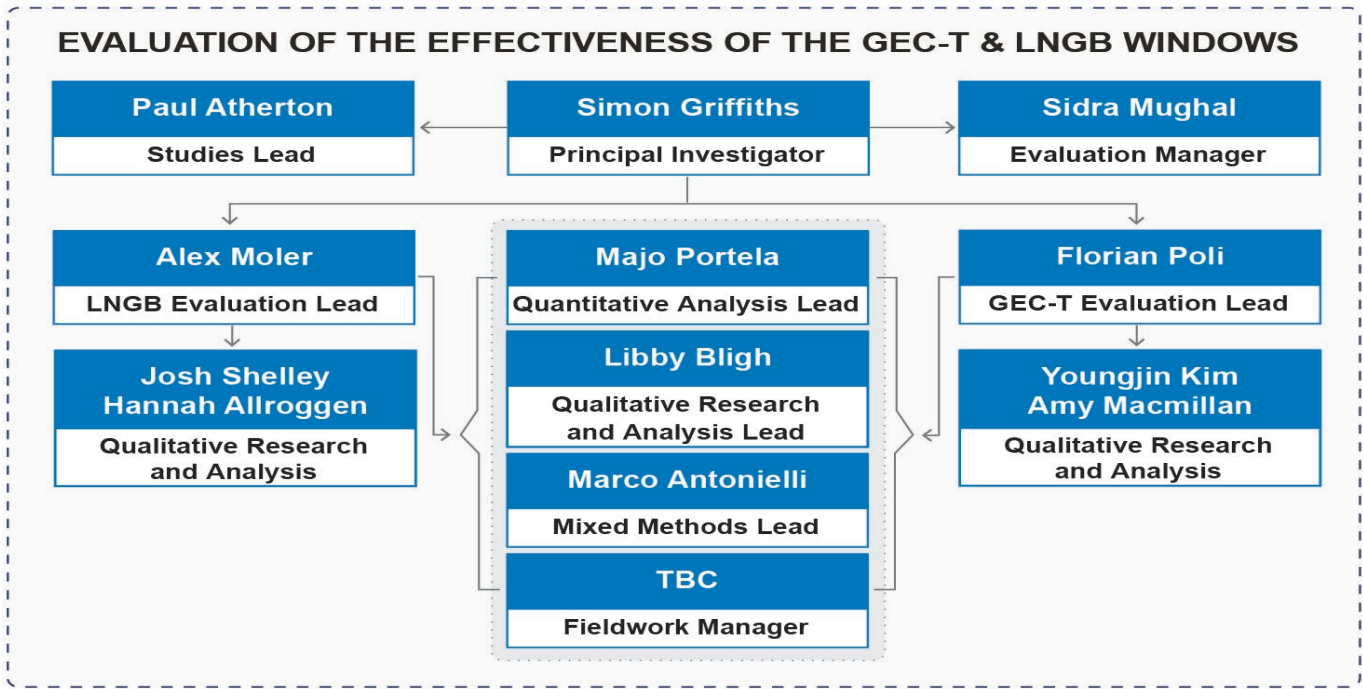
Risk / challenge	Details	Implications
interventions within projects	been evaluated in the aggregate at the project level.	to be assessed, depending on the availability and coverage of project level data. If this is not possible, comparisons of effectiveness will only be possible at the project level.
3. All but 5 projects (3 for GEC-T, 2 for LNGB) have ended, creating a challenge for additional primary research.	Conducting primary research where projects have already closed or are closing soon will require engagement with IPs who may no longer be established in the field or may be concentrating on other activities. It may be difficult to access some data or resolve data queries as a result.	<p>The evaluation will need to prioritise early engagement with the five projects still live (as of December 2023) and make strong efforts to engage with the IPs for closed projects to encourage them to cooperate with the evaluation.</p> <p>It will also be important to ensure the IE teams have up to date contact information for all IPs and in particular their target / treatment schools and communities to allow primary research to be conducted with the right beneficiary groups even after GEC projects have closed.</p>
4. Risk of bias in the review of project results	Arising from risks 1 and 3 above.	The sampling strategy presented in the Evaluation Design Report will need to consider the evidence base for different types of interventions, avoid drawing strong conclusions from partial evidence and to be explicit in reporting the potential for selection bias (and other forms of bias) and the strength of evidence associated with different findings.
5. Recall bias from stakeholders and beneficiaries	The study will seek to obtain feedback from various stakeholders, including FM staff, IP staff and beneficiaries. Significant time may have elapsed since their latest involvement in the GEC, especially for the staff of projects who have closed. This creates a risk of recall/memory bias.	Potential recall/memory bias will be closely monitored during primary data collection. Prompts will be included in interview tools to let respondents self-assess the quality of their recollection. As much as possible, evidence (including secondary evidence) will be triangulated and cross-checked to mitigate the effect of potential bias on findings.
6. Unavailability of FM staff to support the study	Most of the GEC staff involved in GEC II have already moved to other assignments at the time of writing this ToR. This implies it may be difficult to access information and resolve queries.	As with the project IPs, the IE team will make effort to engage with (current or former) FM staff early. Gathering up-to-date contact information will be key, and a 'snowballing approach' will be used to reach staff who has already moved on to other assignments or companies.

5. Evaluation management

5.1. Evaluation team

Figure 1 details the evaluation team structure and roles.

Figure 1: Evaluation team



Six of the eleven team roles filled so far are women. In addition to the roles specified in Figure 1, the support of local research partners is likely to be needed to identify beneficiaries and stakeholders to include in qualitative primary research, to help facilitate and organise the research, and, in some locations, to act as translators. Further details will be included in the Evaluation Design Report.

5.2. Quality assurance

All draft deliverables will undergo internal review and quality assurance by the IE's Evaluation Studies Lead (Paul Atherton), Technical Director (Pauline Rose), Team Leader (Monazza Aslam) and Deputy Team Leader (Shenila Rawal) before their submission to FCDO.

Where local partners are contracted to undertake additional primary data collection (e.g. key informant interviews or focus groups), interviewer training, fieldwork management, and data quality assurance will be managed by the IE Fieldwork Manager (staff member name to be confirmed in the Evaluation Design Report).

The Final Evaluation Report will also be reviewed by FCDO's Evaluation Quality Assurance & Learning Service (EQuALS). In all prior stages, the ESWG will fulfil the QA function, including independent review.

5.3. Points of contact

The IE's point of contact for this evaluation at FCDO is Matthew Harvey, Evaluation Adviser.

6. Ethics and Safeguarding

6.1. Ethical standards

Evaluation activities will fully comply with the guiding concepts and principles set out in the IE's Safeguarding Framework document, the FCDO (2013) Evaluation Policy, the FCDO (2019) Ethical Guidance for Research, Evaluation and Monitoring Activities, the UK Data Protection Act (2018) and other applicable FCDO frameworks and guidance.

Depending on the context, certain groups may face barriers to participation or representation of their views in the evaluation, for example, due to their gender, age, ethnicity, disability, caste, religion, geographic location, ability and socio-economic status. All evaluation activities will, therefore, be undertaken in a way that respects the rights and autonomy of marginalised groups. This will include adaptations to research processes where feasible to accommodate the participation of different groups, including selecting participants, informed consent, deployment of research tools, and feedback and communication processes).

Evaluation activities will also be undertaken in line with the principle of 'Do no harm', with care taken to ensure that children, their parents/ guardians and other stakeholders who participate are not exposed to harm, stigmatised or, further marginalised or discriminated against during or after their participation in the research (whether directly or indirectly). Therefore, the Evaluation Design Report will contain a detailed assessment of the possible consequences before the evaluation, considering the risks for participating individuals and communities (or those who may be indirectly affected) and reflecting on power dynamics such as gender and marginalisation. Mechanisms to engage with IPs and beneficiaries during the study design and implementation will also be defined in the Evaluation Design Report and how findings will be shared in an accessible and appropriate manner with research participants.

6.2. Ethical permissions and approvals

All research and evaluation activities for this contract will be implemented after obtaining necessary approvals, including ethical research board approvals and permissions required from relevant authorities at national, regional or local levels in the countries where research is conducted. Local research partners will support this process where it is needed.

6.3. Safeguarding and Duty of Care

Clear safeguarding processes will be put in place to ensure appropriate handling of any reports of harm to children or adults, whether in relation to the behaviour of IE staff, FM, IP staff, members of the community in which the evaluation is conducted, or others. All IE staff and consultants delivering the evaluation will be expected to adhere to these safeguarding processes.

All IE staff and consultants will be covered by Tetra Tech's appropriate insurances, including public liability & professional indemnity; travel insurance & medical cover; repatriation & life insurance; emergency medical assistance; access to medical and psychological assessment providers where required; access to additional in-country security provision where required; and 24/7 access to the Tetra Tech Risk Management and Compliance Team.

6.4. Data management and access to information

Clear protocols and data storage measures will be put in place to ensure the confidentiality of the data collected and to preserve the anonymity of the research participant(s). All data collected and processed for this contract will be collected, stored, and processed in line with regulations set out in the UK Data Protection Act 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation (2018) (GDPR), and all other applicable legislation.

Any digital research tools (e.g. online survey platforms) used will be under a licensing agreement with Tetra Tech or subcontracted organisations to ensure that IE confidentiality and data protection processes are strictly adhered to. Any digital tools developed by the IE will adhere to the FCDO's Principles for Digital Development where relevant. The FCDO will have unlimited access to the material produced by the evaluation except for personal information within datasets or other measures to protect the privacy of individuals.

Annex B: Changes to the GEC II Theory of Change and Logframe Outcomes

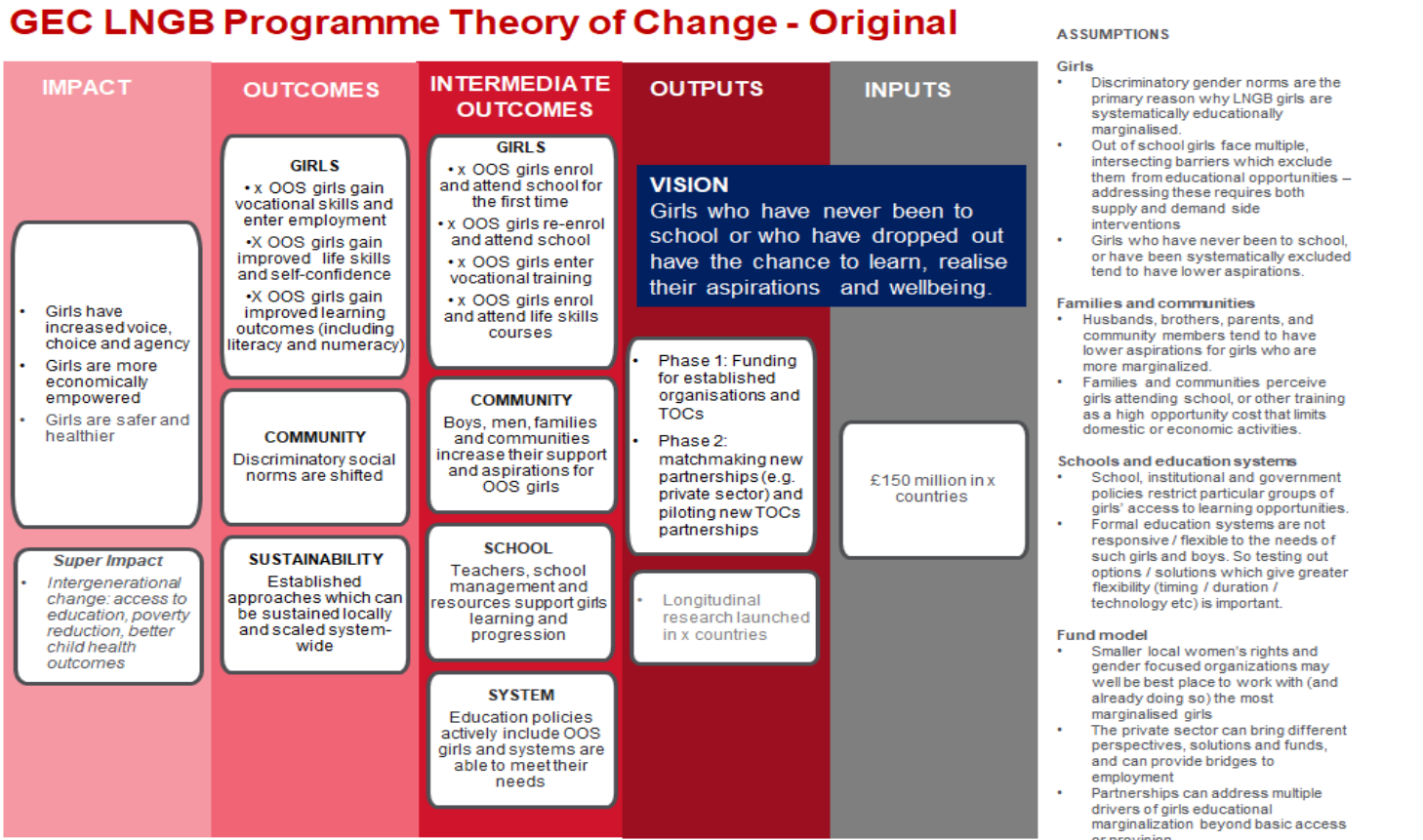
Development of the GEC II ToC

According to the Business Case, the most important difference between the ToCs for GEC I and GEC II was the focus on addressing transition points for girls and better defining marginalisation. For this reason, the Business Case recommended producing a revised ToC focusing more explicitly on supporting girls’ education transitions and on highly marginalised girls during the first year of the programme. The FM and the FCDO collaboratively reviewed the ToC in June 2019, as part of the 2019 Annual Review²⁵ and the changes made reflected:

- The need to consider objectives, intended outcomes and impacts of GEC Phase II projects within the context of the wider socio-political contexts and education systems in which they operate; and
- The need to better consider and reflect the activities, outcomes and impacts of Leave No Girl Behind projects which focus on reaching the most marginalised and excluded girls.

The FM and the FCDO reviewed the GEC II ToC in December 2020 to consider the impacts of Covid-19 on GEC schools and projects and the implications for the programme’s progress and results. At this stage, GEC-T projects were coming to the end of their implementation periods and gradually closing, while LNGB projects were at relatively earlier stages of implementation having started in 2019. The FCDO and FM agreed that the ToC should remain high-level and focus on macro-level changes, and that its outcome and impact indicators would not be majorly affected by the changes brought about by Covid-19. Maintaining the ToC at a high level would continue to allow project ToCs to include specific contextual issues, timeframes, and intervention types. A broad, high-level central hypothesis of change would also allow for the fund-level ToC to remain relevant to a highly diverse set of projects, countries, and target groups. Following the review, no changes were made to the ToC because it was perceived that the overarching ToC was still valid. Likewise, the 2022 FCDO Annual Review concluded that the overarching logic of the ToC remained valid and so to date, the GEC II ToC remains unchanged since the Business Case in 2016. Likewise, the FCDO Annual Reviews in 2021 and 2022 concluded that the overarching logic of the ToC remained valid and so no revisions were required. The LNGB Window has its own ToC (see Figure 6 below), which was developed in 2020, however, a ToC specific to the GEC-T Window was not developed.

Figure 6: LNGB portfolio ToC (2020)



²⁵ FCDO (2019), “Annual Review 2019: Girls’ Education Challenge Phase II”

GEC project monitoring and evaluation requirements

Monitoring

Monitoring of GEC II projects was undertaken by IPs and by the FM, on behalf of the FCDO. Both types of monitoring were used to track progress and to learn about which aspects of project implementation and management were working well and which aspects would benefit from adaptation²⁶.

Project monitoring focused on the Activity and Output levels of the project Logframe. Project Intermediate Outcomes and Outcomes were predominantly assessed through their independent evaluations (see below). Project monitoring of activities and their delivery was reported as part of their quarterly workplan trackers submitted to the FM.

The FM conducted regular monitoring (such as review of documents, attendance and observation of selected project activities, interviews with project staff and beneficiaries) and the facilitation of six-monthly review and adaptation meetings with projects, to support adaptive project management.

Evaluation

All GEC II IPs were required to commission and manage their own independent evaluations. The FM provided technical support, performed a quality assurance role, and collated the evaluation data and reports as they were completed. GEC-T projects were required to commission baseline, midline and endline evaluations, while LNGB projects were required to commission baseline and endline evaluations for some of their cohorts. LNGB projects did not typically conduct midline evaluations because of the relatively short timescales of their interventions with each cohort, which ranged from 12 months upwards. The midline (for GEC-T projects) and endline evaluation reports (for GEC-T and LNGB projects) provided a primary source of evidence for IPs reporting on their outcomes and intermediate outcomes.

GEC-T projects (all of which delivered GEC activities in Phase 1) were required to use comparison groups as part of their quasi-experimental evaluation designs, except for those IPs delivering projects in Afghanistan, Somalia and in refugee camps in Kenya due to Do No Harm reasons – this aligned with the project evaluation requirements in Phase 1. The GEC II projects are holistic by nature, each involving multiple types of interventions, and the GEC-T quasi-experimental evaluations were designed to assess the impact of the project as a whole, rather than the impact of individual types of interventions. LNGB projects were not required to use comparison groups or quasi-experimental evaluation designs because of the highly marginalised nature of their target beneficiaries.

By 2020, most GEC-T projects had completed their midline evaluations, which included the use of comparison groups. Following the outbreak of Covid-19, GEC-T projects were no longer required to use comparison groups for their endline evaluations. Furthermore, the FM discouraged IPs from testing girls' learning as part of their evaluations due to the sensitivities associated with the challenges that girls and their families faced during the Covid-19 pandemic. This applied to all GEC-T endline evaluations conducted before 2022. After 2022, all IPs were required to resume using learning tests as part of their project endline evaluations, but the use of comparison groups was not required. Most LNGB projects completed their endline evaluations from 2022 onwards.

Development of the GEC II Logframe results

Business Case and outcome definitions

The Business Case of the GEC II defines three expected results:

- **Headline Result 1 – Supporting girls' education transitions:** Enable at least 1 million marginalised girls to complete primary education, and make positive transitions to secondary education, or from education to work.
- **Headline Result 2 – Supporting accelerated learning outcomes for girls:** Accelerate girls learning outcomes, through at least a 50% improvement in the number of girls meeting learning targets by 2020.
- **Headline Result 3 – Leaving no girl behind:** Ensure at least 500,000 highly marginalised adolescent girls, who have never been to school or who have already dropped out of school, gain basic education and skills relevant for family life and work.

Headline results 1 and 2 were reflected in the programme-level Logframe as Outcomes 2 and 1, respectively. Headline result 3 was operationalised through the creation of the LNGB Window. A third programme-level outcome around sustainability was also included. In the FCDO Annual Review 2017, programme-level outcomes were defined as follows:

²⁶ Fund Manager (2017), "GEC-T MEL Guidance Part 2", p.3.

- **Outcome 1 – Learning:** Number of marginalised girls with improved learning outcomes.
- **Outcome 2 – Transition:** Number of marginalised girls who have transitioned through key stages of education, training, or employment.
- **Outcome 3 – Sustainability:** Number of projects achieving a 3 or higher on their sustainability score.

Contrary to the GEC II ToC, the GEC II Logframe has undergone substantial and frequent changes since the first year of Phase II: the number, scope and definitions of outcome, intermediate outcome and output indicators have been modified multiple times. This happened in particular (but not exclusively) as a result of the consequences of the Covid-19 outbreak on projects' implementation, monitoring, and evaluation activities.

Changes to the GEC Logframe results 2017 – 2023

Table 10 below includes a Gantt chart showing how GEC level outcome definitions, main methodologies and targets changed between the Business Case and 2023, the year of the latest FCDO Annual Review at the time of writing this report. These changes are summarised as follows:

- **Participation/ Enrolment:** A new participation outcome was introduced in 2021 and renamed enrolment in 2023. It was included post-Covid-19 to capture the number of girls participating in education programmes and re-enrolling following school closures. It is defined as the overall cumulative number of girls reached by GEC II projects (i.e., enrolled in GEC activities), rather than active participation²⁷. This number is calculated by the FM by triangulating several data sources, including projects' quarterly and annual reviews and tables in projects' independent evaluations.
- **Learning:** all projects were required to conduct standardised learning assessments based on evidence from projects' independent evaluations. However, following the outbreak of Covid-19 and school closures in 2020, IPs were unable to conduct learning assessments. Therefore, project evaluations conducted in 2020 and 2021 were able to use exam data (e.g., from school or national examination) or qualitative assessments (e.g., from key informant interviews (KIIs) with teachers, parents and /or girls themselves) as evidence for their reported learning results. The FCDO communicated to the FM in September 2021 that the Payment-by-Results (PbR) approach for GEC-T projects would be removed for the remainder of the GEC II programme²⁸ along with the standard deviation measurement approach i.e., projects set targets to achieve 0.25 standard deviations or more over and above a comparison group, or a benchmark. The requirement to use comparison groups was therefore also removed. No GEC-T projects used these alternative /qualitative forms of evidence to report against PbR during this period. Although PbR was stopped in September 2021, an exception was made for Care Somalia, which reported the project's learning results in 2022 using both standardised learning assessments and comparison groups

From 2022 onwards, progress towards learning was assessed by measuring statistically significant improvements in learning among beneficiaries over time. The new learning indicator is the "number of girls with improved learning, *out of all active projects that assess learning quantitatively*". Four contributory quantitative lines of evidence can be used by projects to demonstrate improved learning²⁹.

- **Transition:** like Learning, the definition and scope of the Transition outcome has changed as a result of Covid-19, to cover for example girls' return to school after closures.³⁰ Reporting is also based on evidence from projects' independent evaluations.

As part of the new results framework effective from 2022³¹, a new transition indicator was introduced as the "number of girls who transition into or progress through school, transition into skills or vocational training, or transition into work, out of all active projects that collect quantitative data on transitions". Transition is measured against a Life of Project target that count girls who have transitioned at least once during a project and covers three possible transition pathways agreed by the FCDO and the FM³². Portfolio-level and programme-level transition targets were set and captured from 2022 onwards. No project transition targets were set in prior years before 2022 for the number of girls transitioning. Before the above definition and pathways were defined and agreed, the FM and the FCDO considered that "the

²⁷ The methodology for calculating enrolment is as follows:

- For GEC-T projects, enrolment is the maximum number of girls enrolled in project schools or centres at any point during a Life of Project.
- For LNGB projects, enrolment is the sum of all cohort girls enrolled in a project to date.

²⁸ Fund Manager (2021), "Annual Report"

²⁹ These are: 1) Improvement in mean score over a prior evaluation point, 2) Decrease in non-learners over a prior evaluation point, 3) Increase in girls meeting benchmark over prior evaluation point, and 4) Increase in girls acquiring a reading skill.

³⁰ "Although enabling transition to the next stage of education, training or employment is a critical outcome, COVID has prompted other, more nuanced, and relevant aspects of transition to be recognised. This includes ensuring that girls are not lost to education after protracted school closures, particularly for GEC-T projects. Thus, LNGB transition has been nuanced accordingly and is represented through girls having the confidence and skills to determine their own appropriate transition plans (which may, of course, include entry into school or training). GEC-T transition has also been nuanced and is represented through girls actively returning to school (as opposed to grade progression), which, as discussed, has not been a given in the time of COVID." FM Annual Report (2021), p.26.

³¹ Fund Manager (2022), "Girls' Education Challenge Revised Logframe Milestone"

³² These pathways are: 1) Girls transition into and/or progress through formal or non-formal schooling; 2) Girls enrol into opportunities to enhance their technical or vocational skills; and 3) Girls transition into employment or self-employment.

transition outcome could not be aggregated at the portfolio level [...] due to differences in what ‘transition’ means across projects and variations in context”³³.

- **Sustainability:** despite changes in the wording of the indicator and a one-off change of scope in 2021 as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak, sustainability has been defined consistently since the start of the GEC II, although the way projects have been scored has changed. Sustainability is out of scope of this evaluation and so has not been explored further.
- **Intermediate Outcomes:** Intermediate Outcomes were first introduced as a Logframe outcome in 2020, when they were reported for GEC-T projects only³⁴. They were not reported as an outcome the following year, and the measurement methodology was replaced by Red/ Amber/ Green RAAG ratings from 2022 onwards. Intermediate outcomes were initially grouped into seven broad themes which have been renamed /redefined a few times. Two new intermediate outcomes were introduced following the Covid-19 outbreak and removed in 2022 as they were not relevant any more³⁵.

The changes in definition and scope of outcomes and intermediate outcomes described above limit the comparability of results over time and across projects. For example, many GEC-T projects’ endline evaluations were conducted in 2020 and 2021, when no independent learning assessment data was required (or available) to assess learning progress. The strength and quality of evidence from these endline evaluations therefore differs considerably compared to: projects whose endline evaluations were conducted from 2022 onwards when the new lines of evidence were established; and projects whose endline evaluations were cancelled as projects closed earlier than planned due to external circumstances³⁶.

At the portfolio level, the different timings of projects’ activities and evaluations imply that the number of projects for which achievements are calculated varies a lot from one year to the other as illustrated in [Table 9](#).

Table 9: Number of projects active and contributing to portfolio-level learning and transition outcome results

GEC Outcomes	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total number of active (open) projects	Total: 27 GEC-T: 27 LNGB: 0	Total: 27 GEC-T: 27 LNGB: 0	Total: 27 GEC-T: 27 LNGB: 0	Total: 28 GEC-T: 14 LNGB: 14	Total: 26 GEC-T: 13 LNGB: 13	Total: 17 GEC-T: 5 LNGB: 12
Number of projects reporting to portfolio-level enrolment results (reported cumulatively for closed and active projects)	N/A	N/A	N/A	Total: 41 GEC-T: 27 LNGB: 14	Total: 41 GEC-T: 27 LNGB: 14	Total: 41 GEC-T: 27 LNGB: 14
Number of projects reporting to portfolio-level learning results	N/A	Total: 3 GEC-T: 3 LNGB: 0	Total: 21 GEC-T: 21 LNGB: 0	Total: 12 GEC-T: 7 LNGB: 5	Total: 17 GEC-T: 8 LNGB: 9	Total: 14 GEC-T: 2 LNGB: 12
Number of projects reporting to portfolio-level transition results	N/A	N/A	N/A	Total: 13 GEC-T: 8 LNGB: 5	Total: 20 GEC-T: 9 LNGB: 11	Total: 15 GEC-T: 4 LNGB: 11

³³ This had been agreed in 2018. See FCDO Annual Report (2020) pp.5-6 for more details.

³⁴ No LNGB project had reached their midline or endline evaluation yet.

³⁵ These are *Provision of education*, which was relevant during Covid school closures, and *Effective content/materials to support learning*, relevant for radio lessons and other forms of distance learning.

³⁶ For example, BRAC Afghanistan closed early due to Taliban takeover. HPA Rwanda’s contract end was when Covid hit, therefore its endline evaluation was cancelled.

Design Note for the Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the GEC II Portfolio

The text in the following tables has been directly extracted from the FCDO Annual Review Reports of each year, sometimes complemented by quotes from the FM Annual Review Reports for the summaries of methodological changes.

Table 10: Changes in GEC II outcome indicators, measurement and reporting requirements and targets between the Business Case and 2023

		Annual Review Reports						
	Business Case	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
ENROLMENT	N/A					Outcome 1 (Participation)		Outcome 1 (Enrolment)
Indicator definition	N/A					Girls supported by GEC II are able to participate in formal or non-formal education (especially during school closures)	Number of girls participating in GEC activities within all active projects	Cumulative number of girls enrolled in GEC activities within all projects
Summary of methodological changes⁽¹⁾	N/A					Outcome indicator introduced post-Covid to capture the number of girls participating in education programmes and capture re-enrolment following school closures. Participation refers to an overall accumulated reach achieved by the GEC rather than current active participation with the project.	The methodology for calculating enrolment by funding window is as follows: • For GEC-T projects, enrolment is the maximum number of girls enrolled in project schools or centres at any point during a Life of Project. • For LNGB projects, enrolment is the sum of all cohort girls enrolled in a project to date. The FM calculates projects' enrolment numbers using several data sources. The FM cross-references project Quarterly and ARs and External Evaluator tables.	<i>No change</i>
Target	N/A					GEC-T: 1,300,000 LNGB: 126,098	GEC-T: 1,318,930 LNGB: 207,799 Total: 1,526,729	GEC-T: 1,336,297 LNGB: 228,236 Total: 1,564,533
Achievement	N/A					Both targets exceeded LNGB: 126,372 GEC-T: 1,318,930	Target slightly exceeded GEC-T: 1,408,014 LNGB: 211,467 Total: 1,619,482	Target Exceeded. In total, the GEC has reached 1,679,095 out of 1,564,533 targeted girls to date, with both GEC-T and LNGB projects exceeding their targets. GEC-T: 1,443,008 LNGB: 236,087
LEARNING	Headline Result 2	Outcome 1				Outcome 2		

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		Annual Review Reports						
	Business Case	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Indicator definition	Accelerate girls learning outcomes, through at least a 50% improvement in the number of girls meeting learning targets by 2020.	Number of marginalised girls with improved learning outcome				Girls supported by GEC II are able to achieve key learning outcomes (projects define key learning outcomes and how to assess these)	Number of girls with improved learning out of all active projects that assess learning quantitatively	
Summary of methodological changes	N/A	N/A	No change	No change	No change	As evaluations have not been able to do standardised test with comparison groups due to Covid-19, achieving learning in the Covid-19 context is understood as improvement or maintenance on midline or compared to a comparison group if available in exam data, qualitative assessment, or standardised test.	PbR, which required an approach to aggregate learning outcomes (the Standard deviation approach) was removed. Progress toward learning outcomes is now assessed only within project beneficiaries across time. The new learning indicator is the "number of girls with improved learning, out of all active projects that assess learning quantitatively", with four contributory lines of evidence: 1) Improvement in mean score over a prior evaluation point, 2) Decrease in non-learners over a prior evaluation point, 3) Increase in girls meeting benchmark over prior evaluation point, and 4) Increase in girls acquiring a reading skill.	No change
Target	Targets will include the number of girls whose learning improves, and the number of girls who achieve functional literacy and numeracy. GEC will also start to measure progress with girls' life skills or soft skills to build self-esteem and decision making linked to reproductive health.	1 million girls targeted by GEC-T projects for improved learning outcomes LNGB procurement on track to reach 500,000 girls for improved learning outcomes	N/A	GEC-T: 823,498	GEC-T: 689,795 LNGB: N/A	N/A	GEC-T: 400,596 LNGB: 49,291 Total: 449,987	GEC-T: 76,603 LNGB: 120,314 Total: 196,917
Achievement	N/A	Overall: Mixed GEC-T: Exceeded (1,391,268) LNGB: Too early to measure	N/A	October 2019: Evidence is only available for a small number of signed off midline evaluations (3) in the GEC-T portfolio. These reveal mixed progress; there are	Not met GEC-T: 612,120 LNGB: N/A	Result on track LNGB: 5/5 midlines demonstrated that projects met their functional literacy/numeracy learning targets despite COVID lockdowns. GEC-T: 7/7 evaluations	Target substantially met GEC-T: 396,811 LNGB: 50,464 Total: 447,275	Target marginally not met. 182,897 out of 196,917 of girls with improved learning outcomes meeting 92.9% of the target – this was comprised of: GECT-T: Achieved – 76,603

Design Note for the Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the GEC II Portfolio

		Annual Review Reports						
	Business Case	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
				some positive literacy and numeracy gains across midlines, but not statistically significant (see below). However, there is emerging evidence that participation in girls' clubs to develop girls' self-efficacy and leadership skills has a positive impact on their learning levels.		with quantitative learning data demonstrated that, since midline, girls have either maintained learning levels or shown some improvements despite COVID school closures.		LNGB: Not met – 106,294
TRANSITION	Headline Result 1	Outcome 2				Outcome 3		
Indicator definition	Enable at least 1 million marginalised girls to complete primary education, and make positive transitions to secondary education, or from education to work.	Number of marginalised girls who have transitioned through key stages of education, training, or employment					Number of girls who transition into or progress through school, skills/vocational training, or into work, out of all active projects that collect quantitative transitions data	
Target	Detailed targets for transition and completion will be agreed in the first year per project. Current projections are that an estimated 400,000 girls will complete lower secondary education by 2020.	90% of GEC 1 beneficiaries are progressing into GEC-T	N/A	n/a (no target set as methodology is new)	N/A	N/A	Completed (closed projects): 69,619 Open projects: 161,268	Completed projects: 92,787 Open projects: 133,771 Total: 226,558
Summary of methodological changes	N/A	N/A	No change	No change	Aggregated transition targets and achievements have not been set or captured at a portfolio level due to differences in what 'transition' means and variations in context. FCDO should therefore consider whether to drop this outcome as part of the upcoming logframe refresh; if retained, then FCDO, the FM and the Independent Evaluator should agree how best to meaningfully measure this at both the project	The transition outcome has changed in emphasis as a result of COVID. Although enabling transition to the next stage of education, training or employment is a critical outcome, COVID has prompted other, more nuanced, and relevant aspects of transition to be recognised. This includes ensuring that girls are not lost to education after protracted school closures, particularly for GEC-T projects. Thus, LNGB transition has been nuanced accordingly and is represented through girls having the confidence and skills to determine their own appropriate transition plans (which may, of course, include	In previous reporting periods, transition in the GEC was measured as "number of projects making adequate progress towards transition" and was reported on qualitatively, recognising that in many projects girls had not yet reached a transition point and so little evidence was available. Now that projects are moving towards closure, a new transition indicator has been introduced: "number of girls who transition into or progress through school, transition into skills or vocational training, or transition into work, out of all active projects that collect quantitative data on transitions". This is measured against a Life	No change

Design Note for the Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the GEC II Portfolio

		Annual Review Reports						
	Business Case	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
					and portfolio level.	entry into school or training). GEC-T transition has also been nuanced and is represented through girls actively returning to school (as opposed to grade progression), which, as discussed, has not been a given in the time of COVID.	of Project target: counting girls who have transitioned at least once during a project. Transition pathways will be different for all girls and will depend on the opportunities available in any context.	
Target	Detailed targets for transition and completion will be agreed in the first year per project. Current projections are that an estimated 400,000 girls will complete lower secondary education by 2020.	90% of GEC 1 beneficiaries are progressing into GEC-T	N/A	n/a (no target set as methodology is new)	N/A	N/A	Completed (closed projects): 69,619 Open projects: 161,268	Completed projects: 92,787 Open projects: 133,771 Total: 226,558
Achievement	N/A	Overall: Exceeded GEC-T: 92%	N/A	As above, as yet there is limited evidence on this outcome. This is also partly linked to challenges with tracking girls who no longer live/attend schools in their baseline areas. High migration is a large risk to the transition methodology. The CARE midline does suggest however that the project has been successful in decreasing dropouts compared to comparison girls by keeping girls in school but repeating a grade.	N/A FM & FCDO agreed in 2018 that the transition outcome could not be aggregated at the portfolio level and so no target was set.	Overall, too early to tell LNGB: 5/5 midlines demonstrated that girls are taking proactive steps to determine the most appropriate transition plan for their needs. GEC-T: 8/8 projects with quantitative data on transition demonstrated that re-enrolment rates were still high after COVID school closures.	Target not met Completed (closed projects): 64,521 Open projects: 104,479	Target marginally not met: In total 219,589 girls successfully transitioned out of a target of 226,558 – achieving 96.9% of the target.

Design Note for the Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the GEC II Portfolio

		Annual Review Reports						
	Business Case	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
SUSTAINABILITY	N/A	Outcome 3				Outcome 4		
Indicator definition	#N/A	Number of projects achieving a 3 or higher on their sustainability score				Projects are strengthening individual/ community/school/system sustainability IE/FM are strengthening programme sustainability at the sector/global level.	Number of projects with sustainability plans/activities rated "green" and/or "amber-green" via FM rubric	Number of projects with sustainability plans/activities rated "green" and/or "amber-green" via FM rubric
Target	#N/A	80% of GEC-T projects have their sustainability scores measured and approved in MEL frameworks	#N/A	2 (assuming 50% of the projects closing in the subsequent period will reach this score)	4	N/A	GEC-T: 9 out of 13 projects rated Green/Amber-Green LNGB: 11 out of 13 projects rated Green/Amber-Green	GEC-T: Four out of five projects rated G/AG LNGB: 10 out of 12 projects rated G/AG
Achievement	N/A	Overall: Not met GEC-T: 70%	#N/A	As above, as yet there is limited evidence on this outcome from midline evaluations. One 'signed off' midline evaluation is from a project closing in the next year and this project has achieved a 2.	N/A COVID-19 meant that endlines did not make use of the sustainability scorecard approach as planned.	Overall, too early to tell / results off track LNGB: 5/5 midlines demonstrated that although projects are far from closure, there is evidence that effects of the projects will be sustained after they close. GEC-T: 7/10 endlines demonstrated emerging evidence that after closure, project effects will be sustained at the community, school, and system level.	Target slightly exceeded GEC-T: 10 out of 13 projects rated Green/Amber-Green LNGB: 12 out of 13 projects rated Green/Amber-Green	Target Achieved GEC-T Achieved: 4 out of 5 projects met desired rating LNGB Exceeded: 11 out of 12 projects met desired rating
IOs	N/A				Outcome 4	N/A		
Indicator definition					Percentage of project Intermediary Outcome (IO) targets for each IO category across the portfolio being achieved or exceeded.			
Target					75%			

Design Note for the Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the GEC II Portfolio

		Annual Review Reports						
	Business Case	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Achievement					Not met 29–57%, depending on the IO category			

Annex C: Evaluation Framework

See separate Excel document.

Annex D: Case Study Selection Tables

Table 11: Schedule of shortlisted projects for case studies

Project IP & Name	Country	Region	Window	Total budget	FCAS (Y/N)	Learning results Classification Category for portfolio evaluation	Total No. of beneficiaries (AR23)	Type of target beneficiaries (universal vs targeted?)	Target beneficiary school phases /age groups	FM VIM Assessment (2022)	Inclusion in IE Studies 1-5
Impact(ED)/DLA (Nigeria): <i>Discovery Project</i>	Nigeria	Africa	GEC-T	£ 25,696,445	No	Fully Achieved Targets	461,351	Universal	Primary / Secondary	N/A	None
Mercy Corps (Nepal): <i>Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali (STEM)</i>	Nepal	Asia	GEC-T	£ 2,655,914	No	Fully Achieved Targets	7,046	Partial targeting (CWD)	Secondary and school leavers	N/A	1
HPA (Rwanda): <i>Rwandan Girls' Education and Advancement Programme 2 (REAP 2)</i>	Rwanda	Africa	GEC-T	£ 1,251,783	No	Half-Achieved Targets	7,975	Universal	Upper Primary / Lower and Upper Secondary	NA	None
Mercy Corps (Nigeria): <i>Educating Nigerian Girls in New Enterprises (ENGINE)</i>	Nigeria	Africa	GEC-T	£ 5,100,435	No	Half-Achieved Targets	21,162	Universal	Senior Secondary / Vocational Training	N/A	None
Cheshire Services Uganda (CSU, Uganda): <i>Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education</i>	Uganda	Africa	GEC-T	£ 12,306,117	No	Did Not Meet Targets	2,060	Targeted (CWD)	Primary / Secondary / Vocational Training	Amber-Red	None
ICL (Kenya): <i>Jielimishe (Educate Yourself)</i>	Kenya	Africa	GEC-T	£ 7,246,839	No	Did Not Meet Targets	11,386	Universal	Upper Primary / Lower and Upper Secondary	Amber-Green	None
PEAS (Uganda): <i>GEARR-ing Up for Success After School</i>	Uganda	Africa	GEC-T	£ 2,412,946	No	Did Not Meet Targets	13,475	Universal	Lower Secondary and beyond	N/A	None
Plan (Ghana): <i>Making Ghanaian Girls Great!</i>	Ghana	Africa	GEC-T	£ 13,197,081	No	Did Not Meet Targets	11,012	Universal	Primary / Secondary	N/A	None
Viva/CRANE (Uganda): <i>Building Girls to Live, Learn, Laugh and 'SCHIP' in Strong, Creative, Holistic, Inclusive, Protective, Quality Education</i>	Uganda	Africa	GEC-T	£ 10,634,756	No	Did Not Meet Targets	9,890	Universal	Upper Primary / Lower Secondary	Amber-Green	4
World Vision (Zimbabwe): <i>Improving Girls' Access through Transforming Education (IGATE)</i>	Zimbabwe	Africa	GEC-T	£ 16,545,430	Yes	Did Not Meet Targets	40,928	Universal	Primary / Secondary / CBE	Green	None
ACTED (Pakistan): <i>Closing the Gap: Educating marginalised girls in Sindh and FATA</i>	Pakistan	Asia	LNGB	£ 4,071,024	Country - N Locality - Y	Exceeded Targets	5,928	Universal	10 to 19-year-old, out-of-school girls	Amber-Green	None
Street Child (Nepal): <i>Marginalised No More</i>	Nepal	Asia	LNGB	£ 1,621,503	No	Exceeded Targets	7,856	Targeted (Musahar girls)	10 to 19-year-old, out-of-school girls	Green	None
PLAN (Zimbabwe): <i>Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education in Zimbabwe (SAGE)</i>	Zimbabwe	Africa	LNGB	£ 12,173,335	No	Met Targets	13,460	Partial targeting (young mothers /married young women /Apostolic groups)	10 to 19-year-old, out-of-school girls	Amber-Green	None
IRC (Pakistan): <i>Teach and Educate Adolescent Girls with Community Help (TEACH)</i>	Pakistan	Asia	LNGB	£ 9,171,525	Country - N Locality - Y	Met Targets	30,257	Universal	10 to 19-year-old, out-of-school girls	Green	None
WEI (Ghana): <i>Strategic Approaches for Girls' Education (STAGE)</i>	Ghana	Africa	LNGB	£ 9,633,744	No	Met Targets	17,254	Partial targeting (young mothers)	10 to 14-year-old, out-of-school girls transitioning to formal school, 15 to 19-year-old out-of-school girls transitioning into the non-formal sector	N/A	5
ActionAid (Kenya): <i>Education for Life</i>	Kenya	Africa	LNGB	£ 7,870,606	No	Did Not Meet Targets	5,701	Partial targeting (Boys /CWD)	10 to 19-year-old, out-of-school girls	Green	5
CARE (Somalia): <i>Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia (AGES)</i>	Somalia	Africa	LNGB	£ 12,768,354	Yes	Did Not Meet Targets	76,406	Partial targeting (pastoralists /young mothers /married young women)	10 to 19-year-old, out-of-school girls	Green	None
Population Council (Ethiopia): <i>Biruh Tesfa for All</i>	Ethiopia	Africa	LNGB	£ 5,843,803	Yes	Did Not Meet Targets	24,968	Universal	10 to 19-year-old, out-of-school girls	Red	None
VSO (Nepal): <i>Empowering a New Generation of Adolescent Girls through Education in Nepal (ENGAGE)</i>	Nepal	Asia	LNGB	£ 4,896,542	No	Did Not Meet Targets	2,525	Universal	10 to 19-year-old, out-of-school girls	Amber-Green	4

Note: Impact (ED)/ DLA budget is the total budget for all three of the projects' target countries, which includes Nigeria.

Table 12: GEC-T portfolio case study selection

Project IP & Name	Country	Project Overview ³⁷	Performance Level (learning)	Rationale
Impact (Ed)/ DLA: <i>Discovery Project</i> Project closed: December 2020	Nigeria	Impact (Ed) International, formerly Discovery Learning Alliance, has supported 461,351 marginalised girls to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, develop their life skills and raise their aspirations.	<i>Fully Achieved Targets</i>	This project is a comparatively large project among the GEC-T portfolio (£25 million budget across the three countries of intervention), as opposed to the other projects included in the GEC-T sample. It has never been selected as case study in any previous IE studies. Projects in the other two countries of Impact (Ed)/DLA implementation (Kenya and Ghana) having failed to meet either their literacy or numeracy targets, they will provide interesting points of comparison with the Nigeria project, which fully achieved and exceeded both its literacy and numeracy targets.
HPA: <i>Rwandan Girls' Education and Advancement Programme 2 (REAP 2)</i> Project closed: August 2020	Rwanda	The REAP 2 project worked to improve the life chances of 8,268 marginalised girls in 28 poor and rural schools in Nyaruguru, Rwanda.	<i>Half-Achieved Targets</i>	The shortlist for this category includes two projects: Mercy Corps (Nigeria) and HPA (Rwanda). Mercy Corps (Nigeria) was excluded to avoid sampling two projects from the same country, Impact (Ed)/DLA Nigeria having been selected in the 'Fully Achieved Targets' category. A more diverse sample of countries will enable the study team to explore different national contexts and political economies. HPA (Rwanda) is one of the smallest GEC-T projects both in terms of budget (about £1.3 million) and number of beneficiaries (8,268 girls). It received a Green RAAG rating for management at midline.
CSU: <i>Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education</i> Project active: ends March 2024	Uganda	The project aims to address the educational marginalisation of 2,560 children with disabilities with a focus on girls.	<i>Did Not Meet Targets</i>	CSU Uganda was selected as the only project still active in early 2024 among the shortlist in this category, along with Viva /CRANE Uganda. Viva /CRANE has already been selected as a case study in IE Study 4. CSU Uganda specifically targets disabled girls, which is uncommon for GEC-T projects whose targeting (and scale) are typically much broader. It also received a Red RAAG rating for management at its midline evaluation, and an Amber-Red for VfM, which provides an opportunity to explore potential organisational capacity factors that may have affected its performance.

³⁷ All project overviews are taken from the GEC website. Stated beneficiary numbers may not align with those reported in relevant documents or this Design Note's annexes.

Table 13: LNGB case study selection

Project IP & Name	Country	Project Overview ³⁸	Performance Level (learning)	Rationale
<p>ACTED: <i>Closing the Gap: Education marginalised girls in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa</i></p> <p>Project closed: May 2023</p>	Pakistan	<p>ACTED's Closing the Gap Project recognised the multiple barriers to education that the most marginalised girls face in Pakistan. These include, but are not limited to, financial barriers, lack of qualified female teachers, insecurity, and acceptance of girls' education. It also recognised the need for innovative thinking around access to education, such as mobile libraries and home learning, if current and future generations of girls are to realise their full potential.</p>	<i>Exceeded Targets</i>	<p>ACTED Pakistan exceeded its target in the 2022 Annual Review (AR) and met its target in the 2023 Annual Review. This project was implemented with multiple cohorts who received different types of programme support based on their demographic profile.</p> <p>This project demonstrated greater achievement against targets than the alternative, Street Child Nepal. Street Child's target beneficiaries (Musahar girls) was also the subject of a RRLF study, so selecting ACTED Pakistan avoided duplication with the previous work.</p>
<p>PLAN: <i>Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education in Zimbabwe</i> (SAGE)</p> <p>Project closed: July 2023</p>	Zimbabwe	<p>The SAGE project targeted up to 13,460 highly marginalised, out-of-school adolescent girls in 11 districts across Zimbabwe to achieve improved learning outcomes and assist them with transition into formal education, training, or employment.</p>	<i>Met targets</i>	<p>This project met its learning targets in both AR22 and AR23, with the endline reporting strong gains in learning. The project targeted seven cohorts and represents one of the largest LNGB projects.</p> <p>This project was selected because it offers insights into how large-scale LNGB projects achieved consistent results across cohorts, using novel approaches and working with specific target sub-groups.</p>
<p>ActionAid: <i>Education for Life</i></p> <p>Project closed: March 2023</p>	Kenya	<p>ActionAid's Education for Life (EFL), Kenya project worked with up to 5,000 highly marginalised 10 to 19-year-old, out-of-school girls and 500 boys in the counties of Isiolo, Garissa, Migori, Kisumu and Kilifi. Of these, 1,500 of the girls and all 500 of the boys were children with disabilities.</p>	<i>Did Not Meet Targets</i>	<p>This project did not meet its learning targets in AR22, but did meet them in AR23 (i.e., it had split cohorts). The project was unique for targeting both girls and boys, while also specifically targeting children with disabilities.</p> <p>This project was selected because it offers insight into how projects with highly specific targeting of the most marginalised of the marginalised contributes to results. It also offers the opportunity to explore project and implementation dynamics of incorporating boys as primary beneficiaries.</p>

³⁸ All project overviews are taken from the GEC website. Stated beneficiary numbers may not align with those reported in relevant documents or this Design Note's annexes.

Annex E: Ethical Research and Safeguarding Framework

The IE Team developed a universal framework during the IE Inception Phase, which has been regularly updated. It covers all aspects of the IE's work and can be provided separately on request.

Annex F: Communication and dissemination plan

Communication Product	Stakeholder audience	Channels	Timeline
External stakeholders			
Final Report and Annexes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FM/ IE external networks, general public GPE members and networks FCDO networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GEC/ Tetra Tech/ partner websites Links to report on website through webinars, social media, FM flyers, briefs, quarterly digest etc. GPE events, website links (via FCDO) GPE translation and dissemination to their country partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> March 2025 GPE (TBC)
Study Brief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FM/ IE external networks, general public GPE members and networks FCDO networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GEC/ Tetra Tech/ partner websites Links to brief on website through webinars, social media, FM flyers, briefs, quarterly digest etc. GPE events, website links (via FM) GPE translation and dissemination to their country partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> March 2025 GPE (TBC)
Blogs and news articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FM/ IE external networks, general public GPE members and networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media /online news media GEC/ Tetra Tech/ partner websites GPE events, website links (via FM) GPE translation and dissemination to their country partners Articles link to international days (IDG/ IDE/ others) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> March 2025 and beyond GPE (TBC)
Presentation at UKFIET conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conference attendees, education specialists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conference event, news and outputs, social media 	September 2025
Webinars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FM/ IE external networks, general public FCDO networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In person events in collaboration with at British Expertise International Other online webinar/ in person events Link to website, webinar attendance, social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> March 2025 and beyond
Internal stakeholders			
Webinar with FCDO/ FM/ IPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wider GEC family – FCDO, IE, IPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FM newsletter and updates, webinar attendance, link to website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> March 2025
Webinar hosted by FCDO country posts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FCDO country office, wider FCDO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FM newsletter and updates, webinar attendance, link to website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be confirmed
Seminar for FCDO teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FCDO education/ evaluation teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online seminar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be confirmed

Annex G: IE Engagement Plan

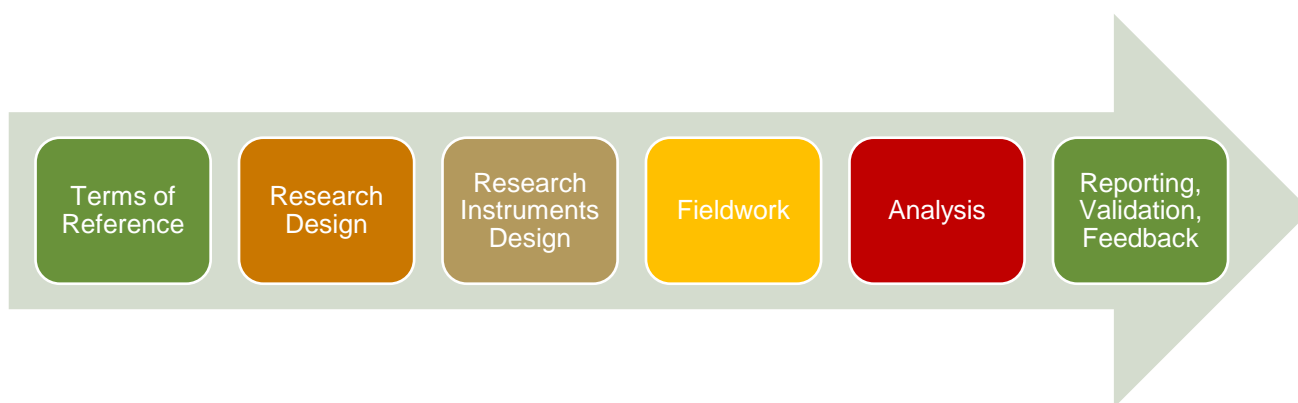
GEC II Independent Evaluation (IE)

Evaluation Studies – Guidance on the Independent Evaluator (IE) and Implementing Partners' (IPs) Engagement Approach

This document provides guidance on the anticipated engagement for both the IE team when engaging with IPs on evaluation studies as well as for IPs supporting the IE and evaluation studies. It has been prepared being mindful that IPs are extremely busy, and so with the intention of avoiding engagement being burdensome but recognising the important contributions from IPs for the success of the studies.

The IE recognises that early engagement with IPs in studies is essential to support the development of the evaluation studies. This will ensure that the study and tools are designed in a way to generate findings that are relevant to wider programmatic and policy efforts, and to promote the smooth implementation of the studies through appropriate engagement with IPs that are the focus of the studies.

The key stages of the IE studies are:



The IE will endeavour to discuss the level of engagement anticipated in the study with IPs as early in the process as possible so that this can be factored into their planning for those projects that are able to engage with the study. The IE will seek to agree with the IPs a focal point of contact or preferred channel of communication at the outset of a study. This will avoid the IE losing touch with IPs when there are staff changes. Equally, the IPs should update IE team on staff changes to avoid losing touch through the process.

The IE will provide regular updates and feedback to IPs throughout the study process. Updates will be provided at key stages, such as research design, data analysis and reporting stages.

Evaluation Stage	Study Phase	IE Responsibilities	IP Responsibilities	Anticipated Level of IP Engagement
Research Design	Inform research design	The IE team will develop the research/ evaluation design report, including mapping what is feasible with available data, development of research methods, identification of local partners, etc.	Clarify questions or details the IE team may have, to inform the final selection of methods. Where relevant, IPs directly involved in the study or evaluation can help the IE team to engage with the project's external evaluators to discuss queries about the project evaluation data.	Moderate
	Sampling strategy	Develop the sampling approach for respondents involved with primary data collection. The IE team will share the sampling strategy with IPs as early as possible (recognising that sign off is needed by FCDO) to allow time for IPs to provide relevant information for identifying participants.	GEC II IPs to provide inputs to help inform the sampling strategy for the study or evaluation. For example, this might include identifying relevant schools/ learning centres or respondents that meet the sampling criteria and suggesting possible replacements.	Moderate
Research Instruments Design	Research permissions	The IE team will be responsible for applying for and managing all research permissions/ ethical approvals needed in-country.	IPs directly involved in the study or evaluation to support the IE team with information relating to the requirements or types of research permissions that may be required within a particular country.	Low
	Review of fieldwork tools	Design and development of all fieldwork tools, including final adaptations and manage translation into local languages.	IPs directly involved in the study or evaluation to review research instruments, including any terminology and sensitivity issues that may be required for GEC II projects.	Moderate
	Sampling of respondents	The IE team will coordinate with the IPs to identify the sampling sites and the respondents who will participate in the study.	IPs based in-country to validate the proposed sampling sites and the respondents to participate in the study/ evaluation in advance of data collection commencing. The IP's validation should focus on the languages spoken by the girls (including local dialects applicable) and the size and availability of schools/ learning centres. The IP should also highlight any other local unique points/	Moderate/ High

Evaluation Stage	Study Phase	IE Responsibilities	IP Responsibilities	Anticipated Level of IP Engagement
			customs that the data collection team and the IE should be aware of.	
Fieldwork	Data collection	IE team will invite IPs to participate in the study/ evaluation (if relevant to the study), e.g., through Key Informant Interviews.	IPs directly involved in the study or evaluation to participate directly as a research participant.	Low
Fieldwork	Data collection	IE team will bear all fieldwork-associated expenses. Fieldwork will be conducted by the IE's local partners and managed by the IE Fieldwork Manager, in coordination with the study team.	<p>IPs directly involved in the study/ evaluation to provide support to the in-country data collection teams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representatives from the IP team in-country to present an introduction to the project to the data collection team on day 1. Representatives from the IP team in-country participate in the final day of data collection partner training to provide additional information about the project and clarify any questions that may have arisen during the training. Provide limited facilitation support for IE team in-country visits and/ or fieldwork (including accessing education facilities and providing introductions to key stakeholders, as relevant). In doing so, we recognise the need to avoid placing an undue burden on IPs by requesting extensive input or support and will seek to minimise this burden at all times Support local partners conducting interviews with government officials to ensure they understand any sensitivities required and why the timing for these needs to be flexible. 	Moderate

Evaluation Stage	Study Phase	IE Responsibilities	IP Responsibilities	Anticipated Level of IP Engagement
			<p>In doing so, we recognise the need to avoid placing an undue burden on IPs by requesting extensive input or support and will seek to minimise this burden at all times.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate with the IE team to ensure that safeguarding reporting procedures are aligned with IPs' procedures during fieldwork. It is expected that the IE team will refer safeguarding reports involving IP/ FM staff or local community members to established IP/ FM channels. 	
	Safeguarding reports	<p>IE team to share information on the GEC II IE Safeguarding Framework and the programme's approach to dealing with safeguarding issues or welfare concerns that arise during the study.</p> <p>Submit a safeguarding report to the FM Safeguarding team for action through the SHE safeguarding system.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representatives from the IP team in-country participate in the final day of data collection partner training by participating in the safeguarding training module by sharing contextual examples of safeguarding issues specific to the projects. Any safeguarding or welfare concerns arising during data collection will be reported to the in-country IP team. To maintain data confidentiality, neither the identity of the research respondent nor the interviewer will be disclosed. 	Moderate
Analysis	Validate data analysis	IE team will code and analyse all the data and collate any specific queries that may require clarification from the IP.	IPs involved in the study or research are requested to respond to discrete queries from the IE study team that arise from the data analysis as it is being undertaken.	Low
Reporting, Validation, Feedback	Reporting	IE team will be responsible for drafting the final report and making necessary revisions as per stakeholders' feedback. The IE team will provide IPs with timely updates on the progress of the report	IPs involved in the study or evaluation will be provided with an opportunity to review draft findings, conclusions and recommendations included in draft reports to check the findings are factually	Low

Evaluation Stage	Study Phase	IE Responsibilities	IP Responsibilities	Anticipated Level of IP Engagement
		and establish IPs' availability to review the draft report in advance.	correct, and recommendations are appropriate.	
	Learning and dissemination	<p>After receiving sign-off on the final report from the FCDO, the IE team will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare relevant communications outputs. • Disseminate findings and recommendations through blogs and webinars in collaboration with the FM. • Disseminate evaluation findings and evidence to relevant authorities within the countries of the study to inform policy. • Engage with FCDO Advisors to reach authorities/ beneficiaries that are in a position to influence policy changes. 	<p>All GEC II IPs will be encouraged to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the dissemination and communication of the evidence and learning produced, including with appropriate stakeholders that might have been relevant to the study/ evaluation so that they are also aware of and understand the findings. • Participate in dissemination events such as webinars to share findings with the wider GEC community. • Use the learning generated from the study to inform the development of future projects, redesign of current projects or to inform other girls' education projects and initiatives as deemed appropriate by all GEC II IPs, particularly where findings are complementary to the IP project. 	Low/ moderate
	Feedback	Feedback will be gathered from IPs at different points in time during the study to ensure this is collected from the right people.	Participate in a reflection session post-study to feed back on the process of engagement with the IE team during the study.	Low

Annex C: List of documents coded

No.	Document	Window	IP/ Author	Project
1	AKF Afghanistan Endline Evaluation Report	GEC - T	AKF	STAGES
2	AKF Afghanistan Midline Report			
3	AKF Afghanistan Midline scorecard			
4	Avanti Midline Transitions research report	GEC - T	Avanti	iMlango
5	Avanti iMlango Endline report			
6	BRAC Midline scorecard	GEC - T	BRAC	Community-Based Education for Marginalised Girls in Afghanistan
7	BRAC Midline report			
8	Camfed International Tanzania Midline scorecard	GEC - T	Camfed	The Ultimate Virtuous Cycle of Girls' Education
9	Camfed International Zambia Midline scorecard			
10	Camfed International Midline Report			
11	Camfed International Zimbabwe Midline scorecard			
12	Camfed International Endline Report			
13	Camfed Tanzania Midline scorecard	GEC - T	Camfed Tanzania	Girls Learn, Succeed and Lead
14	Camfed Tanzania Midline Report			
15	Camfed Tanzania Endline Report			
16	Care SOMGEPT Midline report	GEC - T	CARE International	SOMGEPT - T
17	SOMGEPT Midline scorecard			
18	SOMGEPT Midline Evaluation - round2			
19	CARE Somalia Endline report			
20	CSU Midline Report	GEC - T	CSU	Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education
21	CSU Midline Scorecard			
22	CSU Uganda Endline End of Project Review Report			
23	Q22 CSU RAAG and Risk Rating			
24	Q23 CSU Uganda RAAG and Risk Feedback			
25	Q24 CSU RAAG and Risk Feedback			
26	Q25 CSU RAAG and Risk Feedback			
27	Q26 CSU Uganda RAAG and Risk Feedback			
28	Q27 CSU RAAG and Risk Feedback			
29	Childhope Midline scorecard	GEC - T	Childhope	Excelling Against the Odds
30	Childhope Midline Report			
31	Childhope Ethiopia External Evaluator's Endline Report			
32	ImpactEd DLA Midline scorecard	GEC - T	Impact(Ed) International	Discovery Project
33	ImpactEd Midline Report			
34	ImpactEd Endline Evaluation Report			
35	EDT Midline scorecard	GEC - T	EDT	Let our Girls Succeed (Wasichana Wetu Wafaulu)
36	EDT Midline report			
37	EDT Kenya Endline Evaluation Report			
38	EDT Q22 RAAG and Risk Rating			
39	EDT Q23 RAAG and Risk Feedback			
40	HPA Midline Scorecard	GEC - T	HPA	REAP II
41	HPA Midline Report			
42	I Choose Life Midline Report	GEC - T	ICL Kenya	Jielimishe (Educate Yourself)

No.	Document	Window	IP/ Author	Project
43	I Choose Life Midline scorecard			
44	ICL Kenya Endline Evaluation Report			
45	Leonard Cheshire Midline Report	GEC - T	Leonard Cheshire Disability	Expanding Inclusive Education Strategies for Girls with Disabilities Kenya
46	Leonard Cheshire Midline Scorecard			
47	Q22 Link Ethiopia RAAG and Risk Rating	GEC - T	LINK	Supporting Transition of Adolescent Girls through Enhanced Systems (STAGES)
48	Q23 Link Ethiopia RAAG and Risk Feedback			
49	Q24 Link Ethiopia RAAG and Risk Feedback			
50	Q25 Link Ethiopia RAAG and Risk Feedback			
51	Q26 LINK Ethiopia FM Feedback			
52	Q27 LINK Ethiopia FM Feedback			
53	MC Nepal Midline Report	GEC - T	Mercy Corps Nepal	Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali (STEM)
54	MC Nepal Midline scorecard			
55	MC Nepal Endline Evaluation Report			
56	ENGINE II Midline Report	GEC - T	Mercy Corps Nigeria	Educating Nigerian Girls in New Enterprises (ENGINE)
57	ENGINE II Midline scorecard			
58	Mercy Corps ENGINE II Endline Evaluation Report			
59	OIUK Midline Report	GEC - T	Opportunity	Girls' Education Finance: Empowerment for Girls' Education
60	OIUK Midline scorecard			
61	OIUK EGE Uganda Endline Report			
62	PEAS Midline Evaluation Report	GEC - T	PEAS	GEARR-ing Up for Success After School
63	PEAS Midline Scorecard			
64	PEAS Uganda Endline Evaluation report			
65	Plan GATE-GEC Midline Report	GEC - T	PLAN International	Girls' Access to Education
66	Plan Sierra Leone - GATE-GEC Endline Report			
67	Relief International Midline Report	GEC - T	Relief International	Educate Girls, End Poverty
68	Relief International Scorecard			
69	Relief International EGEP-T Endline Evaluation			
70	StC REALISE DRC Endline Evaluation Report	GEC - T	STC DRC	Réussite et Épanouissement via l'Apprentissage et L'Insertion au Système Éducatif (REALISE)
71	STC Moz Baseline Report	GEC - T	STC MOZ	Successful Transition and Advancement of Rights for Girls (STAR-G)
72	Plan MGCubed Scorecard	GEC - T	Varkey Foundation	Making Ghanaian Girls Great!
73	Plan MGCubed Midline Impact Evaluation			
74	Plan MGCubed Endline Report			
75	Viva Crane Midline Report	GEC - T	Viva	Building Girls to Live, Learn, Laugh and 'SCHIP' in Strong, Creative, Holistic, Inclusive, Protective, Quality Education
76	Viva Crane Midline Scorecard			
77	Viva Crane Endline Evaluation Report			
78	VIVA Crane Q22 RAAG and Risk Rating			
79	Q23 VIVA Crane RAAG and Risk Feedback			
80	Q24 Viva Crane RAAG and Risk Feedback			
81	Q25 Viva Crane RAAG and Risk Feedback			
82	VIVA Crane Q26 RAAG and Risk Feedback			
83	Viva CRANE Q27 RAAG Risk Feedback			
84	VSO Nepal Midline report	GEC - T	VSO	

No.	Document	Window	IP/ Author	Project
85	VSO Nepal Midline scorecard			
86	VSO Nepal Endline Evaluation Report			
87	World Vision IGATE-T Midline Report	GEC - T	World Vision	Improving Girls' Access through Transforming Education (IGATE)
88	World Vision IGATE-T - Zimbabwe Midline Scorecard			
89	WVUK IGATE-T External Evaluator Endline Report			
90	WVUK IGATE-T Project Management Response - Endline Evaluation report			
91	WUSC Midline Report - Volume I	GEC - T	WUSC	Kenya Equity in Education Project (KEEP)
92	WUSC Midline scorecard			
93	WUSC Midline Report - Volume II			
94	WUSC Kenya KEEP II Endline Report Volume I			
95	WUSC Kenya KEEP II Endline Report Volume II			
96	WUSC (KEEP) Q22 RAAG and Risk Rating			
97	ACTED Pakistan Q17 RAAG and Risk Feedback	LNGB	ACTED	Closing the Gap
98	Q18, ACTED RAAG and Risk Feedback			
99	Y4 FM Feedback - ACTED			
100	ACTED ALP Endline report			
101	ACTED ALP Baseline report			
102	ACTED L&N Cohort 1 Baseline report			
103	ACTED L&N Cohort 2 Endline report			
104	ACTED L&N Cohort 3 Baseline and Endline Assessment Results			
105	ACTED L&N Cohort 4 Endline Evaluation report			
106	ACTED LN Cohort 4 Baseline Evaluation report			
107	ActionAid EFL Baseline report	LNGB	ActionAid EFL	Education for Life
108	ActionAid EFL Endline report			
109	ActionAid EFL Midline report			
110	Q18, ActionAid RAAG and Risk Feedback			
111	EfL Y4 Annual Review			
112	AKF STAGES II LNGB Baseline Report	LNGB	AKF	Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Education Success Phase II (STAGES II)
113	AKF STAGES II LNGB Endline Evaluation			
114	Q18, AKF RAAG and Risk Feedback			
115	Q19, AKF RAAG and Risk Feedback			
116	AKF Q16 and Y4 FM Feedback			
117	Q20 AKF RAAG and Risk Ratings			
118	AGES Baseline Evaluation	LNGB	Care Somalia	Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia (AGES)
119	AGES Midline Evaluation			
120	AGES Midline Evaluation 2			
121	Q17 Care AGES RAAG and Risk Feedback			
122	Q18, AGES RAAG and Risk Feedback			
123	Q19 CARE AGES RAAG and Risk Feedback			
124	CARE AGES Q21 FM Feedback			
125	AR FM Feedback - AGES FINAL			
126	EAGER Baseline Report	LNGB	IRC	Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient (EAGER)
127	EAGER Midline Report			
128	EAGER IRC SL Endline Evaluation Report			

No.	Document	Window	IP/ Author	Project
129	EAGER Post-Endline Report			
130	EAGER Q17 RAAG and Risk Feedback			
131	IRC EAGER Q16 and Yr 4 RAAG Risk feedback			
132	IRC TEACH Baseline Report	LNGB	IRC	Teach and Educate Adolescent Girls with Community Help (TEACH)
133	IRC TEACH Endline Evaluation			
134	IRC Pakistan, TEACH Q17 RAAG and Risk Feedback			
135	Q18, IRC TEACH RAAG and Risk Feedback			
136	Y4 FM Feedback - IRC			
137	TEAM Girl Malawi Baseline Report	LNGB	Link Malawi	TEAM Girl Malawi
138	TEAM Girl Malawi Endline Evaluation Report			
139	TEAM Girl Malawi Midline Report			
140	Team Girl Malawi Q17 RAAG and Risk Feedback			
141	Q18, Team Girl Malawi RAAG and Risk Feedback			
142	Q19 Link Malawi RAAG and Risk Feedback			
143	Link Malawi Y4 Annual Review			
144	Q20 Link Malawi RAAG and Risk Feedback	LNGB	PIN Ethiopia	Change
145	Q18, CHANGE RAAG and Risk Feedback			
146	Q19 PIN Ethiopia RAAG and Risk Feedback			
147	PIN Ethiopia Y4 FM Feedback			
148	PIN Feedback AR			
149	AR FM Feedback - PIN Ethiopia			
150	PIN Ethiopia Baseline report			
151	PIN Ethiopia Impact Review Report			
152	PIN Ethiopia Cohort 3 Baseline Report			
153	PIN Ethiopia Cohort 3 Endline Evaluation Report	LNGB	PIN Nepal	Aarambha
154	PIN Nepal Q17 RAAG and Risk Rating			
155	Q18, PIN Nepal, RAAG and Risk Rating			
156	Q19 PIN Nepal RAAG and Risk Feedback			
157	Q21 FM Feedback - PIN Nepal			
158	Year 5 PIN Nepal RAAG and Risk Ratings			
159	PIN Nepal Cohort 1 Endline report			
160	PIN Nepal Cohort 1 Baseline Report			
161	PIN Nepal Cohort 2 Endline report			
162	PIN Nepal Cohort 3 Baseline Report			
163	PIN Nepal Cohort 4 Baseline Report	LNGB	Plan SAGE	Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE)
164	SAGE Baseline Report			
165	SAGE Endline Evaluation Report			
166	SAGE Midline report			
167	SAGE Q16 and Yr 4 RAAG-Risk			
168	SAGE Q17 RAAG and Risk Feedback			
169	Q18, SAGE RAAG and Risk Feedback			
170	Q19 SAGE RAAG and Risk Feedback	LNGB	Population Council	Biruh Tesfa for All
171	Pop Council BTA Ethiopia Baseline Evaluation Report			
172	Pop Council BTA Ethiopia Endline Evaluation Report	LNGB	Street Child	Marginalised no More (MnM)
173	SC Nepal Cohort 1 Endline Evaluation Report			

No.	Document	Window	IP/ Author	Project
174	SC Nepal Cohort 1 Report Baseline Report			
175	SC Nepal Cohort 2 Baseline Report			
176	SC Nepal Cohort 2 Endline Report			
177	SC Nepal Cohort 3 Baseline Report			
178	SC Nepal Cohort 3 Endline Report			
179	STAGES Midline Report	LNGB	AKF STAGES II	Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Education Success Phase II (STAGES II)
180	VSO ENGAGE Baseline report	LNGB	VSO	Empowering a New Generation of Adolescent Girls with Education (ENGAGE)
181	VSO ENGAGE Endline evaluation report			
182	VSO ENGAGE Midline report			
183	VSO ENGAGE Q17 RAAG and Risk Rating			
184	Y4 FM Feedback - VSO			
185	WEI Q17 RAAG and Risk Feedback	LNGB	WEI Ghana	Strategic Approaches to Girls' Education (STAGE)
186	WEI Q16 and AR RAAG and Risk			
187	WEI Ghana STAGE F Midline Report			
188	WEI Ghana STAGE F NF1 External Evaluation Baseline Report			
189	WEI Ghana STAGE NF2 Baseline Report			
190	WEI Ghana STAGE NF2 Endline Report			
191	WEI Ghana STAGE NF2 External Midline Evaluation Report			
192	GEC Phase II Annual Review 2021	Portfolio	Annual Reviews	
193	GEC Phase II Annual Review 2022			
194	GEC Phase II Annual Review 2023			
195	GEC Phase II Annual Review 2017			
196	GEC Phase II Annual Review 2018			
197	GEC Phase II Annual Review 2019			
198	GEC Phase II Annual Review 2020			
199	GEC Annual Report November 2020		Annual Report	
200	GEC Annual Report October 2021			
201	Annual Report July 2018			
202	Annual Report October 2019			
203	GEC Annual Report 2022			
204	GEC Annual Report 2023		FM Learning Brief	
205	GEC-T girls' baseline learning			
206	GEC Baseline analysis of the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics			
207	GEC Foundational Learning			
208	GEC Learning Brief - Ending Violence in Schools			
209	GEC Learning Brief - Girls' Clubs			
210	GEC Learning Brief - Community-based education			
211	GEC Learning Brief - Social and emotional learning in girls' education			
212	GEC Learning Brief - Learning after COVID-19 school closures			
213	GEC Learning Brief - Effective education for girls in emergencies and protracted crises			

No.	Document	Window	IP/ Author	Project
214	GEC Learning Brief - Lessons on peer mentoring from the GEC			
215	GEC Learning Brief - Supporting girls to secure their sexual and reproductive health and rights			
216	GEC Learning Brief - Using technology to improve girls' learning			
217	GEC Portfolio in Practice - Sustainability		FM Portfolio in Practice	
218	GEC Portfolio in Practice - GESI			
219	GEC Portfolio in Practice - Value for Money			
220	GEC Portfolio in Practice - Safeguarding			
221	GEC Portfolio in Practice - Self Assessment tools			
222	GEC Portfolio in Practice - Managing Implementing Partners			
223	GEC Portfolio in Practice - Money Partners			
224	Impact of COVID-19 on GEC Evaluations			
225	GEC Covid-19 lessons learnt		Covid-19	
226	gec_learning_brief_most_marginalised_final		FM Learning brief	
227	gec_learning_brief_poverty-as-a-barrier_v2			

Annex D: List of key stakeholders and IPs interviewed

Key stakeholders interviewed

Name	Stakeholder type	Relationship/ stake in GEC
Ian Attfield	FCDO	Former Senior Education Advisor and Regional GEC Education Advisor
Louise Banham	FCDO	Former Education Adviser, Interim SRO Former Regional GEC Education Advisor
Emma Sarton	Fund Manager	FM Learning Lead, previously FM SPA
Amy Parker	IP, Fund Manager	GEC II LNGB Portfolio Lead GEC I Relief International Global Education Technical Lead GEC I Plan Education Advisor
Sharon Tao	Fund Manager	Former Education Director and Team Leader Phase II Former Senior Portfolio Lead Phase II
Alicia Mills	Fund Manager	Former LNGB Senior Portfolio Advisor and GESI Advisor
Hetal Thukral	Fund Manager/ Strategic Partner	Former Evaluation Lead
Aimee Reeves	Fund Manager	Former Evaluation Lead Former GEC Evaluation Officer

IPs interviewed

Project	IP	Window	Country	Interviewee/s and role on GEC project
Aarambha	PIN	LNGB	Nepal	Eleeza Tuladhar, <i>Project Manager</i> Balal Bina, Sah Sushul Kumar, <i>Project Output Leads</i>
Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia (AGES)	Care International UK	LNGB	Somalia	Lotte Renault, <i>Director of Research, Advocacy and Learning</i> Paul Odhiambo, <i>MEL Manager</i>
Biruh Tesfa for All	Population Council	LNGB	Ethiopia	Annabel Erulkar, <i>Country Director</i>
Building Girls to Live, Learn, Laugh and 'SCHIP' in Strong, Creative, Holistic, Inclusive, Protective, Quality Education	Viva	GEC-T	Uganda	Mim Friday, <i>Head of Development</i>
Change	PIN	LNGB	Ethiopia	Jana Vyhnáková, <i>Programme Quality and Development Advisor</i>
Closing the Gap	ACTED	LNGB	Pakistan	Sadia Hussain, <i>Team Leader</i>
Empowering a New Generation of Adolescent Girls with Education (ENGAGE)	VSO	LNGB	Nepal	Firoz Siddiqui, <i>Project Manager</i> Narayan Silwal, <i>Girls and Inclusive Education Technical Lead</i> Priti Sharma, <i>Programme Specialist - SRH/ MNH</i> Raj Dangol, <i>Global Policy and Advocacy Adviser</i>

Project	IP	Window	Country	Interviewee/s and role on GEC project
Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education	CSU	GEC-T	Uganda	James Kabuye, <i>Head of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning</i>
GEARR-ing Up for Success After School	PEAS	GEC-T	Uganda	Daniel Elijah Kyasanga, <i>Head of Quality Assurance</i>
Girls Learn, Succeed and Lead	Camfed International	GEC-T	Tanzania	Cathy Taylor, <i>Director of Development Operations</i>
Let our Girls Succeed (Wasichana Wetu Wafaulu)	Education Development Trust (formerly CfBT)	GEC-T	Kenya	Rogers Mayero, <i>Education Regional Coordinator</i>
Marginalised no More (MnM)	Street Child	LNGB	Nepal	Usha Limbu, <i>Project Manager</i>
Rwandan Girls' Education and Advancement Programme II (REAP II)	Health Poverty Action	GEC-T	Rwanda	Maurice Nizeyimana, <i>Country Director</i> Clarissa Dudu, <i>Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator</i>
Sisters for Sisters' Education	VSO	GEC-T	Nepal	Raj Kumar Gandharba, <i>Global Policy and Advocacy Lead</i>
Somali Girls Education Promotion Programme (SOMGEP - T)	Care International Somalia	GEC-T	Somalia	Lotte Renault, <i>Director of Research, Advocacy and Learning</i>
Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Education Success (STAGES)	Aga Khan Foundation	GEC-T	Afghanistan	Rayana Fazli, <i>National Programme Manager (Education)</i>
Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE)	Plan International UK	LNGB	Zimbabwe	Charlotte Yvette, <i>National Coordinator</i> Harriet Tlou, <i>District Coordinator</i> Joannes Mbiambai, <i>Disability Inclusion</i>
Teach and Educate Adolescent Girls with Community Help (TEACH)	International Rescue Committee	LNGB	Pakistan	Naima Iqbal Chohan, <i>Head of Technical Excellence</i>
TEAM Girl Malawi	Link Education International	LNGB	Malawi	Angela Keenan, <i>Knowledge and Impact Manager</i>
The Ultimate Virtuous Cycle of Girls' Education	Camfed International	GEC-T	Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe	Cathy Taylor, <i>Director of Development Operations</i>
Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali (STEM)	Mercy Corps Europe	GEC-T	Nepal	Pragya Thapaliya, <i>Programme Manager</i>

Annex E: Project Case Study Outcome Results Tables

Outcome			Learning												Transition	
		Details	Literacy (first language)			Literacy (second language)			Literacy (third language)			Numeracy			Details	BL
			BL	ML	EL	BL	ML	EL	BL	ML	EL	BL	ML	EL		
Closing the Gap: Educating marginalised girls in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (ACTED) - Pakistan (1)	Data collection parameters	Cohorts	C1	C2	C1, C2, C3	C1	C2	C1, C2, C3	—	—	—	C1	C2	C1, C2, C3	Cohorts	—
		Instrument	EGRA	EGRA	EGRA	EGRA	EGRA	EGRA	—	—	—	EGMA	EGMA	EGMA	Instrument	—
		Language	English	English	English	Sindhi	Sindhi	Sindhi	—	—	—	—	—	—	Is transitioned measured? (2)	—
		Sample of Girls	OOS	OOS	OOS	OOS	OOS	OOS	—	—	—	OOS	OOS	OOS	Sample of Girls	—
		Methodology	—	Cross-sectional B&A	Cross-sectional B&A	—	Cross-sectional B&A	Cross-sectional B&A	—	—	—	—	Cross-sectional B&A	Cross-sectional B&A	Methodology	—
		Sample (T)	230	230	610	230	230	610	—	—	—	230	230	610	Sample (T)	—
		Attrition	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Attrition	—
		Date of data collection	Dec 2019 - Mar 2020	July 2021	Unknown	Dec 2019 - Mar 2020	July 2021	Unknown	—	—	—	Dec 2019 - Mar 2020	July 2021	Unknown	Date of data collection	Dec 2019 - Mar 2020
	Results by round (cross-section)	Treated (%)	1.91	41.21	87.92	14.09	69.17	89.87	—	—	—	6.95	76.35	90.49	Treated (%)	—
		Benchmark (%)	—	20.26	—	—	44.40	—	—	—	—	—	51.95	—	Benchmark (%)	—
	Results across rounds	Results B&A	—	39.30***	—	—	55.08***	—	—	—	—	—	69.40***	—	Results B&A	—
		Results BL-impact B&A	—	—	86.01 pp (own calculation)	—	—	75.78 pp (own calculation)	—	—	—	—	—	83.54 pp (own calculation)	Results BL-impact B&A	—
		Results EL-impact B&A	—	—	46.71 pp (own calculation)	—	—	20.7 pp (own calculation)	—	—	—	—	—	14.14 pp (own calculation)	Results EL-impact B&A	—
		% of girls who reach the benchmark	—	70.00%	—	—	75.00%	—	—	—	—	—	85.00%	—	% of girls who reach the benchmark	—
	Data collection parameters	Cohorts	—	—	—	—	—	—	C4	C4	—	C4	C4	—	Cohorts	—
		Instrument	—	—	—	—	—	—	EGRA	EGRA	—	EGMA	EGMA	—	Instrument	Girl survey
		Language	—	—	—	—	—	—	Urdu	Urdu	—	—	—	—	Is transitioned measured? (2)	No (3)
		Sample of Girls	—	—	—	—	—	—	OOS	OOS	—	OOS	OOS	—	Sample of Girls	OOS
		Methodology	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Longitudinal B&A	—	—	Longitudinal B&A	—	Methodology	—
		Sample (T)	—	—	—	—	—	—	206	206	—	206	206	—	Sample (T)	206
		Attrition	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	61.20%	—	—	61.20%	—	Attrition	—
		Date of data collection	—	—	—	—	—	—	July 2021	June 2022	—	July 2021	June 2022	—	Date of data collection	July 2021
	Results by round (cross-section)	Treated (%)	—	—	—	—	—	—	33.98%	87.16%	—	47.78%	91.52%	—	Treated (%)	—
		Benchmark (%)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	70.43%	—	—	83.05%	—	Benchmark (%)	—
	Results across rounds	Results BL-EL (B&A)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	53.18***	—	—	43.74***	—	Results B&A	—
		% of girls who reach the benchmark	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	90.00%	—	—	80.00%	—	% of girls who reach the benchmark	—
	Data collection parameters	Cohorts	ALP	ALP	—	ALP	ALP	—	ALP	ALP	—	ALP	ALP	—	Cohorts	ALP
		Instrument	EGRA	EGRA	—	EGRA	EGRA	—	EGRA	EGRA	—	EGMA	EGMA	—	Instrument	Girl survey
		Language	English	English	—	Sindhi	Sindhi	—	Urdu	Urdu	—	—	—	—	Is transitioned measured? (2)	No (3)
		Sample of Girls	OOS	OOS	—	OOS	OOS	—	OOS	OOS	—	OOS	OOS	—	Sample of Girls	OOS
		Methodology	—	Longitudinal B&A	—	—	Longitudinal B&A	—	—	Longitudinal B&A	—	—	Longitudinal B&A	—	Methodology	—
		Sample (T)	436	335	—	436	335	—	436	335	—	436	335	—	Sample (T)	436
		Attrition	—	23.20%	—	—	23.20%	—	—	23.20%	—	—	23.20%	—	Attrition	—
		Date of data collection	Dec 2020	Mar 2023	—	Dec 2020	Mar 2023	—	Dec 2020	Mar 2023	—	Dec 2020	Mar 2023	—	Date of data collection	Dec 2020
	Results by round (cross-section)	Treated (%)	6.52	85.84	—	20.22	89.35	—	12.28	82.90	—	27.46	86.34	—	Treated (%)	100.00%
		Benchmark (%)	—	67.64	—	—	80.33	—	—	76.64	—	—	84.88	—	Benchmark (%)	—
	Results across rounds	Results BL-EL B&A	—	79.32***	—	—	69.13***	—	—	70.62***	—	—	58.88***	—	Results B&A	—
		% of girls who reach the benchmark	—	85.00%	—	—	85.00%	—	—	77.00%	—	—	71.00%	—	% of girls who reach the benchmark	—
Education for Life, ActionAid Kenya	Data collection parameters	Cohorts	C1	—	C1	C1	—	C1	—	—	—	C1	—	C1	Cohorts	C1
		Instrument	EGRA	—	EGRA	EGRA	—	EGRA	—	—	—	EGMA	—	EGMA	Instrument	Girl survey
		Language	English	—	English	Kiswahili	—	Kiswahili	—	—	—	—	—	—	Is transitioned measured? (2)	No (5)
		Sample of Girls	OOS	—	OOS	OOS	—	OOS	—	—	—	OOS	—	OOS	Sample of Girls	OOS
		Methodology	—	—	Longitudinal B&A	—	—	Longitudinal B&A	—	—	—	—	—	Longitudinal B&A	Methodology	—
		Sample (T)	454	—	454	454	—	454	—	—	—	454	—	454	Sample (T)	454
		Attrition	—	—	37.00%	—	—	37.00%	—	—	—	—	—	37.00%	Attrition	—
		Date of data collection	Sep 2019	—	June- July 2021	Sep 2019	—	June- July 2021	—	—	—	Sep 2019	—	June- July 2021	Date of data collection	Sep-19
	Results by round (cross-section)	Treated (%)	13.05%	—	28.33%	17.61%	—	32.14%	—	—	—	21.98%	—	38.34%	Treated (%)	—
	Results across rounds	Results BL-EL B&A	—	—	15.28***	—	—	14.53%***	—	—	—	—	—	16.36%***	Results BL-EL B&A	—
	Data collection parameters	Cohorts	C3	—	C3	C3	—	C3	—	—	—	C3	—	C3	Cohorts	C3
		Instrument	EGRA	—	EGRA	EGRA	—	EGRA	—	—	—	EGMA	—	EGMA	Instrument	Girl survey
		Language	English	—	English	Kiswahili	—	Kiswahili	—	—	—	—	—	—	Is transitioned measured? (2)	No (5)
		Sample of Girls	OOS	—	OOS	OOS	—	OOS	—	—	—	OOS	—	OOS	Sample of Girls	OOS
		Methodology	—	—	Longitudinal B&A	—	—	Longitudinal B&A	—	—	—	—	—	Longitudinal B&A	Methodology	—
		Sample (T)	528	—	522	528	—	522	—	—	—	528	—	522	Sample (T)	528
		Attrition	—	—	18.00%	—	—	18.00%	—	—	—	—	—	18.00%	Attrition	—
		Date of data collection	June- July 2021	—	Sep 2022	June- July 2021	—	Sep 2022	—	—	—	June- July 2021	—	Sep 2022	Date of data collection	Sep-19
Results by round (cross-section)	Treated (%)	35.34%	—	37.75%	37.23%	—	44.48%	—	—	—	39.58%	—	47.89%	Treated (%)	—	
Results across rounds	Results BL-EL B&A	—	—	+2.41%	—	—	+7.25%	—	—	—	—	—	+8.31%	Results BL-EL B&A	—	
Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE), Plan International - Zimbabwe	Data collection parameters	Cohorts	C2 to C7	C1 to C7	C1 to C7	—	—	—	—	—	—	C2 to C7	C1 to C7	C1 to C7	Cohorts	C1
		Instrument	Initial Progress Assessment (IPA)	Mid-Progress Assessment (MPA)	EndProgress Assessment (EPA)	—	—	—	—	—	—	Initial Progress Assessment (IPA)	Mid-Progress Assessment (MPA)	EndProgress Assessment (EPA)	Instrument	Girl survey
		Language	English or local	English or local	English or local	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Is transitioned measured? (2)	No (6)
		Sample of Girls	OOS	OOS	OOS	—	—	—	—	—	—	OOS	OOS	OOS	Sample of Girls	399
		Methodology	—	Longitudinal B&A	Longitudinal B&A	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Longitudinal B&A	Longitudinal B&A	Methodology	—
		Sample (T)	6,700	6,829	5,716	—	—	—	—	—	—	6,700	6,829	5,716	Sample (T)	—
		Attrition	NR	NR	NR	—	—	—	—	—	—	NR	NR	NR	Attrition	—
		Date of data collection	C1:May 2019 – Dec 2019 C2:Jan 2020 – Oct 2020 C3:Nov 2020 – Jan 2021 C4:Feb 2021 – July 2021 C5: Aug 2021 – Oct 2021 C6: Nov 2021 – Jan 2022 C7:Feb 2022 – Aug 2022	1 year after	2 years after	—	—	—	—	—	—	C1:May 2019 – Dec 2019 C2:Jan 2020 – Oct 2020 C3:Nov 2020 – Jan 2021 C4:Feb 2021 – July 2021 C5: Aug 2021 – Oct 2021 C6: Nov 2021 – Jan 2022 C7:Feb 2022 – Aug 2022	1 year after	2 years after	Date of data collection	Aug- Sept 2019

LNGb																
Outcome			Learning												Transition	
		Details	Literacy (first language)			Literacy (second language)			Literacy (third language)			Numeracy			Details	BL
			BL	ML	EL	BL	ML	EL	BL	ML	EL	BL	ML	EL		
	Results by round (cross-section)	Treated (%)	41.42	68.8	81.12	—	—	—	—	—	—	47.1	63.29	79.73	Treated (%)	97.49%
		Benchmark (%)	—	—	65.00%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	65.00%	Target (%)	—
	Results across rounds	Results IPA to MPA (B&A)	—	27.38***	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	16.19***	—	Results IPA to MPA (B&A)	—
		Results MPA to EPA (B&A)	—	—	12.32***	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	16.44***	Results MPA to EPA (B&A)	—
		Results IPA to EPA (B&A)	—	—	39.70***	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	32.63***	Results IPA to EPA (B&A)	—
		% of girls who reach the benchmark	—	—	11.71% (own calculation)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	13.9% (own calculation)	Achievement against target DiD	
Footnotes																
(1) ACTED does not have a Midline (ML) evaluation but does have an Impact Evaluation conducted after the Endline (EL). To align with the table format, the Endline results are presented in the ML column, and the Impact Evaluation results are included in the EL column.																
(2) Some projects measured different outcomes as transition because they did not have the necessary data available. For example, some measured intention to transition or the proportion of girls who declared receiving support for their transition. Only projects that actually measured transition in the specific evaluation round are marked with a "yes" in this row.																
(3) This project measure intention to transition at endline.																
(4) This are not excluyent categories.																
(5) The project does not measure a transition rate at baseline because girls just started the project, so it is assumed a 100% transition. At baseline the project measured the pathways preferences.																
(6) At baseline the project measured intention to transition.																
(7) At midline the project measured the transition rate of a specific group of girls (not representative) with higher probabilities of dropping out.																

Annex F: Case Study Report: Mercy Corps (Nepal), Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali (STEM)

Project Case Study Report – *Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali* (STEM), Mercy Corps (Nepal)

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to this report

This report summarises the key findings, lessons learned and conclusions from the IE Team's case study research of the GEC-T project *Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali* (STEM), implemented by Mercy Corps in Nepal. The purpose of the six project case studies is to provide an in-depth examination of: reported results (i.e., outcomes and Intermediate Outcomes); how and to what extent project interventions worked well or less well, why, for which types of beneficiaries; and the influences of contextual factors and Implementing Partners' (IPs) delivery capacities. The structure of this report aligns with the evaluation sub-questions to enable the synthesis of the findings across the six case studies. The report structure also aligns with the structure of the main report to ensure that findings from the case study research complement and enrich the findings from the portfolio assessments of the GEC-T and LNGB Windows.

1.2. Project background

STEM II, implemented by Mercy Corps in the Kailali district of Nepal from April 2017 to March 2021, focused on girls in school (IS) in Grades 8 to 10¹, out-of-school girls (OOS) who had dropped out from a STEM school from Grade 6 to 10 in STEM I, and school graduates (SG), who had graduated from Grade 10 and were not enrolled in formal higher levels of education.² STEM II sought to build on STEM I by developing a comprehensive model to improve marginalised girls' access to both formal and non-formal education. The project was based on the idea that supporting girls to transition safely through secondary school or into secure livelihoods would enhance their individual and community resilience. Its main goals were to improve girls' educational outcomes, expand access to income-generating opportunities, and create a sustainable environment that fosters girls' empowerment.

As further explained in [Table 1](#) below, the project reached girls from the three groups directly, through different types of interventions, including:

- IS girls took part in Girls' Clubs, after-school classes that provided academic support in different subjects as well as life skills training, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) education and self-defence classes.
- OOS and SG girls received financial literacy, vocational training, and life-skills interventions, as well as low-interest loans through the Girls' Transition Fund (GTF).

The project also carried out interventions to **support the underlying school environment**, through activities such as teacher training, infrastructural support, and training for school management. These interventions were considered to indirectly benefit boys and girls enrolled in the 30 schools. In the community, the STEM II project carried out awareness raising on the importance of girls' education, through both community-based and door-to-door activities.

¹ Grade 8 corresponds to lower secondary while 9 and 10 to higher secondary.

² In the Nepali school system, education is compulsory until Grade 8. In order to graduate from grade 10, students must pass the Secondary Education Examination (SEE). Following this, students are able to progress to Grades 11 and 12, or higher secondary education, at the end of which they can complete the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) and proceed to higher education. As highlighted later in the report, these two examination points have a considerable impact on drop-out rates.

Table 1: Overview of the STEM II project

Dimension	Project characteristics
Project name:	Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali (STEM)
Implementing Partner:	Mercy Corps
Funding window:	GEC-Transitions (GEC-T)
GEC Phase I:	Innovation Window
Budget:	2.6m
Project start/ end dates (duration):	April 2017 – March 2021 (4 years)
Geographical focus:	Kailali District, Nepal (urban, peri-urban, and rural communities)
Beneficiary groups:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct beneficiaries tracked from STEM Phase I: • In-school (IS) girls in Grades 8 to 10³ • Direct beneficiaries tracked from STEM Phase I, but not taking part in literacy and numeracy interventions: • Out-of-school (OOS) girls (girls who had dropped out between Grades 6 and 10 from STEM schools in the first phase and were not enrolled in school at the time of the project) • School graduates (SG) (girls who graduated from Grade 10 from Phase I and had not continued their studies) • OOS girls and SG girls took part in vocational training, life skills and business support activities • Other project beneficiaries include boys and girls enrolled in the 30 schools reached by the project, who benefited from teaching quality improvements, infrastructure improvements, and awareness raising campaigns
Number of direct learning beneficiaries (girls)	4,768 IS girls across 30 STEM schools.
Number of direct transition beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7,046 girls, of which: • 4,768 IS girls • 1,397 OOS girls⁴ • 881 school graduates
Other beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7,377 boys indirectly reached (enrolled in STEM II schools) • 7,214 girls indirectly reached (enrolled in STEM II schools) • 550 teachers benefiting from training or other interventions • 12,901 community beneficiaries (4,614 male and 8,282 female)
Marginalisation focus:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Married girls and girls from households facing extreme poverty and hunger • Cultural marginalisation including linguistic (namely, girls of the Tharu ethnic group whose first language is not Nepali) • 'Low-caste' groups (Dalit)
Type of interventions:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Economic</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-kind resources (e.g. uniforms, transport, back to school kits, menstrual supplies) • During Covid-19, the project pivoted to delivering hygiene kits and safety materials including gloves, masks, handwash and sanitary towels • Low-interest loans for OOS girls through the Girls' Transition Fund (GTF) • During Covid-19, the interest rate was reduced from 8% to 5%

³ In Nepal, Primary education includes Grades 1-8; Lower Secondary education includes Grades 9 and 10, with students who are typically 14 to 16 years old; and Upper Secondary (or 'Plus Two college') includes Grades 11 and 12, with students who are typically 16 to 18 years old.

⁴ The main interventions for OOS girls were the low-interest loans (GTF) and vocational training, as explicitly outlined below.

Dimension	Project characteristics
• <i>Infrastructure and resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New classrooms, classroom improvements, school grounds improvements, such as computer labs and libraries • Toilets and wash facilities (including menstrual management)
• <i>Teacher training and support</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher skills training for interactive teaching and learning (in-school girls): • Targeted focus on literacy • Targeted focus on numeracy • Gender-responsive pedagogy • Inclusive classroom strategies • During Covid-19, the project shifted to virtual workshops on teaching techniques for maths and good teaching practices
<i>Community Based Awareness, Attitudes and Behaviour</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media (radio, TV, advertising) • Particularly during Covid-19, when the project introduced public service announcements on prevention measures and safeguarding, school reopening and home-based learning; as well as distance learning classes through local FM radio stations • During Covid-19, the project also distributed pamphlets to raise awareness of government scholarships • Community meetings (including use of theatre for awareness raising) • Household level visits & support, including Family Dialogue sessions for parents and guardians of girls who had recently dropped out of school
<i>Extra-Curricular Activity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch-up classes through Girls' Clubs, focusing on: • Tutoring and extra classes in English, Nepali, mathematics, and science • Life skills training (including and SRHR) and self-defence • Financial literacy, business skills, and vocational training for OOS girls. • During Covid-19, this included GTF workshops to promote peer-to-peer support and learning; and vocational training on technical and business management skills
<i>School Management and Governance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with SMCs and PTAs • Working with head teachers or other school management members • Trainings for school management on effective school governance
<i>Empowerment & Self Esteem</i>	Activities that promote girls' voices & participation, including Girls' Clubs and awareness-raising activities
<i>Violence against Children</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher training • Reporting mechanism in schools (including complaints boxes) • Harmful traditional practices including child marriage & FGM/C • Training SMCs, PTAs • During Covid-19, the project developed IEC materials on good parenting, safeguarding, GBV and psychosocial support (with contact numbers), as well as carrying out check-in calls and wellbeing surveys with girls
Total number of separate cohorts (LNGB only)	N/A
Baseline data collection (report) dates:	January 2018 (July 2018)
Midline data collection (report) dates:	February – April 2019 (December 2019)
Endline data collection (report) dates:	September – December 2020 (March 2021)

Where the project worked

STEM II was implemented in rural and peri-urban contexts of Kailali district in Western Nepal. The project had a specific focus on targeting girls from the Tharu community, as well as girls from marginalised castes. While the languages of instruction are Nepali and English, Western Nepal is a highly linguistically diverse and multi-ethnic region. As shared by case study research respondents, in response to the linguistic barriers faced by numerous girls reached by the project, STEM II introduced Nepali teaching to the Girls' Club extra classes (in addition to English, maths and science).

STEM II was implemented in the Kailali district of Western Nepal, in the municipalities listed below. Among these, Dhangadhi is considered urban, while the others are peri-urban and rural. See [Figure 1](#) for a map of STEM II project intervention areas.

Figure 1: Map of STEM II project intervention areas



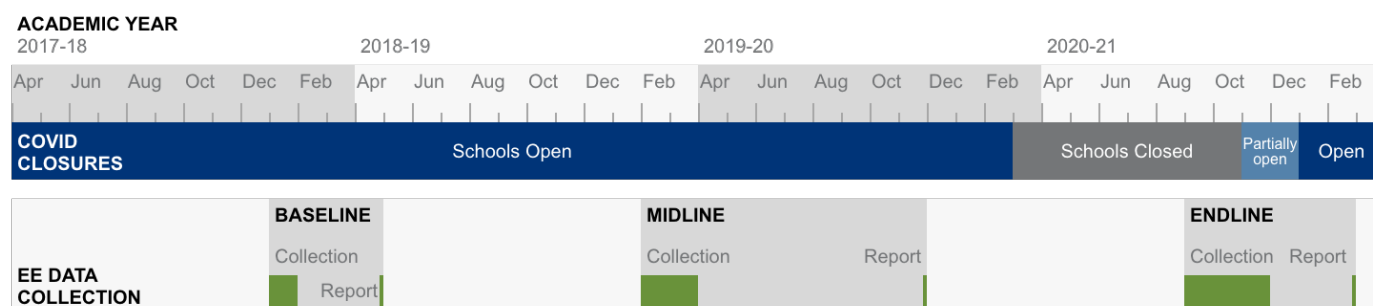
External Evaluation: three rounds conducted (baseline, midline, endline)

Baseline data were collected in January 2018, followed by midline data collected between February and March 2019, both prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. With the academic year in Nepal running from April to March, these evaluations took place just before the completion of the respective academic years (see [Figure x](#)).

The endline data collection, which was initially planned for March 2021, took place from September to December 2020. Endline data collection was brought forward by a few months, to allow more time for the project to utilise endline data in its sustainability planning and handover processes with government. This was agreed with the FM and the FCDO and was possible because most project activities had been completed.

STEM II was shortlisted as a project case study because it fully achieved its targets.

Figure 2: STEM II project and evaluation timeline



Note: the whole frame indicates project start and end dates (April 2017 to March 2021).

2. What outcomes did the project deliver?

2.1. Review of changes to Logframe outcome indicators

Mercy Corps commissioned three rounds of external evaluations to assess the project's performance and impacts on its project outcome indicators. A baseline study and midline evaluation were conducted before the onset of Covid-19, while an endline evaluation was conducted during Covid-19 between September and December 2020.

The outcomes covered in this report focus on learning and transition.

Between the baseline study and midline evaluation, a longitudinal approach was used, tracking the same girls over time. To measure each of the outcomes, data were collected from the recontacted⁵ sample of girls. This methodology used both treatment and comparison groups, providing a robust framework for assessing changes over time. The treatment group was drawn from all 30 treatment schools, while the comparison group was drawn from 15 comparison schools, 12 of which had previously been part of STEM I as comparison schools.

The endline data collection was initially planned for March 2020, but took place from September to December 2020, during a period when schools remained partially closed. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the project's activities faced important challenges during its final year of implementation (March 2020 to March 2021). Schools closed fully in March 2020 and, while they partially reopened in November 2020 and resumed full operations in January 2021, they faced another closure in April 2021 – just a month after the project concluded. Consequently, the endline evaluation underwent considerable changes.

Given the school closures and the over achievement of learning and transition targets by midline, in a paper summarising the effects of Covid-19 published in December 2020 on data collection, the FM indicated that Mercy Corps would not collect any learning data but was exploring using school level exam data to carry out an alternative analysis on learning levels, and the basis of the learning indicator.

While a mixed-methods approach was used in all evaluations, the endline specifically emphasised qualitative data to explore the relationship between outcomes and intermediate outcomes, addressing the 'how' and 'why' behind the trends observed in the quantitative findings for the midline evaluation. As such, the methodologies of difference-in-difference (or before-and-after) used at midline were dropped. Additionally, the evaluation examined cross-cutting themes such as safeguarding, self-confidence, and the resilience of girls in learning during the Covid-19 period.

The changes to Logframe outcome indicators are explained in detail below.

2.1.1. Review of changes to the Learning Outcome indicator

Learning outcomes on STEM II were measured at baseline and midline using the Secondary Grade Reading Assessment (SeGRA) and Secondary Grade Mathematics Assessment (SeGMA), both administered in Nepali. The SeGRA test for literacy included three subtasks: short reading comprehension, long reading comprehension, and short essay construction. The SeGMA test for numeracy included advanced arithmetic, algebra, and word problems (data interpretation).

These tests were administered to the learning cohort, comprising of Grade 8, 9 and 10 IS girls. The baseline evaluation report explains that only IS girls were assessed, as the learning interventions were specifically targeted at this group. As a result, the assessments were conducted at the school level, focusing on improving literacy and numeracy skills for the IS girls.

At baseline, the assessments were administered to girls in Grades 8 to 10. By midline, most of the girls who were in Grade 10 at baseline had already graduated. According to the midline evaluation report, they could not be tracked in schools as they had either progressed to higher grades in different colleges or migrated for studies or work. Consequently, the midline evaluation focused on girls in Grades 8 and 9 at baseline. Between baseline and midline improvements in learning outcomes were assessed through the difference in standard deviations compared to a comparison group. The methodology used was a longitudinal Difference-in-Differences (DiD).

The overachievement of learning targets by midline led the External Evaluator (EE) to conclude that the STEM II learning intervention model had been effective. Following Covid-19 adaptations, the Fund Manager (FM)

⁵ In instances where recontacting sufficient participants proved challenging, new girls were included in these data collection phases to maintain the integrity of the evaluations.

communicated that Mercy Corps would evaluate learning based on girls' performance in the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) conducted nationally.⁶ This approach was considered appropriate, given that the in-school cohort had already graduated before the endline evaluation commenced.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic led to the cancellation of the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) exams. As a result, the approach to measuring learning outcomes at endline was revised. The EE, Implementing Partner (IP), and Fund Manager (FM) mutually agreed to shift the focus of the learning outcome to observing any positive changes in the girls' *perceptions* of their own learning performance over the course of the project, measured through a girls' survey. Improvement in learning performance was defined through indicators as "increased interest in learning," "greater engagement in classroom activities," "improved understanding of lessons," and "better examination scores", among others. Additionally, girls were asked about how Covid-19 impacted their learning.

Although the SEE board exams were cancelled, standardised exams still took place in schools in 2020 and were assessed internally by teachers.⁷ As part of the endline evaluation, girls' perceptions about their learning performance improvement were captured alongside their GPA scores. The survey specifically asked Grade 10 girls (those who had been in Grade 8 at baseline) to report the GPA scores they achieved in their SEE in 2020. These GPA scores were described in the endline evaluation report but not considered in determining the project's success.

Table 2 below provides a summary of changes in how the project's learning outcomes were measured.

Table 2: Summary of changes in measurement of learning outcomes

Parameters	Literacy			Numeracy			Learning	
	BL	ML	EL	BL	ML	EL	EL	EL
Instrument	SeGRA	SeGRA	—	SeGMA	SeGMA	—	GPA	Perception survey ²
Language	Nepali	Nepali	—	Nepali	Nepali	—	—	—
Comparison group	Yes	Yes	—	Yes	Yes	—	Yes	Yes
Grades assessed (as per baseline grade)	8 - 9 ¹	8 - 9	—	8 - 9	8 - 9	—	8	8
Grade assessed (as per grade progression)	8 - 9	9-10	—	8 - 9	9-10	—	10	10
Sample of girls	IS	IS	—	IS	IS	—	IS	IS
Sample size	T:300 C: 200 ²	T:275, C:162 ³	—	T:300 C: 200 ²	T:275, C:162 ³	—	T:285 C:146 ⁴	T:285 C:146 ⁴
Planned dates for data collection	March 2018	March 2019	March 2020	March 2018	March 2019	March 2020	—	—
Actual data collection dates	January 2018	February-March 2019	—	January 2018	February-March 2019	—	September - December 2020	September - December 2020
Publication date of the evaluation report	July 2018	December 2019	—	July 2018	December 2019	—	March 2021	March 2021

Notes: ¹At baseline, Grade 10 was also considered, but since the majority of students could not be tracked at midline, they were excluded from the analysis by the EE. ² If Grade 10 is considered T: 400 and C:50. ³Attrition rate was 30.25% in treatment and 34.8% in comparison group. ⁴Attrition rate for endline was not reported.

⁶ Source: "Impact of Covid-19 on GEC Evaluations (dated December 2020)"

⁷ Headteachers interviewed during the endline evaluation mentioned this was unforeseen, with schools facing difficulties in marking the students for SEE, as many of them did not have detailed record of girls' overall learning performance, apart from their internal exams score.

2.1.2. Review of changes to the Transition Outcome indicator

The transition outcome tracked the percentage of girls who successfully moved into education, training, or employment. At midline, unsuccessful transitions for in-school (IS) girls refer to those who either dropped out or repeated a grade without engaging in vocational training. For school graduates (SG) and out-of-school (OOS) girls, unsuccessful transitions indicate that they did not pursue any further opportunities. All other pathways were categorised as successful transitions⁸.

Between baseline and midline, a Difference-in-Difference (DiD) approach was used to measure transition rates for in-school girls, while a before-and-after (B&A) comparison was employed for SG and OOS girls, who lacked a comparison group. Transition outcomes were estimated using data from household (HH) surveys and school records collected as part of the external evaluations.

Since the project target had already been achieved at midline (see [Section 2.2](#)) and girls from Grade 8 (at baseline) had graduated by endline, the endline evaluation no longer measured transition. Instead, the “endline was directed towards observing the effectiveness of different combinations of training and loan support that the project delivered to the OOS group and SG” (p. 90, EL report).⁹ See [Table 3](#) below for a summary of changes in how transition was measured.

Table 3: Summary of changes to transition

Parameters		Transition Rate		
		Baseline	Midline	Endline
In School girls	Instrument	HH survey and school records	HH survey and school records	—
	Comparison group	Yes	Yes	—
	Grades assessed (as per baseline grade)	8 to 10	8 to 10	—
	Grade assessed (as per grade progression)	8 to 10	9 –10 and SG	
	Sample size	T:400 C: 250	T:347 C:203 ¹	—
Out of School girls	Instrument	HH survey	HH survey	—
	Comparison group	No	No	—
	Sample size	T:175	T:147 ²	—
School Graduates girls	Instrument	HH survey	HH survey	—
	Comparison group	No	No	—
	Sample size	T:175	T:172 ²	—
Evaluation dates	Planned data collection	March 2018	March 2019	March 2020
	Actual data collection	January 2018	February-March 2019	—
	Publication date of the evaluation report	July 2018	December 2019	March 2021

Notes: ¹ Attrition rate for IS girls was 13.25% in treatment and 18.8% in the control. ² Attrition rate in SG/OOS sample was 8.9% (treatment).

⁸ Successful transition for in-school (IS) girls in the project was defined by various outcomes, including upgrading to the next class, continuing to the next class with conditions such as being married, working, or moving to a different school, graduating from the Secondary Education Examination (SEE), or transitioning to non-formal education such as vocational training after dropping out. For secondary graduates (SG) and out-of-school (OOS) girls, successful transition was considered as re-enrolling in school, with or without conditions like marriage or work, starting or continuing vocational training, initiating or running a business, entering formal or informal employment, engaging in waged labour, or positive migration for better opportunities.

⁹ In collaboration with the project team, external evaluator, and the FM, the endline evaluation examined the impact of four key components of the project: (1) youth financial literacy training (YFLT), (2) business skills development training (BSD), (3) vocational training (VT), and (4) the Girls' Transition Fund (GTF) loan. The evaluation aimed to understand how these components, in various combinations, influenced girls' transitions into successful post-education pathways. The effectiveness of these interventions was assessed based on five independent indicators: (1) confidence, (2) livelihood opportunities, (3) decision-making ability within the household, (4) self-efficacy, and (5) agency. The girls were surveyed to determine whether the paths they chose – enhanced by STEM II's support – led to improvements in these specific areas. These five indicators were analysed individually, and an overall aggregate indicator was also estimated to capture the broader impact of the project.

2.2. Outcome results delivered

2.2.1. Learning Outcomes

Baseline to Midline

Learning outcomes between baseline and midline were measured using a DiD methodology. Aggregate scores were estimated based on the percentage of correct answers for each subtask of the given test, with all sub-tasks weighted equally. [Table 4](#) summarises the results achieved in each evaluation round.

At baseline, the results between the treatment and comparison groups were relatively similar, with the treatment group performing around three percentage points higher in literacy and one percentage point lower in numeracy compared to the comparison group (see [Table 4](#))¹⁰. Across both groups, literacy scores were consistently higher than numeracy scores.

By midline, both the treatment and comparison groups showed improvements. Notably, the treatment group achieved scores in literacy and numeracy over and above the comparison group in both assessments.

The defined target was a 0.25 standard deviation (SD) improvement, corresponding to a 4.1% increase in literacy scores and a 4.1% increase in numeracy scores. Between baseline and midline, literacy scores exceeded expectations, achieving 115% of the targeted improvement. Similarly, numeracy outcomes at midline showed substantial progress, exceeding the target by 266%, primarily driven by significant improvements in subtask 1 (Basic Arithmetic). Based on these results, the FM and the EE categorised this project as achieving and exceeding its learning targets.

Despite the overall progress, the midline report indicated mixed results across different literacy subtasks. For a diagnosis of the gaps in literacy and numeracy, the FM set arbitrary subtask score bands¹¹, categorising learning in four categories: (1) non-learner (0% of items), (2) emergent learner (1%–40%), (3) established learner (41%–80%), and (4) proficient learner (81%–100%). Accordingly, significant gains were made in short reading comprehension (subtask 1) and short essay construction (subtask 3), but subtask 2 (long reading comprehension) showed an unexplained decline in proficient learners, which remained unexplored by the project. Furthermore, despite the improvements in subtask 3 performance, around a third of the girls in both grades (35.2% in Grade 8 and 28.5% in Grade 9) remained in the non-learner category, indicating that critical skills such as essay writing remained a challenge. For numeracy, challenges persisted in algebra (subtask 2), where girls struggled, with an average score of just 30% and between a third in the non-learner category.

Midline to Endline

At endline, no learning assessments were conducted as recommended by the FM due to Covid-19 in guidance published in December 2020.¹² Instead, success was evaluated capturing girls' perceptions of learning. Overall, 86.3% of girls in the treatment group reported positive changes in their perception of learning – 11% higher than the comparison group (see [Table 4](#)).

Despite these perceived improvements, no significant differences were found between the treatment and comparison groups in their GPA scores, which averaged 2.48 for treated girls and 2.55 for comparison girls. These results were reported with no further questioning of the results.

Given that the endline evaluation happened during a period of school closures, it is important to highlight the broader context captured by the evaluation. When asked about the potential impact of Covid-19 on their aspirations regarding work or studies, nearly 90% of the girls (89% in the treatment group and 88% in the comparison group) felt that the ongoing pandemic had impacted or would impact their future aspirations in terms of studies or work. Over 70% of the girls reported losing interest in their studies due to the prolonged gap in attending school.

¹⁰ There is no analysis of significance in baseline report.

¹¹ As outlined in the GEC-T Midline Report Template. The GECT MEL Guidance Part 2 (referenced in the same guiding box) emphasises that the conversion to learning categories should enable more meaningful discussion about what beneficiaries are actually learning. However, the learning categories summarised in GECT MEL Guidance, derived from EPDC categories, differ from those outlined in the midline template.

¹² Impact of COVID-19 on GEC Evaluations.

Table 4: Learning scores at baseline, midline and endline in treatment and comparison groups (IS girls)

Parameters			Literacy			Numeracy		Learning		
Evaluation round			Baseline	Midline	Endline	Baseline	Midline	Endline	Endline	Endline
In-School girls	Results by group	Instrument	SeGRA	SeGRA	—	SeGMA	SeGMA	—	GPA ¹	Perception survey ²
		Treated	43.1%	51.2%	—	22.86%	45.28%	—	2.48	86.3%
		Comparison	39.8%	43.2%	—	23.98%	35.39%	—	2.55	75.3%
	Baseline to midline	Results DiD	—	4.7%	—	—	11.02%	—	—	—
		Target DiD (SD)	—	0.25	—	—	0.25	—	—	—
		Target DiD (%)	—	4.09%	—	—	4.14%	—	—	—
		Achievement against target	—	115%*	—	—	265.97%***	—	—	—
	At endline	FM's RAG rating	—	Green	—	—	Green	—	—	—
		Treated - Comparison	—	—	—	—	—	—	-0.7	11%**

Note: Difference coefficients with three asterisks are significant at the 99% confidence level (P-value lower than 0.01=1%), two asterisks are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level (P-value lower than 0.05 = 5%), and those with one asterisk are statistically significant at the 90% level (P-value lower than 0.1 = 10%).

Conclusions on Learning

Baseline to Midline

The project demonstrated significant progress in learning by midline, with IS girls surpassing their target in literacy and numeracy assessment. This was confirmed through the re-analysis of learning data in the “Evaluation Study 3: Aggregate Impact of GEC-T Projects Between Baseline and Midline Study,” (Poli et al., 2022) which highlighted substantial gains (over 3 percentage points) in both SeGRA and SEGMA assessments, supported by both longitudinal and cross-sectional methodologies employed.

In practice, however, the total aggregate score in literacy and numeracy remained slightly above, and below, 50%, respectively, indicating that beneficiary girls’ critical skills had not yet been fully mastered.

Mercy Corps Nepal made considerable progress in reducing the percentage of learners with zero scores across both grades and all subtasks in both tests. Additionally, the project effectively moved the majority of the girls (~80%) into established or proficiency levels in the easiest subtasks – short reading comprehension and arithmetic – although this ranged widely from 40%-100%. The project also achieved a significant increase in the percentage of proficient learners in these subtasks, with short reading comprehension rising to 29.7% (Grade 8) and 42.3% (Grade 9) from an initial 9%, and arithmetic proficiency reaching 20.7% (Grade 8) and 24.6% (Grade 9), up from 0.7% and 0.8%, respectively.

However, the project struggled to achieve similar improvements in more difficult tasks, such as long reading comprehension, essay writing, algebra, and word problems (data interpretation). For instance, by midline, over 84.2% and 67% of the sample was classified as either non-learner or emergent learner on the most challenging subtasks – essay writing and word problems. These tasks appeared more unfamiliar to the girls. As outlined in the midline evaluation, girls come from an education system focused on preparing students for exams through traditional teaching methods and rote learning, which does not emphasize articulating thoughts in writing, making tasks like essay writing particularly challenging. However, some of the more complex numeracy tasks were reported less relatable to girls’ daily lives; and as such proved more challenging.

Midline to Endline

The FM initially approved the use of SEE data to evaluate performance between treatment and comparison girls at endline. However, with the cancellation of the SEE exams, and students being graded for secondary school examination by their respective schools on the basis of their internal exams score and other learning performance, it was agreed to shift the evaluation of learning outcomes to focus on girls’ perceptions of learning.

The endline report concludes positive results based on girls’ perception surveys but offers limited exploration of the factors driving these outcomes. The composite measure of learning performance consisted of several indicators, with

the primary driver being a higher percentage of girls with “increased interest to learn” compared to the comparison group. In contrast, perceptions in other areas – such as “improvement in examination scores,” “improved understanding of lessons in the classroom” or “increased engagement in classroom discussions/ participation” – where no significant differences were observed, are downplayed, and not discussed individually to nuance this conclusion.

Furthermore, as it was agreed that the learning outcome would not be based on the SEE results, the endline evaluation report does not consider the GPA scores to draw conclusions on the project’s effectiveness in delivering learning improvements. While internal assessments (meaning girls were graded for secondary school examination by their respective schools) may raise concerns about standardisation and are not strictly comparable due to the wide range of subjects assessed, the report notes that an equal percentage of girls in the treatment and comparison groups graduated from Grade 10, achieving comparable average GPAs.

Given this, it can be argued that there is no evidence of “improved” or “sustained” performance after a full year of additional support, spanning from March 2019 (when the midline evaluation was conducted) to March 2020 (just before schools closed due to Covid-19). This conclusion is supported by findings from the study “*Effects of Covid-19 on Access and Learning in the GEC II*”¹³, conducted by the Independent Evaluator (IE), who administered SeGRA and SeGMA tests in February /March 2021 to assess the impact of Covid-19 on girls’ learning levels in secondary schools in Nepal (see box below).

The IE team conducted a research study with two GEC projects — Education Development Trust Kenya and Mercy Corps Nepal — to assess the impact of Covid-19 on girls’ learning levels. The research was carried out between November 2020 and December 2021 in Kenya and between February and March 2021 in Nepal. The results, published in the report *Independent Evaluation of the Girls’ Education Challenge Phase II (GEC II) – Evaluation Study 1: Effects of Covid-19 on Access and Learning in the GEC II*, showed girls in the sampled areas showed significant learning losses in both countries following school closures.

In Nepal, specifically, for the combined group of treatment and comparison girls —literacy scores dropped by 1.01 Standard Deviations (SDs) and by 0.82 SDs for numeracy scores.

This new data point compared average numeracy and literacy scores for recontacted girls from the project’s midline evaluation (pre-Covid-19) using the same SeGMA and SeGRA tests. The evaluation focused on girls in Grades 9 and 10 (at baseline), who were later found to be enrolled in Grades 10, 11, and 12 in the sampled schools. While the study did not set out to assess the learning loss of the treatment group compared to the comparison group — and therefore did not differentiate between them — the results showed the negative impact of Covid-19 on girls’ learning outcomes including those in the treatment group.

2.1.1. Transition Outcomes

Baseline to Midline

At midline, a transition target was set at a five-percentage point increase in the transition rate for IS girls (Grades 8 to 10) compared to the comparison group, and an eight percentage point increase for SG and OOS girls from baseline to midline (the latter groups did not have a comparison).

At baseline, transition rates were higher for the comparison group than the treatment group among IS girls, with 95.1% for the comparison group compared to 93.7% for the treatment group. For SG and OOS girls, only treatment girls were evaluated, with transition rates of 29.7% and 34.7%, respectively.

By midline, all treatment groups showed improvements in transition rates. IS girls had a modest increase of nearly 1 percentage point, while the comparison group experienced a significant decrease of almost 20 percentage points. As a result, the difference in transition rate between treatment and comparison girls at midline was statistically significant¹⁴. SG and OOS girls saw increases to 52.3% and 47.6%, respectively.

This indicates that between baseline and midline, all groups exceeded their targets. IS girls achieved a DiD of 20.5 percentage points, far surpassing the target of five percentage points by an additional 15.5 percentage points.

¹³ Tetra Tech (2022) *Independent Evaluation of the Girls’ Education Challenge Phase II - Evaluation Study 1: Effects of Covid-19 on Access and Learning in GEC II – Final Report*. Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). February 2022. Available at: <https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/as3lwuxx/gec-ii-evaluation-study-1-access-and-learning-final-report-february-2022.pdf>

¹⁴ The report indicates that this difference is significant, but it does not mention the confidence level.

Similarly, SG and OOS girls exceeded their target of an eight-percentage point increase, with SG achieving an increase of 14.6 percentage points and OOS girls achieving 4.9 percentage points above their target.

Transition pathways analysis

For IS girls, transition pathways observed at midline varied depending on their grade level. Results were reported separately for two groups: girls in Grades 8 and 9 at baseline (expected to progress to Grades 9 and 10 at midline), and those who were in Grade 10 at baseline (expected to graduate from secondary school).

Among Grades 8 and 9, the most common pathway for both treatment and comparison groups was progression to the next educational grade. A slightly higher percentage of treatment girls advanced grade compared to the comparison group (92.3% vs 89.2%, respectively). This difference is attributed to slightly higher rates of grade repetition and dropout in the comparison group, where no dropouts were reported in the treatment group. A few girls in the treatment group considered as successful transitions were found in non-formal education or repeating a grade while engaged in vocational training. As such, the overall rate of successful transition was 94.1% for treatment and 89.2% for the comparison group. However, no statistical analysis was provided to support these results.

For Grade 10 girls, transition pathways differed for a small percentage in the treatment group (13.3%), where a greater proportion of treatment group girls graduated and engaged in employment (5.3% vs 0%), vocational training (6.7% vs 0%) or were still in school and engaged in family business (1.3% vs 0%) compared to the comparison group. However, a very low percentage of girls continued formal schooling after graduation (4% for the treatment group and 2.7% for the comparison group). The majority of girls in both groups graduated but did not engage in employment, vocational training, or further education (78.7% in the treatment group vs 94.6% in the comparison group) at midline. No significance testing was conducted for any pathway in any school grade.

Midline to Endline

At endline, transition rates were not measured; instead, perceptions of the effectiveness of the project's OOS interventions were assessed (see [Table 5](#)).¹⁵

Table 5: Transition rates at baseline, midline and endline in treatment and comparison groups

Parameters			Transition rate		
	Evaluation round		Baseline	Midline	Endline
		Instrument	HH survey and school records	HH survey and school records	—
In-School Girls	Results by group	Treated	93.7%	94.5%	—
		Comparison	95.1%	75.4%	—
	Baseline to midline	Results DiD (%)	—	20.5 pp	—
		Target DiD (%)	—	5 pp	—
		Difference from the target		15.5 pp (own estimation)	—
OOS girls	Results by group	Treated	34.7%	47.6%	—
		Comparison	—	—	—
	Baseline to midline	Results B&A (%)	—	12.9 pp	—
		Target B&A (%)	—	8 pp	—
		Difference from the target		4.9 pp (own estimation)	—

¹⁵ External Evaluation surveys revealed that an aggregate 60 percent of OOS population in the sample demonstrated improved confidence, decision-making ability, self-efficacy, livelihood opportunities, and agency as a result of different training and intervention combinations from STEM II's economic development component. These included (1) youth financial literacy training (YFLT), (2) business skills development training (BSD), (3) vocational training (VT), and (4) the Girls' Transition Fund (GTF) loan. Data analysis indicated that training combinations involving GTF loan support were particularly effective. Girls who participated in all available programmes – YFLT, BSD, VT, and GTF – showed significant gains in confidence, livelihood opportunities, decision-making ability, self-efficacy, and agency, with reported improvements ranging from 70% to 100%. However, it is important to exercise caution with the data, as the small number of participants in some categories limits the generalisability of these findings. Regarding the impact of Covid-19, a total of 82.7% of girls believe that the Covid-19 pandemic impacted or will impact their future aspirations related to livelihood, income generation, and overall quality of life. Among them, 76.5% cited financial hardships faced by their families as a key consequence of the pandemic. In particular, 11.3% of the girls reported having to stop their businesses due to the pandemic and extended lockdowns.

Parameters			Transition rate		
	Evaluation round		Baseline	Midline	Endline
School Graduate girls	Results by group	Treated	29.7%	52.3%	—
		Comparison	—	—	—
	Baseline to midline	Results B&A (%)	—	22.6 pp	—
		Target B&A (%)	—	8 pp	—
		Difference from the target		14.6 pp (own estimation)	—
Overall Impact (IS, OOS, SG)	Baseline to midline	FM's RAG rating		Green	

Note: Difference coefficients with three asterisks are significant at the 99% confidence level (P-value lower than 0.01=1%), two asterisks are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level (P-value lower than 0.05 = 5%), and those with one asterisk are statistically significant at the 90% level (P-value lower than 0.1 = 10%).

IE Conclusions on Transition

Baseline to Midline

Midline targets were achieved for all three groups of girls: IS, SG and OOS. Among the IS girls, the project surpassed its target by 15.5 percentage points. This improvement was largely driven by a significant reduction in the transition rate of the comparison group rather than a substantial increase within the treatment group itself.

For OOS and SG girls, the absence of a comparison group requires interpreting their transition rates results with caution. Nevertheless, given that these girls were not enrolled in school, it is unlikely that a counterfactual scenario would have led to improvements of the same magnitude i.e., 22.6% for OOS and 12.9% for SG girls.

In Study 3, conducted by the Independent Evaluator (IE) to assess the “Aggregate impact of GEC-T projects between baseline and midline” (Poli et al., 2022), transitions were evaluated at the portfolio level, with a primary focus on in-school progression, adjusted for attrition.

Overall, Mercy Corps Nepal had one of the highest re-contact rates among the projects between baseline and midline, with a low attrition rate of 13%. Of the 131 girls who could not be re-contacted (13%), the whereabouts of 72% were unknown, while 28% were Grade 10 girls who had completed the programme and were assumed to have transitioned out of education. Mercy Corps Nepal reported that nearly all attrition came from Grade 10 girls who emigrated for work after completing the project intervention cycle for In-School Girls. Those who could be tracked after Grade 10 remained in the cohort and were re-categorised as School Graduates, presumably receiving a different intervention from the In-School Girls group. Additionally, some out-of-school (OOS) girls and School Graduates were found to have migrated outside the community for work.

Findings from Study 3 support the conclusion that Mercy Corps Nepal effectively tracked and supported girls through school. However, challenges remained, particularly with post-graduation transitions and the engagement of OOS girls.

The project demonstrated success in facilitating transitions for some IS girls in Grade 10, particularly in terms of employment, vocational training, and continued education. Although results were not accompanied with analysis of their significance, about 13.3% of Grade 10 treatment girls engaged in employment or vocational training and a further 4% continued to higher secondary (compared to 2.7% in the comparison group). Despite these positive outcomes, the majority of Grade 10 girls (78.7%) were classified as graduates without further engagement in education, training, or work, highlighting an important challenge in post-graduation transitions. This finding underscores the need for greater efforts to support graduates in accessing meaningful post-education opportunities.

While the gains for OOS and SG girls were also remarkable, considerable gaps remained. Nearly 48% of SG and 52% of OOS girls did not achieve a successful transition, meaning they did neither secured employment nor returned to school or participated in any training provided by the project. The lack of participation in training was likely because the trainings offered by the project were not mandatory for all girls, and as a result, not all girls were provided with the same opportunities.

Midline to endline

At endline, transition rates were not measured, leaving the status of the cohort who graduated before the endline unknown. As with learning, the focus of the endline evaluation shifted to observing the effectiveness of different combinations of training and loan support for OOS girls, and focused on self-reported improvements in confidence, livelihood opportunities, decision-making abilities, self-efficacy and agency.

While the shifts in the learning indicator experienced at endline are understandable given the guidance communicated by the FM in light of school closures, it appears this indicator was revisited during the same review. The key difference is that household surveys continued with the sample of re-contacted girls at endline. As a result, it is unclear why the evaluation did not gather information on the girls' post-graduation transitions, particularly for girls in Grade 8 at baseline.

At endline, the lack of a transition measurement means it is not possible to assess the project's effectiveness in this regard.

3. What intermediate outcomes did the project deliver?

3.1. Overall project performance

STEM II's evaluation reports found progress in its Intermediate Outcomes (IOs) at both midline and endline, and case study interviews largely confirmed these results. The reported results and degree of change varied by IO area, with considerable positive changes reported in community attitudes and girls' empowerment, and challenges remaining in school governance and teaching quality. [Table 6](#) provides a summary of progress made by the project towards its IOs, as found in evaluation reports.

The self-reported nature of many of these changes, particularly around attitudes, could lead to a positive bias in responses. This section provides a brief overview of the main reported changes according to STEM II evaluation reports and the IE's primary research. While STEM II reported on project-specific IOs, in this section we follow the FM's IO definitions, and group project indicators accordingly.

Table 6: Progress towards Intermediate Outcomes¹⁶

FM IO	IP Indicator	Baseline	Midline
IO1: Changing community attitudes and norms	IP IO Indicator 1.1: <i>Average proportion of time per day IS girls spend on unpaid domestic and care work</i>	3.4 hours	1.8 hours (vs 3.2 hour target)
	IP IO Indicator 1.2: <i>Average proportion of time per day girls spend to study at home</i>	1.9 hours	1.6 hours (vs 2.1 hour target)
IO2: Reducing Financial barriers	IP IO Indicator 4.1: <i>Percent of OOS /SG marginalised girls who get STEM II's Youth Financial Literacy Training (YFLT) move to a higher learning level</i>	43.41%	89% (vs 70% target)
IO3: Improved teaching	IP IO Indicator 5.1: <i>Percent of STEM II teachers using student-centred teaching methodologies</i>	N/A	30% (target 60%)
IO5: Effective management	IP IO Indicator 2.1: <i>Percent of STEM II schools that identify girls' needs through gap assessment and incorporate into their SIPs</i>	0	50% (vs 50% target)
IO6: Attendance	IP IO Indicator 3.1: <i>Percentage improvement in attendance rates</i>	85%	87% (vs 88% target)

3.2. FM IO1: Changing community attitudes and norms¹⁷

FM Indicator: Changes in attitudes and perceptions towards girls and girls' education among male and female family and community members, educators, boys, and government officials.

Main activities: Street dramas, awareness raising campaigns, community discussions; family dialogues and household visits targeting parents directly.

Key findings: The project delivered important results through community-based and household-level activities. These resulted in reduced household chores, increased time for studying (in school) and reduced prevalence of early marriage. Differences remain between sub-groups, with lower caste girls continuing to be more affected by harmful gender norms. IE case study research found evidence of some community-level change, but continued barriers linked to gender norms. Despite increased awareness, parents continue to disproportionately support boys in their education due to economic hardship. Discrepancy between primary and secondary data could be linked to positive response bias during evaluations, or to results not having been sustained after the project's end.

STEM II delivered strong results against FM IO1, as shown in project evaluation reports and in case study research. It addressed social norms hindering girls' education through community- and household-focused activities.

¹⁶ As the endline evaluation focused on qualitative assessments of progress made, it is not included in this table. Key findings from the endline report are, however, included in the sections below.

¹⁷ IP IO 1: Attitudes and Behaviours.

At midline, the first indicator that the project reported against for this IO was the average proportion of time per day IS girls spend on unpaid domestic and care work. The midline evaluation found that STEM II had overachieved its targets, with 85% of girls reporting that chores were fairly divided among family members, and caregivers sharing that chores are the responsibility of all family members. Girls spent more time on household chores and supporting their families during planting and harvesting seasons, as well as during religious festivals (see [Section 3.6](#)). The overall decrease in household chores led to more time spent studying, including attending tuition and Girls' Clubs classes. This was described as reducing drop-out due to poor performance. A decrease in household chores also affected girls' social capital and wellbeing, allowing them to spend time socialising with their peers. Although the midline evaluation also found inequalities between sub-groups: girls from the Dalit ('low-caste') community continued to spend about two hours a day on household chores; more than girls from 'higher' castes.

The second indicator focused on the average proportion of time girls spend studying at home. The project did not meet its target for this indicator, as the reported time spent studying at home decreased from baseline. This does not mean that girls' time studying decreased overall; the time girls spent studying outside the home increased in the same period. The IE's primary research confirmed that girls benefited from dedicated study time, away from the distractions of home due to the Girls' Clubs (see [Section 4.2](#)). As above, socio-economic differences emerge. The midline evaluation found that girls from 'higher' castes – namely, Brahmin girls – spent the most time studying per day (1.72 hours on average), while girls from the Janajati and Tharu ethnic groups spent the least (1.4 and 1.5 hours, respectively).

At endline, more girls in the treatment group (97.20%) compared to the comparison group (89.70%) reported that parents support them to stay in school and do well in their studies. Support mentioned includes moral encouragement, financial support, help with homework and allocation of time for study in and outside the home. The endline evaluation also found evidence of continued improvements in parental attitudes towards girls' education. Changes in attitudes reportedly led to parents reducing girls' household chores, reallocating them to others in the household, and increasing their allocated time for studying, especially as girls prepared for SEE exams. As this change was reported for both treatment and comparison groups, it could be linked to factors external to the project.

Project evaluations point to continued challenges linked to social norms. The qualitative research for the endline evaluation found continued reluctance among caregivers relating to girls' mobility, including for employment opportunities, which were mostly linked to concerns about safety. The endline evaluation points to a lack of awareness of gender issues among boys. This includes gender dynamics in the house, the need to support girls' education, and traditional gender roles. Research also finds that the project did not extensively engage with boys to promote gender norm change.

Participants to the IE case study research mentioned the positive effects of awareness-raising sessions on harmful social norms. Parents spoke about awareness raising sessions on early marriage and on the importance of education. Caregivers also mentioned learning about saving strategies, practical steps to supporting education, and the importance of shifting gender norms in the home, referencing awareness raising activities focusing on sharing housework between men and women. Overall, STEM II's initiatives appear to be slowly shifting gender norms in the community, supporting girls' education and broader gender equality. As mentioned by one respondent:

"There was a campaign that girls should be educated and not limited to household chores. It taught that girls and boys should be treated equally and not discriminated against. My mother used to discriminate between me and my brothers. She loved us all, but she used to give more food and clothes to my brothers compared to me. If I said anything about it, she would say, "You will go to someone else's home, so don't talk too much." She used to suppress my opinions by saying that. These days, she doesn't do that anymore." (FGD with IS girls)

A smaller number of IE case study research respondents also spoke about awareness raising around caste-based and religion-based discrimination, which were also tackled by the project by promoting the inclusion of girls from marginalised castes and ethnic groups. According to those respondents, project activities led to greater awareness and less discrimination at the community level.

Some challenges in caregiver and community attitudes remained. Case study FGDs with girls showcased that early marriage and pregnancy continue to be an issue (see [Section 4.5](#)). Several OOS girls who took part in case study research mentioned having married or become pregnant during the project, and some mentioned it as a reason for school dropout. Girls who had been married or pregnant faced challenges in accessing education activities, including those run by STEM II.

Issues like housework also continued to be mentioned by some parents who took part in IE case study research as limiting girls' time for study. The discrepancy with secondary data could indicate a positive bias in responses to the

midline evaluation reports or could also be linked to reversals following the end of project activities (see [Section 4.3](#) on Sustainability). A small number of respondents mentioned that changing social norms would have required more and deeper engagement with communities, particularly in rural areas where these issues are more prevalent. In addition, families face economic barriers to education, which tend to disproportionately affect girls and limit the impact of awareness raising activities. According to one government respondent, while families may be supportive of girls' education in principle, when it comes to taking practical steps, they tend to continue to prioritise boys' education.

3.3. FM IO2: Reducing financial barriers¹⁸

FM Indicator: Changes in financial barriers that improve the chances of girls participating in learning.

Main activities: Youth Financial Literacy Training; Life Skills Training; Business Skills Development; Vocational Training and Girls' Transition Fund (GTF).

Key findings: Project support to OOS and SG girls focused on their employability and entrepreneurship skills. Girls who received this type of support found it helpful both for their direct employment prospects, as well as their self-esteem, family dynamics and agency. Vocational training was particularly helpful to increase access to economic opportunities. A small share of girls received GTF support, which was particularly helpful for girls who lacked capital to start their own business.

To support OOS and SG girls, STEM II did not focus on re-integrating girls in school, but instead focused on their entrepreneurship aims and transition to employment. The project did so by providing different types of training focused on skills for employment, and by facilitating loans for girls through microfinance institutions and the Girls' Transition Fund (GTF). The midline evaluation found an improvement in girls' technical learning, measured by progression to the next level in the Youth Financial Literacy Training (YFLT) programme. At midline, 85% of participating girls moved to the next level in the training.

Midline and endline evaluation reports found that this type of support facilitated girls' transition into employment and the development of skills helpful for their longer-term prospects. According to the midline evaluation, OOS and SG girls gained helpful skills, supporting their transition into employment, and improving their families' finances. The midline evaluation found that the economic opportunities offered by employability training had effects on girls' self-efficacy and agency: girls gained more status in the family and ability to influence family decisions. Qualitative evidence from the midline evaluation indicated that transitioning into employment postponed the age of marriage in some cases. Almost all girls surveyed at midline (93%) thought the skills they gained would be useful in the future, and 63% wanted to start their own business. At endline, girls continued to share positive feedback regarding the training and skills received, particularly vocational training. According to 75% of OOS and SG sampled at endline, vocational training allowed them to strengthen their employability and potential for income generation. Training was also reported to have improved girls' problem-solving skills (64%); self-esteem (33.5%) and networking skills (2.5%).

Importantly, the midline indicated that the share of girls who had received this type of support was quite small. For example, only 36 out of the 319 SG/OOS girls in the midline sample had taken Business Skills Development training. In terms of loan access, only 4.7% of girls at midline and 7.8% at endline had accessed the GTF, to open new businesses or expand existing ones. Limitations with the loan were linked to the budget availability from the project and the requirements to pay it back in a given time. While it reached a small percentage of girls, the endline evaluation found that the loan was helpful to girls who lacked capital to start their business, and that it also had positive effects on girls' self-esteem (reported by 94.6% of girls), their status and decision-making power in the family (100% of girls), and ability to support their household (86.5%). Tailoring was the most common business for girls to open or to intend to work in. It requires little investment, especially compared to other activities with higher start-up costs, such as beauty parlours. This is confirmed by the IE's case study research, during which girls and other respondents confirmed that tailoring was the most suitable activity in their context.

¹⁸ IP IO 4: Financial Literacy: Marginalised OOS/ SG girls are equipped with skills and knowledge that allows them to make informed financial decisions.

3.4. FM IO3: Improved teaching¹⁹

FM Indicator: Improvements in the quality and effectiveness of teaching, facilitation, and support to learning.

Main activities: Teacher training on literacy, numeracy, pedagogy, and inclusive classroom strategies.

Key findings: Teaching quality in regular classes was strongly constrained by classroom conditions and curriculum demands. Teaching in Girls' Clubs was found to be much more engaging and participatory, despite being led by the same teachers. This was due to the smaller group size as well as less rigid course content and structure. Qualitative evidence from the endline evaluation had pointed to some improvements in teacher practice and attitudes towards girls, among continuing challenges. IE case study research with government, community stakeholders and teachers themselves, on the contrary, indicates that teaching quality may have worsened. This could be due to changes that occurred since the end of the project in 2021, long-term effects of Covid-19, and continuing contextual barriers such as large classroom sizes being reflected in participants' responses.

STEM II faced challenges in improving quality of teaching in the classroom. STEM II provided teacher training on student-centred pedagogies, but this seems to have been insufficient in the context of challenging classroom conditions (see [Section 4.3](#)). The midline target of at least 60% of teachers using child-centred teaching methodologies was not achieved, although there were some improvements in teacher-student interactions. In 90% of sampled schools, students asked questions in class and teachers mostly used lesson plans. The use of worksheets containing ideas about the lessons planned for the next day helped students understand and prepare for lessons. Girls sampled in the evaluation mentioned helpful methods used by teachers. For example, several respondents gained a better understanding of maths as teachers started employing more practical methods in class, such as using coins or pebbles to teach probability. Others mentioned the use of pictures, groupwork and peer learning.

Despite some positive examples, the midline evaluation found little evidence of overarching change. Only nine out of 30 observed teachers were adequately using student-centred teaching methods. The use of real-life examples, interactive pedagogies, IEC materials, technology and groupwork were all very limited. Girls also shared that they found it difficult to write essays, as this was not emphasised in classroom teaching. This was partly linked to the Nepali education system. The education system in Nepal is highly centralised, with the national Ministry of Education responsible for curriculum development, policy formulation and teacher training.²⁰ This was found to limit the extent to which local innovation and experimentation could take place. Teachers sampled in the midline evaluation reflected that teaching in Nepal is more curriculum-based than knowledge-based, limiting the extent to which practice, analysis and real-life examples can be used. They also shared that the limited focus on writing was due to the curriculum and lesson formats. Groupwork and student monitoring were constrained by the large number of students in the classroom (see [Section 4.5](#)). Most teachers were giving equal attention to both boys and girls, although boys tended to dominate classroom dynamics. A higher percentage of girls reported that teachers treat girls and boys differently (from 5% to 25%), and about 20% reported that male teachers were biased towards boys. Rather than necessarily reflecting a worsening in gender dynamics, this could suggest that girls feel more confident in reporting their teachers' behaviour.

Importantly, the midline found improvements in teaching quality in Girls' Clubs classes and tutoring sessions after school (see [Section 4.2](#)). In turn, the midline evaluation found that girls' engagement in Girls' Club classes had a ripple effect on their engagement in regular school classes, also because the teachers were the same. The midline evaluation found it likely that improved quality of teaching in Girls' Clubs was linked with improved learning outcomes for girls. Primary research pointed to important changes resulting from Girls' Clubs, including improved exam performance and transition into continued education, which was reported both by girls and their teachers (see [Section 4.2](#)).

At endline, it was not possible to carry out classroom observations due to school closures. Questions on teacher practice were included in the girls' survey. It was reported by girls that STEM-trained (82%) and non-STEM-trained teachers (69%) in project schools practice child-friendly teaching methods, compared to 49% among teachers in comparison schools. Endline interviews with STEM II-trained teachers found that they could describe some child-friendly practices in the classroom. These findings point to improvements in teaching practice, but the potential bias of self-reported data need to be considered. At endline, the evaluation found qualitative evidence of girls' increased classroom engagement and increased interest in learning, due to improvements in facilitators' attitudes, the use of interactive methods and participatory learning in Girls' Clubs. The perception of teachers treating girls and boys

¹⁹ IP IO5: Teacher Quality Improvement: STEM II teachers promote student centered teaching environment.

²⁰ Local Service Delivery in Nepal, World Bank, 2014

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/188401468053415165/pdf/879220ESWOREV100385228B00PUBLIC00NP.pdf>

differently had also reduced: from 25% at midline to 13% at endline. Almost 100% of girls reported that teachers made them feel welcome in the classroom.

Overall, IE case study research respondents spoke less about changes in teacher practice compared to other intervention areas. As discussed in [Section 4.5](#), the case study took place in a context of worsening teaching quality. It is possible that prior teaching improvements may have been reversed due to Covid-19, the length of time (three years) since the end of the project, or due to remaining contextual challenges, such as large classroom sizes. In terms of positive changes, some respondents pointed to the helpfulness of capacity-building activities for teachers, particularly where the training was adapted to the specific subject they were teaching. It was reported that the support received by the project, including training activities and provision of inputs, helped make classes more child-centred and girl-friendly.

3.5. FM IO4: Effective management²¹

FM Indicator: Changes in leadership and management of formal and /or non-formal learning spaces and engagement of governance structures such as PTAs, BOMs, SMCs.

Main activities: School management training; working with SMCs, PTAs and Headteachers to develop School Improvement Plans (SIPs); infrastructure improvements (classrooms, computer labs, libraries, WASH facilities); provision of Educate Girls Alleviate Poverty (EGAP) awards to schools that achieved project targets.

Key findings: Half of the project's schools developed SIPs that took girls' needs into account, although the focus continued to be on general infrastructure improvements. Evaluations found evidence of improvements, but remaining challenges in terms of WASH facilities. Parental engagement was higher than in comparison schools, but only half of parents regularly engaged with their daughters' schools.

STEM II aimed to work with schools to support the development of School Improvement Plans (SIPs) that considered girls' needs, and to improve school infrastructure. Evaluation reports point to improvements in school governance, coupled with continuing challenges, particularly in parental engagement. At midline, 50% of schools were found to have incorporated plans in their SIPs after assessing girls' needs. Activities included expanding girls' toilets and setting up Girls' Clubs. While this represents an improvement from baseline, most SIPs focused on physical infrastructure rather than gender-responsive plans. The midline evaluation also found evidence of some improvements in the school environment; for example, separate toilets for girls and boys, running water and WASH utilities. Important challenges remained: only 40% of girls included in the midline sample reported that they had access to sanitary pad disposal facilities, 48% had clean toilets in the school and 59% had running water. At endline, school visits found evidence of gender-sensitive infrastructure, including separate toilets for girls and boys, WASH facilities and availability of free sanitary pads for girls. This indicates improvements in the school environment, which appears to have become safer and more welcoming for girls.

Parental engagement in school activities increased during the project, with STEM II schools performing better than comparison schools at midline: about 50% of parents regularly visited their daughters' school, compared to 37% in comparison schools. This included increased participation in PTAs. IE case study research found that increased parental engagement was linked to more awareness of school activities and their daughters' school performance. Parental engagement led to teachers becoming more serious about their responsibilities. Evidence on the effects of the project on school management structures, and their link to learning outcomes, was more limited. While some IE case study research respondents reported that school management, particularly SMCs, led to improvements at the school level, others pointed to practical challenges linked to their politicisation and limited caregiver engagement in these structures.

²¹ IP IO2: School Governance: School Environment promotes quality education supporting girls.

3.6. FM IO7: Attendance²²

FM Indicator: Changes in girls' attendance at opportunities for learning made available to them.

Main Activities: Awareness raising activities with communities and parents (Family Dialogues and household visits).

Key findings: Average attendance was high at baseline and improved by midline as a result of material support, particularly of menstrual products, coupled with awareness raising. Seasonal absenteeism linked to agricultural work continued throughout the project, although attendance slightly increased for Grade 10 girls during harvesting and planting periods.

Despite high levels of attendance at baseline, one of the project indicators focused on increasing attendance rates. The midline evaluation reported a slight increase in girls' attendance rates – from 85.1% at baseline to 87% at midline – although it continued to be lower at certain points of the year. This was during festivals and during agricultural periods: plantation and harvesting seasons in July-August and October-November. While the evaluation found a slight increase in the attendance rate of Grade 10 girls during those months, potentially supporting SEE performance, the midline found continuing challenges linked to seasonal absenteeism. Overall, the midline evaluation did not find a link between girls' attendance and their literacy and numeracy scores. The attendance of boys was similarly affected by economic activities. Evaluation reports and IE case study research found that boys often travel to India during the winter season to work. According to the midline evaluation, boys' seasonal migration tends to be linked to boys' desire to earn money for themselves, rather than to support the family.

IE case study research pointed to several areas of STEM II support which supported girls' attendance to school, although some respondents highlighted that enrolment and attendance are not key issues for education in the project area. Others explicitly mentioned that the provision of material inputs, particularly period products, coupled with social norm change surrounding menstruation helped support girls' school attendance. As mentioned by one respondent:

“In regular classes, where many students including boys were present, the girls were quite shy and would often go home if they felt uncomfortable, such as during menstrual cramps. I advised them that going home was not the solution and encouraged them to stay and share their needs. Later, when menstrual pads were provided, it made a significant difference in terms of girls' retention in the classroom. They began staying until the classes were over even if they were in their menstruation period.” (KII with teacher/ headteacher)

²² IP IO3: Attendance: Improvement in marginalised girls' attendance in schools throughout the life of the project.

4. What worked well/ less well and why?

4.1. Overall project performance

STEM II led to changes in girls' learning, enabling the project to achieve its learning and transition targets at midline. As explained in the previous section, improvements at IO level were reported in terms of community awareness, quality of teaching in small group environments, and, to an extent, infrastructure and classroom environment. STEM II's interventions, particularly Girls' Clubs, had important positive effects on girls' self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-advocacy. In turn, these were found to have a positive and two-way relationship with learning outcomes. This section explores what interventions worked well and less well, as well as contextual factors and implementation factors. This section includes insights from primary and secondary data collected with girls, caregivers, teachers and school leadership, project partners and implementers. Case study research was carried out as part of the IE with both IS and OOS girls, for whom project goals were different. As the project fully closed in March 2021, the case study data highlights sustainability challenges and the long-lasting effects of Covid-19 school closures in project areas.

4.2. What worked well in the STEM II Project interventions?

The **girl-only, small-group environment of Girls' Clubs** supported improvements in girls' experience and performance in school, offering the opportunity to revise key topics, ask questions and learn from other students.

Awareness-raising activities, particularly family dialogues and door-to-door outreach, improved caregiver attitudes, allowing girls to attend school more regularly and spend more time studying. IE primary research suggests that while awareness raising led to learning and attendance improvements during project implementation, it did not lead to longer-term changes following close-out.

Infrastructure improvements, including infrastructure prizes linked to school competitions on academic performance, were found to support a more positive learning environment. Improved infrastructure encouraged girls to attend more regularly, including during menstruation. Despite this, some infrastructural challenges remained, according to IE case study research.

The combination of these effective interventions had important results on girls' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and ability to make decisions about their future.

4.2.1. Girls' Clubs and other extra-curricular activities

Girls' Clubs and tutoring/ coaching activities were described as particularly supportive of girls' learning in both evaluation reports and IE case study research. Evaluation reports found that the small group environment of Girls' Clubs strongly supported girls' participation in lessons, allowing them to ask questions and receive more individualised support from teachers. Being in girl-only spaces helped girls feel more comfortable to participate in the classroom. Teachers were also able to implement more engaging techniques, thanks to the smaller group sizes and greater freedom from curriculum constraints. The midline evaluation found strong links between Girls' Clubs and improved literacy and numeracy, mainly due to the interactive nature of the sessions. Having time for guided study and self-study over the weekends was also seen as leading to improved academic performance.

IE case study research confirms the importance of Girls' Clubs to support girls' education. A large number of respondents pointed out that literacy and numeracy improvements were linked to in-class and after-school learning opportunities. In particular, extra classes to study Nepali, English and maths were credited by a high number of respondents as leading to improvements in girls' learning. Girls reportedly improved their academic performance due to more individualised attention from teachers. Girls' Clubs made it easier for teachers to provide support in challenging subjects, such as maths, due to the smaller group size (about 40 girls, compared to around 100 in regular classes). Not only did this lead to improved academic performance, but girls' attitudes and interest in education also improved due to increased frequency of educational activities. Girls' Club classes also increased girls' life skills, including through SRHR content. As pointed out by one respondent:

"Students cannot learn everything from regular classes. Therefore, its extra classes were a great support. It was an opportunity for them to learn things they didn't get from regular classes. In addition to learning, through

the activities, they learned to voice their concerns and thoughts, and they were able to develop other skills such as leadership skills, self-confidence skills, and self-defence skills.” (KII with government official)

Girls echoed this positive feedback. Several girls saw extra classes as useful because of their limited time to study at home, the possibility to focus on more difficult subjects, and the additional support provided to those who were struggling with a specific topic. As highlighted by one research participant:

“I liked the extra classes the most. I could learn what I didn’t know. And because there were only a few students, teachers used to explain individually when I had any issue.” (FGD with IS girls)

Several FGD respondents highlighted that additional lessons were helpful for girls who had previously failed their exams, and shared that their improved performance in school helped them continue their education after the STEM II project had closed. Girls' Club sessions were described as a way for teachers to revise key topics, and girls reported that their writing skills improved as a result. Improvements in writing were described as important beyond direct school performance; for example, to write job applications.

Girls' backgrounds and previous education performance were seen as important determinants of their experiences in the Girls' Clubs. One government partner highlighted that the Girls' Clubs were particularly effective where they grouped students from different communities, who tend to have different levels of learning achievement. Several girls praised the schedule of Girls' Clubs, which allowed them to have dedicated time for studying after school and during weekends. Others shared that inflexible hours posed challenges to their attendance, especially when they had other household commitments.

4.2.2. Awareness raising with communities and caregivers

Awareness raising among communities and caregivers was a central part of STEM II's implementation, and was found to have had positive results. The midline and endline evaluation reports highlighted changes in parental attitudes to girls' education, particularly in terms of allowing further time for studying, reduced housework commitments and increased engagement with girls' schools. Overall, project evaluations and IE case study research findings point to improvements in gender and social norms at the community level, supporting girls' education in various ways, particularly through the allocation for more time dedicated to study. Delay in age of marriage was also mentioned, but the links to project activities are less clear.

Four awareness-raising interventions were highlighted in evaluation reports and IE case study data:

- 1) Trainings on family dynamics and gender in the household and on girls' education, including a three-day training for caregivers (known as Family Dialogues);
- 2) Household visits and door-to-door campaigns;
- 3) Street dramas, both on girls' education generally and more specifically about menstruation and child marriage; and
- 4) Enrolment campaigns in the community.

Some IE case study research respondents confirmed that, following awareness raising sessions, parents divided housework more equitably between girls and boys. This allowed girls to engage more with their education and was linked to improvements in their learning outcomes. The change was not mentioned extensively by respondents, and there are indications that girls continue to have higher domestic workloads. It is therefore questionable whether there have been long-term changes in social norms linked to housework responsibilities.

Awareness raising with caregivers also reportedly increased parental engagement with schools and their support for education. This was described as supporting enrolment and attendance. Numerous respondents highlighted that STEM II's activities were able to increase parental awareness of higher education opportunities; while previously the social norm was for girls to marry and drop out of school after Grade 10. In particular, Family Dialogues and house visits stood out as having improved parents' understanding of the STEM II project and raised awareness on the importance of girls' education. As explained by an implementing partner (IP) respondent:

“The parents of the girls were involved in an activity called Family Dialogue, which helped improve the learning environment at home. This activity encouraged the parents to send their daughters to school and helped them understand the importance of girls' education. Additionally, this activity helped to improve relationship between their family members.” (KII with IP)

The project also carried out community-based awareness raising activities, including theatre, against harmful traditional practices. For example, several primary research respondents recalled awareness-raising on *Chhaupadi*, a traditional practice where girls stay outside of the home during the menstruation period and also do not attend school.

While these activities were described as valuable, several respondents pointed out they affect primarily one community rather than girls' education overall.

4.2.3. Improved school environment and provision of materials

Evaluations and IE case study research points to improvements in school infrastructure, and a more positive and girl-friendly learning environment. Improvements linked to WASH facilities, classroom infrastructure and broader school resources were reported in evaluations and case study research. IE case study research respondents spoke positively about the building of girls' toilets and new facilities, such as libraries and computer labs. One strategy that was particularly appreciated was the awarding of prizes based on school performance, through which the project provided infrastructure improvements to schools that achieved project targets. The project also encouraged the use of school competitions, such as essay writing and quizzes, to foster engagement and participation of students in learning activities. These types of activities were described as motivational by teachers, school leaders and students.

Despite STEM II support, project evaluations and IE case study research highlighted continuing infrastructure challenges linked to classroom infrastructure, WASH facilities, and broader school resources. This suggests that, although there have been improvements, the project was not able to fully meet schools' needs (see [Section 4.5](#)). Even where resources have been helpful, some respondents pointed out that there were mixed results; for example, one IP respondent shared that students were not always given access to the new computer labs, although this improved after discussions with schools. Overall, it seems that teacher capacities to successfully integrate ICT into learning were limited. This suggests that the schools targeted by the project may not be a suitable environment for an ICT-focused intervention – at least not without additional support to teachers and school leadership. Similarly, while libraries set up by the project were seen as helpful, some schools lacked the staff to manage them. This points to challenges in managing new infrastructure and resources without additional funding to cover staff running costs.

Several respondents mentioned the provision of materials to girls as being supportive to girls' learning and attendance, encouraging them to focus on and continue their studies. Girls who took part in IE case study research described receiving educational materials including dictionaries, books, notebooks, calculators, and other materials that could help them prepare for the SEE. A small number of girls also mentioned having received bikes to travel to and from schools. Government respondents highlighted that one of the project strengths was providing school supplies to the municipality. Sanitary pads were highlighted as a specific area of support that encouraged regular attendance. Despite this, poverty remains a major barrier (see [Section 4.5](#)), and according to some IE research participants, more could have been done to provide educational materials to girls and reduce economic barriers to education (e.g., by providing uniforms or school lunches).

4.2.4. Improvements in girls' self-esteem

While not tracked directly through specific indicators, project evaluations and IE case study research found that STEM II led to improvements in girls' self-esteem, advocacy and ability to make decisions. Girls' Clubs, in particular, were seen as linked to improved transition outcomes, particularly through girls' increased ability to decide to delay early marriage. For example, the endline evaluation found that 80% of IS girls and 85% of OOS and SG girls felt they had the ability to make decisions about their personal and professional life. Endline data also pointed to increased resilience of girls: more than 85% of girls said they felt capable to deal with the Covid-19 crisis and persist in the pursuit of their dreams and aspirations for the future.

IE case study research suggests an improvement in girls' self-confidence and ability to make decisions due to the project, including the decision to delay early marriage. Improvements in self-esteem were described by numerous respondents as having a direct link to improvements in literacy and numeracy. Girls supported by STEM II were described by both project staff and girls themselves as increasingly motivated to continue their education, and as having become role models in their communities. In turn, this further motivated other girls as well as caregivers. The leadership skills and confidence developed by girls allowed them to be more active and participatory both in school and in vocational training. IE case study research participants, especially girls, highlighted the positive effects of self-defence classes. These were seen as directly supporting girls' self-esteem and ability to stand up for themselves. Self-defence classes were added to the project in response to expressed needs in project schools.

4.3. What worked less well in the STEM II project interventions?

Teacher training provided by the project was insufficient to lead to sustained changes in the classroom, including the use of child-centred pedagogies. Due to the low baseline levels of teacher capacity and the challenging classroom context, teachers would have needed more practical support to apply teaching methodologies introduced by STEM II. Vocational training and business support had mixed results. While girls developed helpful skills, the training provided was insufficient to support their business endeavours, especially for more challenging business areas. The financial support provided through loans was often insufficient and faced challenges linked to repayment after the project's end. Some questions were raised on the project's ability to involve very vulnerable girls; for example, girls who have been married or had children, girls with disabilities, or girls from extremely poor households. Research indicates that the project faced important sustainability concerns, and that it did not lead to systemic improvements in education quality, particularly in a context of worsening learning outcomes.

4.3.1. Teacher training

Despite delivering some improvements in learning, evaluation reports and IE case study research point to continued challenges in teaching quality. Teacher training, which focused on child-centred and interactive pedagogies, appears to have been insufficient to lead to widespread improvements in teaching quality. IE case study research confirms the evaluation findings, indicating some improvements to teaching practices, but also widespread evidence of remaining challenges.

In terms of positive changes, several primary research respondents described improvements in teachers' attitudes and teaching quality, which helped to foster a more positive learning environment. As explained by one respondent:

"Teachers used to be harsh on students, but now they have a different perspective. Back then, students were often beaten. But after the restriction of corporal punishment, it has been decreased significantly. Additionally, majority of the teachers are trained now, they tend to adopt new techniques of teaching and learning. Additionally, they are friendly with students as a result students can ask their doubts and confusion without any fear. Moreover, our school administration is also strict regarding school policy. The teachers need to attend school regularly to teach students." (KII with community stakeholders)

Some girls who took part in the IE case study research shared that teachers began paying more attention to girls in the classroom, including by giving them awards in weekly tests. This type of engagement was described as motivational for girls, who were particularly motivated to win prizes and also felt more appreciated by teachers and their peers.

Despite this, IE case study research highlighted continuing challenges. The contextual challenges of large classroom size and the strict curriculum requirements limited the extent to which teachers could provide individualised support to girls and use more engaging methods in the large classroom environment. This could help explain why the small-group learning provided in Girls' Clubs was so successful. Several respondents also pointed to **a recent worsening of learning outcomes** in project schools and reflected that education quality varies widely depending on the specific school and teachers. Respondents also highlighted that student performance in their Secondary Education Examination (SEE) and School Leaving Certificate (SLC) has actually worsened since the end of the project. This could be linked to a worsening in education outcomes due to Covid-19, but also puts into question whether the project had any longer-term changes.

Training provided by the project seems to have been insufficient to lead to lasting changes, particularly in the context of challenging classroom conditions and low baseline teaching capacity. In particular, it was pointed out that teachers would have required more practical support and examples that they could integrate in their teaching:

"Potential improvement to teacher training would have been to include more to support their motivations and examples to improve their teaching. Therefore, the training was seen as needing to be more extensive." (KII with teachers/ headteachers)

4.3.2. Vocational training and business support

Evidence of the effectiveness of the support to OOS and SG girls is mixed. Overall, STEM II struggled to support transitions into employment, especially in the challenging economic context. Evaluation reports and IE case study research point to the development of important skills among girls but is unclear on the resulting transition into employment, and the numbers of girls benefited appear low.

In terms of the project's support for girls to transition into employment, it is important to highlight that the IE case study research found that not all girls who received support were able to continue into employment, as some dropped out, mostly due to early marriage. Unsurprisingly, some areas of vocational training and support were more suited than others to girls' needs. IE case study research respondents spoke about tailoring, fish farming, and shopkeeping as having been more successful business endeavours. Beauty training and embroidery were less successful, as they would have required more than three months of training to gain enough knowledge to start a successful business.

Several IE case study research respondents, including girls, shared that practical skills developed as a result of STEM II were useful to their daily lives and business prospects. For example, girls appreciated being able to use maths skills in practice, keeping track of household income and expenses and, in some cases, using these in their businesses. Girls and their caregivers also valued financial literacy skills and savings behaviours taught by the project. Vocational skills training, especially tailoring, was also described as helpful. For example:

"First of all, we did not know anything before getting the training. We learnt the skills in the training, started saving, helped with household expenses, and learnt how to handle finances. I keep track of my budget. I note my income, expenses, and profit." (FGD with OOS girls)

At the same time, there were also numerous mentions of training having lacked sufficient depth and detail to support profitable employment and entrepreneurship. Several girls who took part in FGDs reported that STEM II did not provide more advanced (Level 2) training, especially for certain professions.

While low-cost loans and support to purchase materials were helpful to girls who sought to start a business, some challenges also emerged. Provision of loans was overall quite beneficial, at least in the short-run, but IE case study research found strong indications that girls have struggled to repay loans, particularly after Covid-19 and after the end of the project. The loan process was also described as challenging by some respondents, while some girls also spoke about delays in receiving funds – sometimes of up to a year. There were several mentions of the loan amount being too small to successfully start a business in the challenging context and with little start-up capital. Some specific suggestions that emerged were to have a longer repayment timeframe and a larger loan amount. Girls would have also required further support for materials, such as sewing machines, as they are a very costly investment.

Ultimately, girls' successful business ventures depended considerably on their own skills, interest, and motivation to pursue entrepreneurship avenues, which in some cases limited their income-earning potential. It is likely that for less motivated girls or girls with fewer pre-existing skills, the project did not provide enough support and support that was sufficiently tailored to girls' skills needs. As highlighted by a respondent:

"Some girls that I knew received beautician training and worked at beauty parlours, but they couldn't afford to open their own beauty salon. The training programme provided level one training, covering basic threading and hair updos, but it's not realistic to start a beauty parlour with just these skills. The success of the training also depended on the individual's willingness. Some girls did well with just the level one training, while others struggled. The girls who received cooking training generally fared better, as did those who received tailoring training. Even though they didn't open their own tailoring shops, they were able to stitch clothes for their families. The same was true for the girls who received beautician training; they practiced threading on friends and family but weren't making money from it." (KII with IP)

This type of economic support for girls' business ventures also seems to have been affected by sustainability constraints (see [Section 4.3.4](#)). While loans continue to be provided by local cooperatives after the end of the project, it was stated that during the STEM II project girls received more follow up and monitoring, leading to timely repayments, which is no longer the case. This has resulted in issues with repayment in some cases.

4.3.3. Engaging different marginalised subgroups of girls

Despite positive improvements in social norms and in learning environments highlighted in [Section 4.2](#), IE case study research points to important challenges in reaching the most vulnerable within STEM II project communities. Some harmful gender norms have also proved hard to shift and may have reverted to pre-existing levels following the end of the project. For example, child marriage emerged strongly from IE case study research as a remaining barrier – not necessarily forced by parents, but in some cases linked to girls' choices. Poor performance in school and the resulting drop-out were often described as linked to girls' decisions to get married. This suggests that SRHR activities and awareness raising may not have been sufficient to address persistent social norms, particularly among the worst performers in school. Older girls, particularly girls who were married, had children, or had previously migrated, were particularly hard to reach, and continued to face stigma and discrimination that often prevented them from re-enrolling in education.

Girls' Clubs, while effective overall, were difficult to attend for girls who had housework or work commitments during weekends. This is likely to have affected the attendance of girls from more vulnerable households. A small number of IE case study research respondents also shared that, following the end of the project, some Girls' Clubs have continued on a paid-for basis. If this is the case, it can substantially affect the project's ability to reach the most vulnerable girls, who would very likely be excluded from this type of support.

A general challenge faced by the project was reaching girls with disabilities, where a more targeted approach and further focus on inclusive education would have been necessary. As highlighted in the midline and evaluation reports, the project worked with a small number of GWD, due to its focus on IS girls who had already transitioned from primary education.

4.3.4. Continued barriers to education and sustainability concerns

As STEM II activities concluded in March 2021, it is unsurprising that sustainability concerns emerged from the IE's primary research. Several respondents reported that education quality worsened and project gains were reversed following the end of the project. This seems to indicate that the **STEM II interventions did not lead to systemic change at the school level**. Further, due to the lengthy school closures and persistent economic and psychosocial impacts of Covid-19, some of the gains made have been reversed. As mentioned by one respondent:

"The quality of education was much better when the project was there. Many years after the STEM project ended, the result of the students was found to be very poor comparatively. These are the students who did not benefit from the STEM project. The learning and performance of the girls were notably better when the project supported them through extra classes compared to now. There were significant improvements after the girls began attending extra classes. Moreover, the girls became more confident and were no longer shy about asking their teacher questions." (KII with community stakeholders)

Perhaps due to the contextual worsening of education outcomes (see [Section 4.5](#)), IE case study research suggests that the project was not able to support sustained improvements in girls' education overall; with several mentions of girls having failed SEE and SLC examinations. Poor performance in examinations continued to be reported as a barrier to girls' transition to higher education, and girls reportedly continue to face significant challenges, especially in maths. Here, respondents seem to suggest that the support provided by the project did not lead to a learning environment where the low starting point of students, especially in certain subjects, could be addressed.

"Compared to other subjects, most students failed in Maths. Despite our efforts, the improvement in Maths grades wasn't as noticeable as in other subjects." (KII with IP)

IE case study research indicates that more could have also been done to increase ownership of project activities at the school level. For example, one teacher reported that the project supported them to use more engaging methods, such as groupwork, but that this was no longer a focus at the school level. As pointed out by an IP:

"We had compensated the teachers for taking extra classes, but as soon as the project phased out they also stopped teaching extra classes voluntarily. This is what did not work. It is actually, the teachers did not take ownership of the club neither [did the] school take it as its responsibility." (KII with IP)

4.4. What were the unexpected or unintended results from the STEM II Project?

There were not many unexpected results mentioned in evaluation reports or IE case study research. Some IE research participants described spillover effects of the project and saw it as having improved quality of learning at the school level, led to broader gender norm change in the household, and supported peer learning on academic and life skills. There were reports of the replication of STEM II activities, especially Girls' Clubs and self-defence training, on the part of local government, after the end of project implementation.

IE case study research also showed evidence of some negative unintended results. Some respondents perceived the project targeting as having been unfair, especially as it was seen to exclude boys. Other IE case study research respondents reported that the project was not able to accommodate the demand for learning materials or vocational training in project communities. This unmet demand and criteria used to prioritise support may also have contributed to perceptions of unfairness.

4.4.1. Positive unintended effects

No positive unintended effects emerged from the review of STEM II documents, but IE research highlighted various unexpected project results.

Spillover effects of the project were mentioned in the context of different interventions. According to one teacher, the project was able to benefit not just its direct participants, but also the broader school environment, project stakeholders and students indirectly involved. Changes in the learning environment engendered by the project were seen as leading to improved school performance and experience of education at the school level – including among children not directly reached by the project.

Direct project participants also reportedly **shared what they learned from the project with their peers**: this was mentioned in the case of self-defence, life skills and practical skills (such as pad making), and academic skills gained through the project. This included sharing what they learned with boys in their class. In some cases, girls were able to monetise these skills, for instance selling pads or working as tutors for other students. One Country Office (CO) team member reflected on the fact that girls with successful businesses were also able to hire other girls in their community.

Some **changes in household dynamics were also reported**. Namely, one respondent highlighted that the project unexpectedly was able to change gender norms in the household and support greater equality between boys and girls at the family level. However, achieving sustained gender norm change was highlighted as a remaining limitation by several other respondents, as highlighted above.

Self-defence classes were another area where results surpassed initial plans, to the point that activities have since been continued by government partners. These classes were included as an add-on to existing Girls' Clubs activities in response to harassment cases identified through monitoring visits. Though not central to the project's implementation plans, they were seen by several respondents as a key strength of the project, to the point that the local government decided to replicate the training following the end of STEM II activities. This was not the only mentioned case of STEM II activities being replicated. Another case mentioned by IE case study respondents relates to girls from one of the Girls' Clubs who formed their own group and opened an NGO following the project.

4.4.2. Negative unintended effects

Mentions of negative unintended effects were more frequent in both evaluation reports and IE case study research. These mostly concerned gender dynamics and the perceived exclusion of boys. It was highlighted by several case study respondents that boys face important barriers to their education in this context, especially linked to the need to pursue income-generation activities, migration to India, and low motivation to go to school. At endline, it had already been highlighted that there were boys in the community who would have needed support; more so than relatively well-off girls who were being supported by STEM II. Primary research strongly confirmed this perception. For example, one government respondent commented on boys' worsening situation, including because of increased drug use. According to several project stakeholders, boys would have wanted to be included in extra-curricular clubs but were not able to participate. Some teachers requested additional classes for boys, as reportedly girls were outperforming them. One community stakeholder also highlighted that vocational training would have been especially helpful for boys and allowed them to pursue more profitable careers. For example, as mentioned by a respondent:

"I noticed boys increasingly dropping out of school. In terms of boys, they are often easily convinced by their friends to go to India to work. Boys also felt proud if they can earn money at a young age rather than attending school." (KII with community stakeholder)

Other perceptions of unfairness emerged from respondent interviews. For example, some students who came from low-income families and would have also required support, reportedly did not receive school materials from the project. Similarly, the number of girls who applied for vocational training was higher than could be enrolled; this may have also contributed to perceptions of unfairness. Others mentioned that the project should have focused on lower grades, as well as higher grades, which would have increased its impact across the school system.

IE case study research and secondary data highlighted that, while there were some shifts in housework responsibilities, the underlying gender norms did not change. According to the endline evaluation report, while girls benefited from reduced household chores, the responsibility for these shifted mostly to mothers and other female family members; thereby indicating that the underlying gender barrier did not change. The report mentioned that traditional gender roles are still a major social structure that continue to affect project communities. IE case study data confirmed the challenges in shifting traditional gender norms, including in terms of household dynamics.

4.5. To what extent and how did external contextual factors influence the STEM II project's performance?

Contextual factors supporting implementation included alignment with local government priorities, which participated in monitoring activities and continued self-defence and sanitary pad distribution following STEM II's end. Other projects focusing on education were active in project localities and could have supported similar goals to STEM II, also indicating a supportive context.

STEM II also faced important contextual barriers. The Covid-19 pandemic led to a worsening in girls' learning, motivation to learn, and household incomes, which were reflected strongly in IE case study research. School closures in March 2020 affected the final year of implementation and STEM II's close-out phase. High poverty levels and limited economic opportunities in project areas limited transition prospects before and during Covid-19. In terms of learning, improvements in teaching quality were severely constrained by school conditions, including large classroom sizes and limited monitoring and coaching activities. Social norms such as early marriage continued to be prevalent in the target communities. Political tensions, elections and government reviews of their education plans hindered project activities, while local government budgets for school infrastructure continued to be low.

4.5.1. Supportive factors

Limited supportive factors were identified in IE research and in project evaluations. There was mixed evidence of the project's collaboration with government. While some respondents saw limited direct work with government as being a project limitation (see [Section 4.6](#)), others, mostly from IP organisations, highlighted that the project worked in a context of a supportive local government overall. This included support for, and participation in monitoring activities on the part of local authorities. It is important to note that some STEM II activities, such as self-defence classes and the distribution of sanitary pads, were, in fact, continued by government following the project's end. While there was one mention of support to STEM II from a political campaign, the political environment did, nonetheless, pose some challenges (see [Section 4.5.2](#)).

Another potentially supportive contextual factor, although not explicitly mentioned as such by IE research respondents, was the presence of other education programmes in the area. One IE research participant specifically mentioned USAID's Early Grade Reading Programme, as well as JICA and World Vision programmes more generally. It is unclear from the data whether these interventions targeted the same project schools as STEM II.

4.5.2. Hindering factors

Contextual factors that limited project results were far more numerous and mentioned in both project reports and IE case study research.

A major challenge was linked to Covid-19. Schools were closed due to Covid-19 between March and September 2020, for a total of 28 weeks. The endline evaluation report – due to its timing – discussed extensively Covid-19's impact on learning outcomes, due to the lengthy school closures that resulted. Covid-19 not only hindered the project's learning results, but also the extent to which the project was able to follow-up with schools, conduct observations and results in an objective way. The project's reliance on self-reporting at a crucial moment in the implementation life-cycle resulted in limited evidence and likely biases in the project results at endline. The STEM II project aligned with the Nepali government response to the pandemic through the provision of online classes. As reported by the WHO (2020), the government's transition to remote learning was largely unsuccessful; particularly in rural areas due to limited digital access. This was found to lead to a widening in the gaps in learning opportunities across socio-economic groups.²³ Other project activities in the period included radio programming, training for teachers for the post-school closures period, and rapid telephone check-ins with girls to assess their health, wellbeing, and life goals. In practice, there were numerous challenges that the project was not always able to address. For instance, student access to smartphones was limited, according to both project documentation and IE case study research. Respondents also mentioned teachers' limited skills in employing technology successfully. In terms of timing, it is also important to note that the pandemic hit as the project was entering its final phase of

²³ https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/nepal-documents/novel-coronavirus/who-nepal-sitrep/who-nepal-sitrep-Covid-19-20apr2020.pdf?sfvrsn=c788bf96_2

implementation, leading to an early halting of lessons. Ultimately, there were considerable learning losses, a decrease in study time and lower motivation among girls as a result of Covid-19 ([Tetra Tech, 2022](#)).

A Covid-related effect in the longer-term was the government policy allowing all students to progress to the next grade without taking exams. According to some IE research respondents, this led to a loss of interest in education and lower motivation to study. According to other respondents, automatically passing to the next grade affected overall school performance and learning levels: coupled with school closures and limited strategies for continued lesson provision in the period, this led to a worsening in reading and writing skills. The endline evaluation report also found that Covid-19 had affected or was likely to affect girls' future aspirations linked to studies or work. This was because of two main factors: (1) concerns about the financial hardships faced by their families; and (2) losing interest in education after having been out of school for a long time.

Another contextual challenge was the economic situation in project communities, with high levels of poverty affecting households reached by the project. Poverty affects both the direct, immediate costs of education, as well as girls' aspirations and opportunities for the future. The midline evaluation report found an increase among households that reported being unable to meet basic needs, affected by poor agricultural years in the 2017-18 period. The situation continued to worsen in the post-Covid period, as evidenced in IE case study research.

While one primary research respondent reported that the cost of education is no longer an issue due to the Federal Government's Free and Compulsory Education Act, IE case study research clearly shows this barrier is persistent and prevalent, and influences learning and transition in different ways. Due to limited employment prospects in their areas, many young people choose to migrate abroad, often ending up at risk of exploitation. Migration also affects household dynamics, as girls whose caregivers are working abroad are reportedly less supported in their education and face additional challenges. Another direct effect of poverty concerns girls' commitments inside and outside the home. For example, it was reported by caregivers that girls' attendance continued to be affected by seasonal patterns and farming needs. For several respondents, the project made important strides in caregiver awareness raising, but more efforts – including practical and economic support – are needed. For example, as highlighted by one caregiver:

“My daughter is also not studying. She completed Grade 12, but we couldn't afford to send her out of the village for a bachelor's degree due to our weak financial background. So, she is just staying at home.” (FGD with caregivers)

The economic context and employment opportunities also directly affected the effectiveness of interventions with OOS girls. Several respondents shared that girls who trained in embroidery or as beauticians were not able to start their own business or find work. This could be linked to low demand for this type of business in girls' communities.

An underlying and very strong barrier mentioned by IE case study research respondents is the **low quality of schools, in terms of teacher capacities, motivation and interest, as well as limited resources and infrastructure**, particularly in government schools. Large classroom sizes, with classes of up to 100 students, was a major barrier to implementing student-centred methods in the classroom. In terms of follow-up and support, one respondent reported limited interest in monitoring students' performance, and perhaps linked to this, a worsening quality of education. It was also reported that the government education curriculum does not encourage the use of the teaching techniques advocated by the project; further alignment with government curricula and more engagement with education policymakers could have been more effective (see [Section 4.6](#)). Other barriers to teaching quality include persistently low budgets for infrastructure. The Nepali Government allocated less than 1% of the education budget to capital expenditure between 2011/12 and 2019/20, indicating limited direct funding for school facilities and resources.²⁴ This may explain the infrastructure issues reported in IE case study research. Despite some improvements, the midline evaluation highlighted considerable infrastructure challenges, such as poor toilet facilities, lack of running water and lack of disposal facilities for sanitary pads. In the same report, one project staff member shared that schools struggle to replace or repair damaged facilities.

Stigma and social norms continued to affect girls even during (and after) project implementation. This particularly affected girls from marginalised social groups. For example, several IE case study research respondents mentioned social stigma relayed to girls returning to school after a certain age, often leading to them being mocked within their communities. A social and cultural norm that continued to affect girls' education and transition pathways both during and after the project was **early marriage**. Child marriage is a widespread issue in Nepal. In 2019, about 33% of girls married before the age of 18, of which 8% married before the age of 15, and this percentage is higher in rural areas.²⁵ Married girls are ten times more likely to not be in school than their peers, according to UNICEF (2017).²⁶ A key stage for girls dropping out of school due to marriage is in Grades 10 and 11, particularly for girls who do not pass the SEE

²⁴ See: <https://www.unicef.org/nepal/media/13271/file/Education%20-%20Budget%20Brief.pdf>

²⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/nepal/media/16206/file/Nepal%20MICS%20Statistical%20Snapshot%20-%20Child%20Marriage.pdf>

²⁶ <https://www.unicef.org/nepal/media/401/file/Ending%20Child%20Marriage%20in%20Nepal.pdf>

exam. At midline, the evaluation found some signs of positive attitudes towards early marriage; parents reported that an appropriate age for marriage would be around 22 years old, higher than the legal age of 20. At endline, less than 10% of sampled caregivers would have wanted their daughters to get married. Despite this, IE case study research respondents shared that drop-out in Grades 10 or 11 continues to be an issue for some girls. Married girls particularly faced strong stigma that prevented re-entry into education. A lack of support from husbands or in-laws strongly limited prospects for girls continuing their education. However, it was also reported that some girls continued studying after marriage, with some indication that the acceptability of this type of pathway may have increased due to the project's awareness raising activities. As shared by one girl who took part in the IE case study research:

"I left school as I got married and after marriage my new family believed that girls should not study in schools. But despite that I completed my school level studies shortly after my marriage and then recently also passed my +2 exams (high-school level)." (FGD with OOS girls)

While some IE case study research respondents praised local government support for STEM II activities, others described **political tensions as affecting implementation**. SMCs and PTAs were described by some respondents as particularly politicised groups, which could lead to conflicts in school driven by political interest. Delays in obtaining approvals from local government were reported by another respondent, although reasons for this were unclear. IP and CO respondents spoke of political instability in project areas, which limited group activities during electoral periods. Reportedly, local government was more supportive of STEM II activities when infrastructure was provided from the project budget, as they had not allocated funding for infrastructure improvements. Other challenges in working closely with government included the long amount of time needed for the development of local government education plans, due to recent elections; and frequent changes in government officials and bureaucracy. Closer collaboration with local government could have been beneficial, especially in joint monitoring, managing school operations, and teacher training.

4.6. What were the implementation factors behind the STEM II Project's success or lack of success?

Positive implementation factors include close collaboration with schools and communities. This was made possible by active engagement from the project team, as well as motivation at the local level stemming from performance-based incentives linked to project targets. Another supportive strategy was hiring project staff from marginalised groups within local communities, as it led to better understanding of contextual challenges. The use of monitoring data for adaptive management allowed for course-correction and a greater involvement of marginalised girls.

Project implementation was constrained by various factors. First, direct engagement with government was somewhat limited by local elections and the review of local education policy. Capacity and budget constraints, coupled with the high number of schools and the remoteness of project locations, limited the hands-on support that the project team could provide. Limited technical skills, for example in teacher pedagogy, also affected the local team's capacity to support teachers during school visits. Aside from more hands-on support, STEM II could also have provided further incentives for teachers, especially considering their additional workload and time commitment resulting from project activities. While some activities were added to STEM II's design in response to needs emerging from schools and communities, some respondents would have preferred further tailoring to local needs in the project approach.

4.6.1. Supportive factors

While project evaluation reports do not highlight implementation factors that supported project results, IE case study research indicates that there were several strategies employed by the project team. First, several school and community stakeholders praised their **positive collaboration with the project**, including the determination, positive attitudes, and mindset of the implementation team. According to one community stakeholder, the successful collaboration between school leadership, teachers, and the STEM II team was crucial for the success of the project. The provision of **incentives to participating schools** was described by several respondents as a positive mechanism, particularly performance-based incentives. An example given by a community stakeholder was the construction of school toilets, which encouraged participants to achieve or over-achieve against their targets. Performance-based targets were seen as successful both when they included prizes for girls, as well as the broader school community.

IE case study research respondents mentioned the project's decision **to hire team members from the Tharu community and 'low-caste' groups targeted by the project**. Having representation of marginalised communities within the project team led to better contextualisation and understanding of the challenges faced in project localities. This was seen as supporting team members' role as social mobilisers. Respondents also pointed out that these hiring decisions translated into career progression and career opportunities for representatives of marginalised groups, which could be seen as an additional benefit of the project.

The project team **responded to trends emerging from monitoring data**. Monitoring data initially indicated limited participation of girls from the majority Tharu community, which faces stronger educational marginalisation. In response, the project took active steps to involve Tharu girls, increasing their representation from about 35-40% to approximately 60-65% of project participants. This type of adaptive management was described by CO staff as supporting a contextually appropriate intervention.

4.6.2. Hindering factors

IE case study research points to several implementation factors that limited the delivery of the project's results and its sustainability. No clear findings on this emerged from the review of project documents and evaluations.

As mentioned above, the project had **limited direct engagement with local government**, partly due to local elections. This could have negatively impacted sustainability, except for interventions such as self-defence and pad distribution. Further engagement with government could have supported greater ownership, take-up, and longer-term results. As recognised by a primary research respondent:

"If the project had proper coordination with the local government, the good practices of the project might have been owned and replicated by the local government." (KII with IP)

The project also faced **general capacity issues** – IP and CO respondents spoke about considerable time constraints and the need to cover many, often remote, schools. Another IP respondent shared that they did not have sufficient technical knowledge to provide feedback on teaching methods and pedagogy. Therefore, in their monitoring visits, they focused on tracking student and teacher attendance. The same respondent also reported that it was not always possible to follow up on or attend community meetings. These factors indicate that some information on what happened at the local level may have been lost, especially in hard-to-reach and remote areas. Project monitoring requirements may have been excessive – both in terms of the content and the quantity of data being collected – and further support should have been provided to the project team. Linked to this, complying with FM monitoring requirements and communication with various thematic experts was, at times, burdensome for the team.

A small number of IE case study research respondents discussed **budgetary issues**. One IP respondent spoke about delayed disbursement of funds for certain activities. This hindered implementation as project teams had to use their own funds and were reimbursed at a later date. Another highlighted that the project had not allocated specific resources for safeguarding, despite this being a requirement, perhaps pointing to design issues when budgets were developed.

The project could have further planned for **teacher incentives**. It was challenging for teachers to lead extra classes on Saturdays, especially if they lived far away. Financial compensation was described as too low; and while salaries are defined by the government and outside of the project's scope, more could have been done to identify other mechanisms to support their motivation; for example, by providing teaching and learning materials or a larger-scale use of performance-based incentives.

Finally, STEM II could have done more **to adapt to different schools' needs**, further prioritising activities according to their varying contexts. While the project did adapt its activities in response to needs – for example, adding Nepali classes and self-defence training – IE case study research found that further tailoring would have been helpful. For example, feedback from girls pointed to needs that were not addressed by the project, such as SRHR services in school.

4.7. Key lessons learned

1. The combination of community awareness-raising activities and targeted, long-term engagement with caregivers can support girls' regular attendance and create the necessary conditions for improved learning.

In contexts with gender norms that hinder girls' education, engagement with caregivers and communities is essential to support attendance and prioritisation of education. Social norms are challenging and time-consuming to shift, and often are not linked purely to attitudes towards education. For example, gender norms linked to housework

responsibilities are a major barrier to learning, as they limit girls' time for study. In future projects, carrying out household visits, especially among girls who have higher rates of absenteeism and poorer school performance, and longer training sessions with caregivers can be helpful. Targeted sessions on household dynamics and housework responsibilities, combined with awareness on the importance of girls' education and other harmful social norms such as early marriage, can be helpful. Sessions focusing on engagement with boys and men can support more long-term changes in gender dynamics within the household; but these processes are likely to be lengthy. Awareness raising on girls' education and early marriage should also be combined with economic interventions, as they are often linked to financial considerations. Engaging with girls' in-laws and husbands after marriage can also be helpful to encourage those who dropped out to re-enter education.

2. Improvements in teaching quality are more feasible to achieve in small group settings, outside of regular school hours, but careful consideration should be placed on who might be left out.

In the context of large classrooms, challenging school infrastructure and prescriptive government curricula, it is difficult to improve teaching quality considerably and introduce more engaging, innovative methodologies. Especially where teachers have limited pre-existing levels of capacity, they require consistent follow-up, coaching and mentoring, including through classroom observation sessions that provide feedback on pedagogical considerations. The smaller and more flexible environment of Girls' Clubs or other types of after-school sessions allows teachers to offer hands-on support to students, promote peer learning and experiment with practical and participatory teaching methods. Another advantage of Girls' Clubs, compared to regular lessons, is the girl-only environment, where girls can feel more comfortable to speak up, ask questions and learn from their peers; overcoming some of the gender barriers to participation in mixed-gender environments. Future projects can consider implementing both Girls' Clubs and Boys' Clubs, as spaces where students can take part in targeted interventions to support learning outcomes as well as gender norm change. Carrying out sessions over weekends can, however, make it difficult for children with other responsibilities in and outside the home. Future projects can consider a more flexible approach to the class schedule, and tailoring the schedule to students' needs in different schools.

3. Improvements in learning can support girls' self-esteem and confidence; this can further support learning by encouraging participation.

There is strong evidence of a positive, two-way relationship between girls' self-esteem and their numeracy and reading skills, as well as vocational skills. Interventions that focus on girls' self-esteem, self-advocacy and confidence can reinforce the learning gains achieved through other intervention types. Future projects can build on the experience of STEM II by further targeting and measuring self-esteem improvements. Activities such as Girls' Clubs, quizzes and school competitions, life skills training, SRHR and self-defence are all supportive of girls' self-esteem improvement. Future initiatives could reinforce these efforts, with further targeting of sensitive topics such as SRHR and early marriage, trying to address the root causes of complex social norms. Future initiatives could also have a greater focus on measuring changes in self-esteem and confidence resulting from these interventions, as well as further researching the link between girls' self-esteem, their aspirations, and their education outcomes.

4. Supporting transition towards paid employment and entrepreneurship requires hands-on support, including with start-up capital and tailored technical training.

Girls' transition to paid employment and sustainable business endeavours requires a combination of start-up capital and technical skills. While loan provision is helpful, repayment of the loan amounts and interest rates can be challenging for girls from very low-income backgrounds. In future projects, provision of favourable interest rates could be combined with financial education that can support repayments in the long-run. Technical and vocational training can be an effective modality to support girls who struggle academically, for whom transition into higher levels of education is particularly challenging. Vocational training should be further tailored to the economic opportunities available in the project area. Focusing on areas that require lower levels of specialisation and for which there is greater demand at local level can help support a larger number of girls. Future projects could consider carrying out further market research before deciding which professional areas to focus on. Entrepreneurship can be a profitable pathway for some girls, but requires high levels motivation, capacity and capital. Future projects could also consider partnering with local businesses to provide girls with internships or work experience programmes, allowing them to strengthen their technical skills and gain helpful practical experience.

5. Conclusions

Improvements in literacy and numeracy for IS girls

STEM II led to positive changes in girls' education, especially in terms of literacy and numeracy gains. The project was overall more successful in its support to IS girls, for whom learning targets were exceeded at midline. The combination of in-depth support through Girls' Clubs and the successful engagement of caregivers supported girls' learning improvements, providing them spaces where they could focus on their studies, learn from their peers, and reinforce challenging topics with their teachers. Teachers were able to use participatory and engaging methods outside of the formal school environment, where they were hindered by school conditions and government policy. IS girls surpassed their transition targets at midline; and IE case study research also indicates that more girls continued their education thanks to STEM II's support. Girls' improved academic performance and increased self-esteem is likely to have supported decisions to progress to higher education.

Remaining challenges in improving learning

Despite these improvements, learning levels remained low overall, with only half of girls reaching proficiency levels. Substantial challenges in learning remained, linked to limited teacher training, a challenging classroom environment, limited materials due to widespread poverty and low government investment in infrastructure and school materials. Teachers were also constrained in their ability to implement new methods learned in training, due to the government's curriculum. It is likely that the girls who benefited the most from the STEM II package of interventions, particularly the Girls' Clubs, were already performing quite well. Learning losses and economic challenges after Covid-19 pose additional challenges in the longer-term, with girls' school and exam performance reportedly decreasing due to spending a long time away from school.

Challenges in supporting Grade 10 graduates, OOS and SG girls in transition

STEM II effectively tracked and supported girls through school as evidenced by the low attrition rate and sustained transition levels at midline, compared to the comparison group. STEM II's support to OOS and SG girls was more limited both in terms of numbers reached and transition outcomes. At midline, while it is unlikely that a counterfactual scenario would have resulted in such significant increases in transition rates, about half of girls in the OOS and SG group were still categorised as not having achieved a successful transition: they did not secure employment, return to school or take part in STEM II training.

Following graduation from Grade 10, the project did not engage further with new school graduates, who would have benefited from more support following the end of their studies. Grade 10 continued to be a key moment for girls' drop-out and marriage decisions.

Girls' transition outcomes were not consistently measured throughout the project. Despite some positive stories of change emerging from IE case study research, some of the vocational training provided by the project was insufficient to support girls' business endeavours, especially in technical areas that would have required more specific expertise and in-depth training. Training in tailoring was the most aligned with the economic context and girls' interest. Only a small percentage of girls received loans; but for those who did, this type of support enabled them set up their own business. Issues with repayment following the project's end were reported.

Improvements in girls' self-esteem, aspirations and motivation

While the improvement in girls' self-esteem was not a specific objective of the project, the different types of support provided through STEM II have led to considerable improvements in this area, which can be considered a major project success. Girls' self-esteem, aspirations and motivations were all seen to have improved, and contributed to postponed marriage, increased ability to make decisions, and greater interest in continuing education. STEM II girls were also described as role models for others in the community. Caregiver and community engagement, treatment and perception of girls in the household and in school, as well as learning improvements and increased motivation among girls all contributed to girls' improved self-esteem, self-efficacy and ability to make decisions about their future.

Annex G: Case Study Report: HPA (Rwanda), Rwandan Education and Advancement Programme (REAP II)

Project Case Study Report: *Rwandan Education and Advancement Programme (REAP II)*, Health Poverty Action (HPA) (Rwanda)

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to this report

This report summarises the key findings, lessons learned and conclusions from the IE Team's case study research of the **GEC-T project Rwandan Education and Advancement Programme (REAP II)**, implemented by Health Poverty Action (HPA). The purpose of the six project case studies is to provide an in-depth examination of reported results (i.e., Outcomes and Intermediate Outcomes); how and to what extent project interventions worked well or less well, why, for which types of beneficiaries; and the influences of contextual factors and Implementing Partners' (IPs) delivery capacities. The structure of this report aligns with the evaluation sub-questions to enable the synthesis of the findings across the six case studies. The report structure also aligns with the structure of the main report to ensure that findings from the case study research complement and enrich the findings from the portfolio assessments of the GEC-T and LNGB Windows. Due to the length of time since the end of the REAP II project, which closed in 2020, this specific case study has a stronger focus on sustainability, although the main focus remains centred on assessing portfolio evaluation. Case study primary research respondents frequently reflected on the sustainability of project activities, which is an important part of their longer-term effectiveness. While sustainability is not a specific focus of the overall evaluation, this case study therefore includes longer-term considerations linked to project activities and results.

1.2. Project background

The overall objective of REAP II, implemented by HPA from April 2017 to March 2020, was to improve the life chances of the marginalised girls targeted by REAP I in 28 poor and rural schools in the Nyaruguru district of Rwanda. The project focused on supporting girls from Primary 4 (P4) to Secondary 4 (S4), encompassing upper primary and lower secondary education¹, as well as out-of-school (OOS) girls. Phase II targeted improvements in learning (literacy and numeracy) and transition.

The project targeted marginalised girls facing several barriers to their education, economic hardship, and low sexual and reproductive health awareness (resulting in poor menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and increased risk of pregnancy). In addition, both boys and girls in the target schools are also affected by poor teaching quality and limited knowledge of the language of instruction (English). Please see [Table 1](#) for an overview of the REAP II project.

Table 1: Overview of the REAP II project

Dimension	Project characteristics
Project name:	REAP II
Implementing Partner:	HPA
Funding window:	GEC-T
GEC Phase I:	REAP I
Budget:	£1.2 million
Project start/ end dates (duration):	April 2017 – March 2020
Geographical focus:	Rwanda (Nyaruguru district in Southern Province)
Beneficiary groups:	Girls in the 28 poorest performing schools (based on attendance and test scores) in rural areas of Nyaruguru district
Number of direct beneficiaries:	Girls: 7,589
Number of indirect beneficiaries:	Girls: 14,594 Boys: 14,242
Other beneficiaries:	Teachers: 252
Marginalisation focus:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 28 poorest performing schools in the Nyaruguru District (based on attendance and test scores)

¹ Rwanda's education system includes six levels in primary school (P1 to P6), four levels in lower secondary (S1 to S4), and two levels in upper secondary (S5 to S6).

Dimension	Project characteristics
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project targeted 7,589 girls in Upper Primary and Lower Secondary to receive the full learning intervention package by endline; of these, 230 girls experienced a form of physical or intellectual disability In addition, the project reached 293 girls out of school Particularly marginalised groups therein include: girls with disabilities (GWD); Young mothers or pregnant girls; girls from low-income households; girls whose parents hold negative values towards girls' education
Type of interventions:	
<i>Economic</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supported 28 schools to adopt the "Education that Pays for Itself" self-financing education model, adding business and practical skills classes to the curriculum and setting up income generating activities
<i>Infrastructure and resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distributed 7,702 textbooks Improved school facilities for girls in phase 1, including 14 separate, lockable girls' changing rooms and 30 ECOSAN toilets
<i>Teacher training and support</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trained 252 teachers across 28 schools in learner-centred and gender-responsive teaching methods
<i>Community Based Awareness, Attitudes and Behaviour</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worked with 56 community health workers and youth corners to offer family planning services, alongside behaviour change communication
<i>Extra-Curricular Activity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established 75 community after-school study groups, including 28 after-school remedial learning and tutorial classes for girls whose performance on learning outcomes was low, or who had dropped out
<i>School Management and Governance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training for school leadership (including for 270 parent-teacher association members) to develop, monitor and report on school improvement plans (SIPs) Worked with the government to promote a girls' education policy
<i>Empowerment & Self Esteem</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trained 75 Girls' Club leaders
Total number of separate cohorts (LNGB only):	N/A
Baseline data collection (report) dates:	December 2017 – January 2018 (April 2018)
Midline data collection (report) dates:	February – April 2019 (July 2019)
Endline data collection (report) dates:	N/A

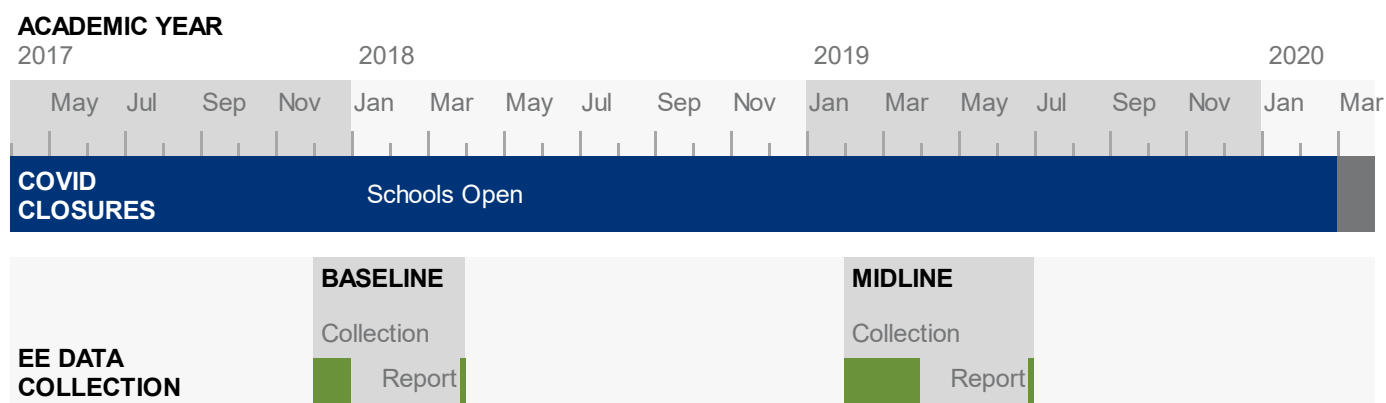
Where the project worked

REAP II worked in 28 highly marginalised schools in Nyaruguru District, one of the poorest districts in Rwanda. Please see [Figure 1](#) for a map of project locations. The project identified the poorest performing schools based on attendance and test scores. Intervention schools were selected in close cooperation with government stakeholders and other NGOs, seeking to provide services where other education interventions did not exist. **Girls attending those schools were assumed to experience one or multiple forms of marginalisation.**

Figure 1: Map of REAP II project intervention areas**External Evaluation: two rounds conducted (baseline, endline)**

Baseline data was collected in December 2017, with the report published in April 2018. Data for the midline evaluation was collected between February and March 2019, and the evaluation report was published in July 2019 as shown in [Figure 2](#). The project ended during Covid-19, and an endline was not carried out due to the pandemic.

This project was shortlisted for half-achieving its targets.

Figure 2: REAP II project and evaluation timeline

Notes: (1) the whole frame indicates contractual project start and end dates (April 2017 to March 2020). In practice, REAP II finished field activity in March 2020. (2) During the 2020 school year, Rwanda adjusted the start dates of the academic year. The dates referenced here correspond to the pre-Covid-19 calendar.

2. What outcomes did the project deliver?

2.1. Review of changes to Logframe outcome indicators

External evaluation data was collected by external evaluators at baseline (December 2017 to January 2018) and midline (February to April 2019). The endline evaluation was initially planned for November 2019. However, the endline evaluation was not conducted as planned, and then dropped as the project concluded in March 2020, just as the Covid-19 pandemic began. The pandemic significantly disrupted the project timeline and activities, with schools remaining closed from March 2020 to November 2020, making it impossible to carry out the endline evaluation as originally planned.

A mixed-methods approach, grounded in a longitudinal framework, was employed to track and measure the same girls across data collection rounds between the baseline and midline evaluations. To measure each of the outcomes, data were collected from the recontacted² sample of girls considering a group of girls from treated schools and comparison schools.

Below, the changes to Logframe outcome indicators are explained in detail.

2.1.1. Review of changes to the Learning Outcome indicator

Literacy and numeracy outcomes were assessed at baseline and midline using the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Secondary Grade Reading Assessment (SeGRA) for Kinyarwanda and English literacy; and the Early Grade Math Assessment (EGMA) and Secondary Grade Math Assessment (SeGMA) for numeracy.

For Kinyarwanda and English literacy, the EGRA test included five subtasks: (1) letter naming, (2) familiar word reading, (3) invented word reading, (4) Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) or short passage reading, and (5) reading comprehension; and the SeGRA test included three subtasks: (1) Advanced Reading Comprehension 1, (2) Advanced Reading Comprehension 2, and (3) Short Essay Construction (the latter only for Kinyarwanda). To ensure subtasks overlap for girls transitioning from primary to secondary, the EGRA test included both Advanced Reading Comprehension 1 and 2 from SeGRA, while the SeGRA assessment included ORF or short passage reading.

To assess progress for literacy, the evaluation focused only on overlapping subtasks to calculate aggregate scores that could be compared across evaluations. Of the three overlapping subtasks taken by all girls, regardless of grade level, the aggregate score included only ORF³ and Advanced Reading Comprehension 1^{4,5}. The percentage correct scores for both subtasks were averaged and weighted equally to generate an overall Kinyarwanda and English aggregate literacy score.

For numeracy, the EGMA test assessed six subtasks: (1) number identification, (2) quantity discrimination, (3) missing numbers, (4) word problems, (5) addition and subtraction, (6) multiplication and division; while the SeGMA included two subtasks: (1) longer multiplications of integers and fractions, divisions, and order of operations problems; and (2) fraction addition, area, and volume problems, equations with unknowns, and simultaneous equations.⁶ Similarly, to ensure subtasks overlap for girls progressing from primary to secondary, the EGMA assessment at midline included both advanced tasks included in SeGMA⁷, while the SeGMA assessment at midline included the multiplication and division task from the EGMA.

To assess progress for numeracy, the original plan was to estimate the aggregate score based on “the single subtask that overlapped”⁸ between periods on EGMA and SeGMA: longer multiplications of integers and fractions, divisions, and order of operations problems.⁹ However, since many girls scored 0% on this subtask, the External Evaluator adopted a standardised scoring approach¹⁰. This method allowed for a more accurate assessment of changes in numeracy across all the assessed subtasks, including those from EGMA.

These assessments were administered to girls from P4 through to S4, as well as OOS girls at baseline. Between baseline and midline improvements in learning outcomes were assessed through difference in standard deviations

² In instances where recontacting sufficient participants proved challenging, new girls were included in these data collection phases to maintain the integrity of the evaluations.

³ ORF, which is measured in words per minute was capped at 100wpm, as per GEC FM guidance.

⁴ The comprehension subtask was calculated based on the maximum total of 10 marks.

⁵ The midline report contradicts itself in the number of overlapping subtasks described throughout.

⁶ The SeGMA test at baseline also included a subtask named Sophisticated Word problems. This was excluded from Midline assessment without explanation.

⁷ The EGMA test at baseline only included the first advanced task.

⁸ A closer look into the baseline and midline report shows that this is not the only overlapping subtask between periods.

⁹ This subtask was common in EGMA and SeGMA (subtask 6 for EGMA and 1 in SeGMA)

¹⁰ This method converted raw scores across the eight numeracy subtasks into standardised scores by calculating how many standard deviations a participant's score is from the mean.

compared to a comparison group. The methodology used was a longitudinal Difference-in-Difference (DiD). *Table 2* below summarises these changes in measurement to learning outcomes.

Table 2: Summary of changes in measurement to learning outcomes

Parameters	Literacy		Numeracy	
Evaluation round	BL	ML	BL	ML
Instrument	EGRA/ SeGRA	EGRA/ SeGRA	EGMA/SEGMA	EGMA/SEGMA
Language assessed	English, Kinyarwanda	English, Kinyarwanda	—	—
Comparison group	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Grades assessed (as per baseline grade)	P4 – S4 & OOS	P4 – S4 & OOS	P4 – S4 & OOS	P4 – S4 & OOS
Grade assessed (as per expected grade progression)	P4 – S4 & OOS	P5 – S5 & OOS	P4 – S4 & OOS	P5 – S5 and OOS
Sample of girls	IS & OOS	IS & OOS	IS & OOS	IS & OOS
Sample size	T:431 C: 422	T:383 ¹ C:454 ²	T:431 C: 422	T:383 ¹ C:454 ²
Planned data collection	Nov 2017	Nov 2018	Nov 2017	Nov 2018
Actual data collection	Dec 2017- Jan 2018	Feb- April 2019	Dec 2017- Jan 2018	Feb- April 2019
Publication date of the evaluation report	April 2018	July 2019	April 2018	July 2019

Note: ¹Attrition rate reported in the external evaluation 19.65% (323 girls reported recontacted) ²Attrition rate reported in the external evaluation 32.83% (270 girls reported recontacted)

2.1.2. Review of changes to the Transition Outcome indicator

The transition outcome aimed to measure how successfully project girls progressed through different stages of education, including completing primary and secondary school (or re-enrolling school), as well as enrolling into TVET and entering employment. This included acquiring income-generating skills through vocational training or earning income from employment or self-employment when they reach the legal working age of 16.

This outcome was measured through surveys conducted with both girls and their household at two time points: baseline and midline. The baseline survey took place in December of 2017, while the midline assessment took place in February 2019, aligning with the start of a new academic calendar. In Rwanda, at the time of these evaluations, the academic year used to run from January to November. As two new academic years began between the baseline and midline in Rwanda, the midline data captured two transition rates retrospectively – they asked girls if they moved forward or repeated a grade in the 2018 academic year and in the 2019 academic year.¹¹ The report refers to these rates as Midline 1 (ML1) and Midline 2 (ML2).

Table 3 below outlines the pathways for successful transitions in ML1 and ML2, detailing the criteria for a successful transition at each grade level in each evaluation round.

Table 3: Expected transition levels by grade in each round of evaluation

BL (2017)	ML1 (2018)	ML2 (2019)
P4	P5	P6
P5	P6	S1
P6	S1	S2
S1	S2	S3
S2	S3	S4
S3	S4, TVET or work	S5, TVET or work
S4	S5	S6

¹¹ Transition stages were recorded through the household survey and girls' survey by asking participants what they or their child were doing in 2017, 2018, and 2019, and triangulating across multiple surveys to correct for recall bias. Girls were given a score of one (1) if they transitioned successfully or zero (0) if they did not by transition pathway and in an overall transition score. This final score is treated as the equivalent to the first difference in the DID model.

BL (2017)	ML1 (2018)	ML2 (2019)
OOS	School (any grade), TVET or work	School (any grade), TVET or work

Between the baseline and midline evaluation, a before-and-after estimation was used to measure *yearly* transition rates for the treatment group, with transition rates for the comparison group also reported. Additionally, a Difference-in-Difference was conducted for transition rates across three periods: 2016-2017; 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. The first period (2016-2017) serves as a baseline, as it precedes the start of the project. [Table 4](#) summarises these changes in measurement of transition.

Table 4: Summary of changes to transition

Parameters	Transition rate		
	BL	ML1	ML2
Instrument	HH and girls survey	HH and girls survey	HH and girls survey
Comparison group	Yes	Yes	Yes
Grades assessed (as per baseline grade)	P4 – S4 & OOS	P4 – S4 & OOS	P4 – S4 & OOS
Grade assessed (as per grade progression)	P4 – S4 & OOS	P5 – S5 and OOS	P6 – S6 and OOS
Sample of girls	IS & OOS	IS & OOS	IS & OOS
Sample size	T:415 C: 414	T:259 C:310 ¹	T:259 C:310 ¹
Planned data collection dates	Nov 2017	Nov 2018	
Actual data collection dates	Dec 2017- Jan 2018	Feb- April 2019	
Publication date of the evaluation report	April 2018	July 2019	

Note: Average attrition rate for treated and comparison groups 28%

2.2. Outcome results delivered

2.2.1. Learning Outcomes

Baseline to Midline

Learning outcomes between baseline and midline were measured for English and Kinyarwanda language skills using a DiD methodology. To evaluate the impact of the intervention, the evaluation adopted a target of 0.25 standard deviation improvement in learning outcomes, consistent with the standard target applied across the GEC-T projects (0.25 SD per academic year). This target was converted into an equivalent goal of achieving 5.1% higher aggregate literacy score compared to the comparison group, measured based on the DiD estimator. This information is presented in [Table 5](#).

For numeracy, the target remained in standard deviations, reflecting the change in methodology outlined in the previous section.

Considering the selection of overlapping subtasks and the methodological adjustments, the results for each of the learning assessments are as follows. For English literacy, the treatment group scored 29.2% at baseline, while the comparison group scored slightly higher at 31.4%. By midline, the treatment group demonstrated a significant improvement of 12 percentage points, bringing their total to 41.2%. In contrast, the comparison group improved at a lower rate, achieving a score of 39.2%. The Difference-in-Differences estimation indicated a 3.8% (percentage points) improvement in English literacy for the treatment group, over and above the comparison group, which represents 72% of the project's target. The primary driver of this progress was the gain in ORF, with girls in the treatment group reading **an average of six additional words per minute than girls in the comparison group**. The second evaluated subtask, Advanced Reading Comprehension 1, showed a modest increase of 4.1% for the treatment group. Notably, these two subtasks were the only ones with significant results out of all the subtasks evaluated.

The increase in English literacy scores was not uniform across all educational levels, though all in-school girls showed improvement from baseline to midline. The group with the lowest performance was the OOS girls, which the

project struggled to engage¹². The project also presented a Difference-in-Differences estimator for each grade. This analysis indicates that, although all grades improved since baseline, not all showed greater improvement than the comparison group. Specifically, S2 and S4 showed a negative Difference-in-Differences result. The highest increases were driven by S1 and S3. In general terms, results in secondary school were mixed, while primary school experienced a modest but consistent improvement across all grades.

In Kinyarwanda literacy, the scores for both the treatment and comparison groups remained nearly unchanged from baseline to midline. The treatment group's score stayed at 66% (66.5% at baseline to 66.6% at midline) showing a 0.06 percentage points increase, while the comparison group saw a slight improvement of 2.1 percentage points reaching a score of 67.7%. The estimated DiD gives a result of -0.4%. As with English literacy, the largest decrease between periods was exhibited by girls who were out of school in the treatment group at baseline. The external evaluation report highlighted that this is likely because English is the language of instruction, and while girls continue to speak Kinyarwanda at home, they have fewer opportunities to read or write Kinyarwanda as they progress in school.

Numeracy results were mixed. At baseline, both the treatment and comparison groups had a standardised score of 0.0, serving as the reference point for subsequent measurements.¹³ This means that improvements in scores are measured relative to the baseline, and an increase in standard deviations (SD) indicates how much better the groups performed compared to this initial state. By midline, the treatment group's standardised score improved to 0.41 standard deviations, while the comparison group's score increased to 0.30 standard deviations, yielding a DiD of 0.14 SD. Although this was not statistically significant, it represents progress towards the target, achieving 54.4% of the expected improvement.

Progression in numeracy was compared across different grades and subtasks, with both treatment and comparison groups outperforming each other in various grades, though without a consistent pattern. From baseline to midline, all grades except S4 showed improvement; however, when the DiD is analysed by grade, the results are mixed, with P4, P6, S3, and S4 showing negative estimators. Notably, the most significant improvement in numeracy DiD was observed among out-of-school girls. This increase was driven by the treatment group, who demonstrated substantial progress between baseline and midline, albeit not being engaged in learning activities.

In terms of specific subtasks across all grades, treatment girls showed advancements in number identification and quantity discrimination. However, results indicated a lack of skills in pattern recognition, as evidenced by the missing numbers and word problems tasks, where performance remained largely unchanged since baseline. This suggests that while some improvements in numeracy were present, they were uneven and did not consistently favour the treatment group across all grades.

Table 5: Learning scores at baseline and midline in treatment and comparison groups

		Parameters	English Literacy		Kinyarwanda Literacy		Numeracy	
			BL	ML	BL	ML	BL	ML
Overall impact IS and OOS girls	Results by group	Instrument	EGRA /SeGRA	EGRA /SeGRA	EGRA /SeGRA	EGRA /SeGRA	EGMA /SeGMA	EGMA /SeGMA
		Treated	29.23%	41.21%	66.50%	66.56%	0 SD	0.41 SD
		Comparison	31.43%	39.18%	65.59%	67.70%	0 SD	0.30 SD
	Baseline to Midline	Results DiD	—	3.77%* ¹	—	-0.44%	—	0.136 SD
		Target (SD)	—	0.25	—	0.25	—	0.25
		Target (DiD)	—	5.27%	—	4.4%	—	—
		Achievement against target	—	72.00%	—	0.00%	—	54.50%
		FM's RAG rating	—	Amber	—	Amber	—	Amber

Note: Difference coefficients with three asterisks are significant at the 99% confidence level (P-value lower than 0.01=1%), two asterisks are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level (P-value lower than 0.05 = 5%). Those with one asterisk are statistically significant at the 90% level (P-value lower than 0.1 = 10%). ¹ The estimation done by the FM indicates 3.79%.

¹² The report indicates that the treatment group OOS only included seven girls, and the comparison included 14. Beside the small sample size, a higher proportion of girls from the comparison group (50%) re-enrol in the school than in the treated group (28%). Additionally, none of the 7 girls in the treatment group who were out of school at baseline (0%) participated in Community Study Groups or Remedial lessons.

¹³ In subsequent evaluations, if a group's score increases, it would be represented as a positive standardised score (indicating an improvement relative to the baseline). Conversely, a decrease in score would result in a negative standardised score (indicating a decline).

Conclusions on learning

REAP II did not demonstrate any significant impact on Kinyarwanda literacy or in numeracy outcomes. Positive results were observed exclusively in English literacy; however, the project fell short of its target of a 5.3% improvement in aggregate literacy scores. The reported improvement was based on only two subtasks – ORF and Advanced Reading Comprehension 1 – out of the eight subtasks assessed.

Subtask-level analysis shows that ORF and Advanced Reading Comprehension 1 were the only ones with positive and statistically significant results. The remaining six subtasks showed no significant changes, raising concerns about the robustness and representativeness of the aggregated literacy score as a metric for overall impact. Results were primarily driven by ORF, suggesting that improvements in English literacy were heavily concentrated in this one area. This reliance on the “positive subtasks” suggests that the progress against the target was overestimated (at 72%) and still not met. The improvements in English literacy were also unevenly distributed across participants. Gains were mainly concentrated in two grades, S1 and S3, with modest improvements in the primary grades. Furthermore, while the results for English literacy were statistically significant at the 90% confidence level, this indicates that the differences, while noteworthy, may lack robustness to conclude lasting impact.¹⁴ For OOS girls, the project’s limited engagement with them is particularly concerning. Due to a very small sample size of this group and the project being unable to include them meaningfully in learning activities, their learning scores cannot be attributed to programmatic interventions. As such, we conclude that the project struggled to work with this vulnerable group.

Finally, the absence of endline data due to Covid-19 restrictions severely limits the ability to assess the sustainability of these gains over time. This data gap prevents a thorough understanding of whether the positive outcomes achieved at midline are enduring or merely transient, and whether the project was able to show positive results regarding numeracy and Kinyarwanda reading at a subsequent round.

2.2.2. Transition Outcomes

Baseline to ML1 and ML2

Transition outcomes were measured at baseline and retrospectively for two academic years during the midline (referred to as ML1 and ML2),¹⁵ which was calculated but not used to assess project achievements. Instead, a before-after target was used. The target for each academic year was set at an 8% increase from the baseline transition rate.

At baseline, the transition rate from the 2016 to the 2017 academic year was 81% for both the treatment and comparison groups. The DiD estimation indicates that there is no significant difference between the transition of girls in the treatment and comparison groups from 2016 to 2017.

In ML1, covering girls’ transition from the 2017 to 2018 academic year, the treatment group showed a 1% increase, achieving a transition rate of 82%. However, this was 7% short of the expected target. In contrast, the comparison group had a transition rate of 76%, meaning the treatment group had an advantage of 6 percentage points compared to the comparison group. Despite this improvement, the 2017-2018 DiD also found no statistically significant difference in the odds of successful transitions between the treatment and comparison groups.

At ML2, measuring the transition from the 2018 to 2019 academic year, the transition rate for the treatment group reached 92%, representing an 11% increase from baseline, surpassing the target by 2%. Notably, both the treatment and comparison groups achieved the same transition rate of 92% by midline, indicating that the comparison group improved more significantly in the second period. Once again, there was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and comparison groups. [Table 6](#) summarises these results.

¹⁴ A 90% confidence level suggests there is a 10% chance that the observed improvements could be due to random variation rather than the effectiveness of the intervention.

¹⁵ The project estimated the Difference-in-Differences (DID) using binary logistic regression. Instead of calculating simple differences in transition rates, the analysis estimated the odds of a girl successfully transitioning, accounting for her treatment status (whether she was in a project school or not). As a result, the interpretation of the DID cannot be expressed as a simple percentage change but rather as a change in the odds of successful transition. This approach is more suited for handling the binary nature of the outcome (successful vs. unsuccessful transition) and adjusts for changes in treatment status over time.

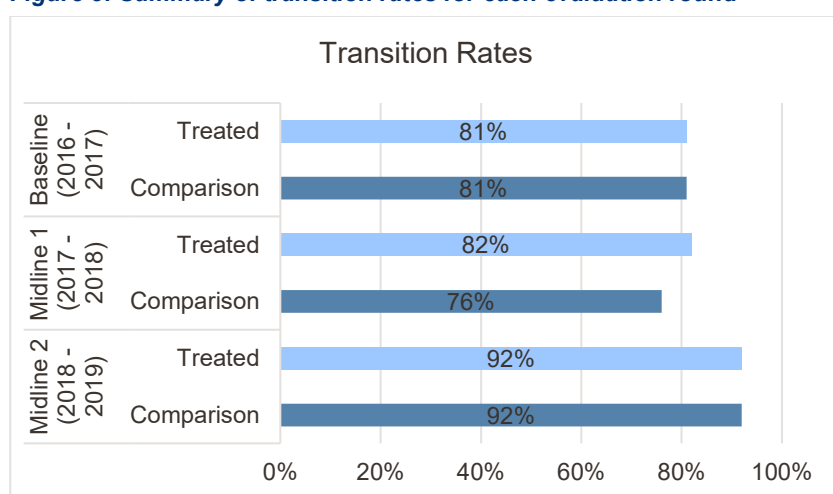
Table 6: Transition rates at baseline and in treatment and comparison groups

	Parameters	Transition rate		
		BL	ML1	ML2
Results by group	Instrument	HH and girls survey	HH and girls survey	HH and girls survey
	Treated	81%	82%	92%
	Comparison	81%	76%	92%
Baseline to midlines	Results DiD (OR) ¹	0.134 ²	0.260	0.003
	Results B&A (%)	—	1 pp	10 pp
	Target B&A (%)	—	8 pp (89%)	8 pp (90%)
	Achievement against target	—	- 7pp	2 pp
	FM's RAG rating		Data inconclusive	Data inconclusive

Note: Difference coefficients with three asterisks are significant at the 99% confidence level (P-value lower than 0.01=1%), two asterisks are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level (P-value lower than 0.05 = 5%). Those with one asterisk are statistically significant at the 90% level (P-value lower than 0.1 = 10%). ¹The results are presented as odds ratios (OR). An odds ratio reflects the likelihood of successful transition in the treatment group compared to the comparison group. An OR = 1 indicates that the odds of transitioning are the same for both groups. However, for accurate interpretation, the confidence interval must be considered. None of the three logistic estimators were statistically significant. ²This DiD logit model in BL was done against a year previous to baseline. This is 2016 – 2017.

School-based transitions were the most common pathway for girls in treatment areas, with 95% of the sample engaged in school-based transitions. In contrast, work-based transitions accounted for only 1% of the treatment sample, including 0.5% enrolled in vocational training at the time of the survey and none in either paid or unpaid employment. The highest rates of drop-out occur in secondary, in particular in S3, S4 and S5.

Overall, the midline evaluation report concluded that attending a treatment school did not significantly affect the odds of successfully transitioning between 2017 and 2018 or between 2018 and 2019. *Figure 3* summarises the transition rates for each round.

Figure 3: Summary of transition rates for each evaluation round

IE Conclusions on transition

The project did not demonstrate a positive effect on transition rates. The treatment group showed only marginal improvements compared to the comparison group, with no significant advantage in transition outcomes. Although the target was set for an 8% improvement from baseline, both groups exhibited nearly identical gains by 2019.

Based on the before-and-after estimation, the project concluded that, for ML1, transition rates increased by 1 percentage point, and for ML2, by 10 percentage points in the treated group, meaning they reached their target for the second midline. This suggests that the project may have impacted transitions more significantly in the first academic year than in the second. However, when considering the comparison group rates, this showed a 5 percentage points decline in ML1 and a 16 percentage point increase in ML2. This finding contrasts with the conclusion drawn from the before-and-after estimation, which suggests that the transition was higher for ML2. Nonetheless, none of these transition changes were statistically significant. The absence of an endline evaluation due to Covid-19 further limits the ability to assess the project's long-term impact on girls' transitions into education or employment, leaving questions about the sustainability of these outcomes.

3. What intermediate outcomes did the project deliver?

3.1. Overall project performance

Overall, there is limited evidence of project progress against its Intermediate Outcomes (IOs). It should be noted that the project only reported its results until midline, and that the case study primary research took place in 2024, several years after the end of the project in 2020. [Table 7](#) summarises progress made towards IOs, as reported by the baseline evaluation in 2018 and the midline evaluation in 2019.

The evidence available from project evaluations and case study primary research suggests that there have been improvements in girls' life-skills and in their self-esteem more broadly, as a direct result of the project. Girls were reportedly more confident to speak up and participate in class, with some improvements in learning, particularly in reading. There is limited evidence on the extent to which the project supported transition to employment; REAP II struggled to lead to changes in this area, as, despite girls' increased interest, they lacked access to materials and information on vocational training. There were some positive results at midline in addressing financial barriers in terms of school businesses and saving groups (Mother-Daughter Clubs). However, these were largely not sustained over time, as highlighted by the case study primary research. Some improvements in teaching were reported, but comparison schools performed better than treatment schools across various dimensions. There were limited changes in school attendance, which was already very high at baseline. It's possible that the positive results experienced by the comparison group may be explained by other government and non-government programmes in the comparison areas.

Table 7: Progress towards Intermediate Outcomes

FM IO	IP Indicator	Baseline	Midline
IO2: Reducing Financial barriers	IP IO Indicator: % of target girls (out-of-school girls and upper secondary) who report having improved livelihood through securing jobs/livelihoods/income as a result of completing work readiness trainings, TVET curriculum and STWT	N/A	0% (vs 10% target)
IO3: Improved teaching	IP IO Indicator: % of girls who believe their teachers create a supportive climate	49.1%	81.5% (vs 75% target)
	IP IO Indicator: % of girls who believe their lessons are engaging	42%	73.6% (vs 80% target)
	IP IO Indicator: % of girls who believe their lessons are well managed	39.2%	79.9% (vs 80% target)
	IP IO Indicator: % of lessons adopting gender responsive pedagogy through a) group discussion and participation; or b) gender sensitive teaching and learning materials; or c) use of gender sensitive language	N/A	a) 25.6% (vs 50% target) b) 2.3% (vs 50% target) c) Unclear indicator
IO6: Empowering girls	IP IO Indicator: % of girls who can give an example of using newly gained life skills in the process of transitioning into STWT, TVET or WR	N/A	65% (no target)
	IP IO Indicator: % of girls with improved life skills based on girls' self-assessment: a) planning skills; b) interpersonal skills; c) self-esteem skills.	a) 57% b) 48% c) 52%	a) 67% (vs 65%) b) 75% (vs 65%) c) 74% (vs 65%)
IO6: Attendance	IP IO Indicator: % Improvement in marginalised girls' average monthly attendance in schools throughout the life of the project (average percentage)	96.7%	97.16% (vs 97% target)
	IP IO Indicator: % of most marginalised girls (moderate to extreme hardship) with school costs reduced/ covered by other sources (ex. SB, MDC, scholarships) by at least 20%.	13%	50.9% (vs 30% target)

3.2. FM IO2: Reducing financial barriers¹⁶

FM Indicator: Changes in financial barriers that improve the chances of girls participating in learning.

Main activities: Mentorship to MDCs and school businesses so that profit from enterprises is used to support girls' access to school and maintenance of girl-friendly activities; alumni scholarships; internships in private businesses; girls' savings groups; work readiness and TVET training.

Key findings: There is limited evidence on the link between REAP II's economic interventions and girls' education outcomes. Economic interventions at school, household and girl-level faced considerable practical challenges. The focus on savings groups proved unsustainable in the context of the widespread poverty that the project targeted.

The REAP II project had a strong focus on reducing economic barriers to education, particularly by supporting income-generating activities at the school, household, and girl level. The main interventions in this area were school businesses and Income-Generating Activities, with the aim to **invest in girl-friendly school materials**; Mother-Daughter Clubs, which set up income-generating activities, among other activities; savings groups; and scholarships, Work Readiness training and 100 internships per year directly benefiting girls (and a small number of boys). There is limited evidence of these activities having directly supported girls' education outcomes. Despite improvements during the lifetime of the project, as pointed out in [Section 4](#), important practical concerns and sustainability challenges were reported by case study primary research respondents for all interventions targeting economic barriers.

At midline, **43% of marginalised girls experienced reduced school costs, or had them covered by other sources, such as scholarships, school businesses¹⁷, and Mother-Daughter Clubs** (Midline report, 2019). While indicating an important continuing financial barrier for more than half of the girls targeted, this points to several interventions having supported a large share of the girls, at least until midline. However, it should be noted that at midline, the evaluation also reports that the comparison group experienced a greater decline in schooling costs. Additionally, a lack of parental engagement and the cost of schooling were the two main reasons for girls' drop-out from school at midline. The second factor was tackled by the project but continued to present challenges.

The 'Education that Pays for Itself' model was central to the REAP II project. Schools were supported to set up different types of businesses, including stationery shops or livestock raising. The project initially reported some improvements in business profitability, with 61% of school businesses operating at a profit at midline, compared to 45% at baseline, according to the midline report. School businesses were described by IE case study primary research respondents as **supporting education outcomes in that profits were re-invested in school facilities as well as used by students to purchase learning materials**.

The project aimed to support parents to cover the indirect cost of schooling (learning materials and uniforms), which was identified as one of the main reasons girls drop out. This was achieved mostly through savings groups and Mother-Daughter Clubs. At midline, all savings groups were reported to be operational. However, as highlighted in [Section 4](#), there were important sustainability challenges reported by primary research participants, as households (and girls) struggled to save due to high levels of poverty.

There is limited evidence of changes in girls' economic activity. The midline report found that **none of the girls in the treatment sample had transitioned into paid employment or income generation**. Interestingly, the midline report also found that OOS girls would have **preferred to return to school, rather than pursue income-generating opportunities**, and that this was done out of necessity rather than preference. Overall, both in-school and out-of-school girls preferred in-school transitions.

Internships were described as successful in promoting transition to employment (see [Section 4](#)) but involved a relatively small number of girls, with a target of 100 girls per year. An important barrier mentioned in the midline report was accessing materials, such as sewing machines, which are a costly investment for girls, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. The midline report highlighted that, while girls were motivated to learn vocational skills and generate their own income, they lacked information on how to do so. **The midline report concluded that the project should review its approach to supporting transition to employment**. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and project closure happening soon after, it appears that this did not take place.

¹⁶ IP IO: Improve the economic empowerment of marginalised girls and ensure the most vulnerable can off-set or cover the associated costs of attending school.

¹⁷ Through the 'Education that Pays for Itself' model, schools taking part in the project were supported to generate an income that could be used for educational quality and support to girls. Some examples of school businesses include banana plantations, animal farming, apiculture.

3.3. FM IO3: Improved teaching¹⁸

FM Indicator: Improvements in the quality and effectiveness of teaching, facilitation, and support to learning.

Main activities: Teacher training on child- and gender-sensitive methods; community-after-school groups.

Key findings: REAP II did not meet all its targets relating to teacher quality improvements. The midline report points to continuing challenges in supporting learning through improved teaching, particularly in English – for which national curriculum expectations do not match teacher or students' abilities. Midline data also points to limitations in employing gender-responsive practices. Comparison schoolteachers performed better in terms of gender responsiveness as well as having better planned and more interactive lessons. Secondary and case study primary research both pointed to issues with teacher training in practice and remaining unmet needs among teachers.

There is mixed evidence on changes in teaching quality resulting from the project's activities. REAP II aimed to train 252 teachers in gender-sensitive pedagogy, child-responsive teaching practices, and improved instructional approaches to teach literacy and numeracy. Overall, the midline evaluation report found that the project led to improvements in classroom management, but that project targets for supportive climate and cognitive activation¹⁹ were not met. It also reports improvements in girls' perception of their teachers and lessons. The project did not meet its targets (50% of lessons) for the adoption of gender-responsive teaching practices, with only 24.4% of observed lessons adopting gender-responsive practices.

The midline report found that differences in cognitive activation between periods successfully predicted improvements in English, but that classroom management and the supportive climate did not predict improvements in any learning outcomes. The report also indicated that further support to teachers would have been necessary to improve performance in written comprehension tasks, particularly in light of a challenging English language curriculum compared to teacher and student competencies in English.

Classroom observations carried out at midline indicated that comparison schools performed better than treatment schools in several areas. Teachers in comparison schools were more likely to have clear lesson plans and objectives, summarise learning objectives at the beginning of a lesson, as well as allowing time for students to support each other. Group work was more frequently used in the classroom, with more time allocated at the end of a lesson to support reflection and discussion among children. In terms of gender-responsiveness, lessons in comparison schools were more gender-responsive than treatment schools: schoolteachers in treatment schools were more likely to call on girls equally by name but were less likely to praise girls and boys equally. The midline teacher survey found that 73.8% of teachers in comparison schools had positive attitudes towards girls' education, compared to 69% in treatment schools.

As explained in [Section 4.3](#), project evaluations and the case study primary research suggest that there were challenges in teacher training. It is possible, though unclear, that teachers in comparison groups may have taken part in other interventions that improved the quality of their teaching. Some concerns about inclusive education were also raised at midline: the report found that while the project was able to improve the English literacy and numeracy levels of girls with disabilities, teachers felt they **needed more support to engage learners with cognitive or intellectual disabilities**.

¹⁸ IP IO: Improve the quality of teaching as perceived by parents and students, improvements in teachers' pedagogical practice as well as on the quality of curricula and teaching resources

¹⁹ According to the project's midline report, cognitive activation describes teaching practices that enhance students' engagement with curriculum content (Buttner et al., 2016). In cognitively activating lessons teachers encourage classroom discussion and participation, build on existing knowledge, and give students tasks within their zone of proximal development (Lipowsky et al., 2009).

3.4. FM IO6: Empowering girls²⁰

FM Indicator: Changes in girls' self-esteem, self-efficacy, confidence, and a sense of agency and empowered to make good choices for herself.

Main activities: Girls' Clubs; family planning services and behavioural change.

Key findings: Secondary research, and especially the case study primary research points to considerable changes in girls' self-esteem, confidence, ability to speak in front of others and participate in school. Improvements in reading were both a cause of, and a result of the increase in confidence: improving their skills also led to improved self-perception, and motivated girls to continue studying and practicing. Some case study respondents also reported that improved motivation and self-esteem was linked to increased likelihood to transition into secondary school.

While the IP's IO definition focuses on the link between life skills and savings and employment behaviour (see [Section 3.2](#)), the midline reports on broader life skills changes. Evidence from the case study primary research and secondary research points to improvements in girls' self-esteem and self-confidence, including after the end of the project. The midline evaluation found that life skills targets were met and exceeded in terms of self-esteem (from 57% to 67%), planning (from 48% to 75%) and interpersonal skills (52% to 74%).

Changes in children's life skills and confidence came out strongly from the case study primary research. There were numerous reports that girls have become more outspoken, confident, and less afraid of interacting with others as a result of the project. According to case study primary research respondents, this supported students to **transition to secondary education**. According to the same respondents, students became more interested and outspoken in school in general, as a result of the discussions that took place as part of the REAP II project. In their own words:

"[Before the project] if students would reach the topic of reproduction, many would bend their heads down. However, because of the discussions and the courage they had to learn things well [...] they were curious and became attentive to the extent you would tell them that would learn other things in secondary but prompt you with questions to explore more." (KII with other stakeholder)

Caregivers similarly spoke about improvements in girls' confidence. Parents recognised that improved self-esteem and self-confidence both stemmed from their improved reading skills, but also supported girls to continue being motivated and interested in improving their skills and education. This type of **mindset shift** and **motivational improvements** were seen as very important by parents. For example:

"The programme made her confident; she wants to understand whatever she encounters, and once she understands, she continues to learn about it until she knows it well. When she meets someone, she is not afraid to discuss what she has learned". (FGD with parents)

"Since she joined this club and started studying in the fourth grade, I can tell you that it has greatly improved her confidence. She learned about three times and immediately said, I have really become confident in reading; I am no longer afraid to read and practice". (FGD with parents)

Girls also reported having become more confident, freer in their self-expression, and more outspoken, including in the classroom. According to girls, this increase in confidence supported them to **ask questions and speak up in class**:

"Before, when you were a less performing student in class, it was hard for teachers to identify you because you were not participative in class. Then, you would not be open to teachers; you would be afraid to ask. You would feel not speaking in class that they would laugh at you. However, when we joined the REAP programme [...] a teacher would want you to keep asking what you didn't understand and then share it with others." (FGD with girls under 18)

²⁰ IP IO: Improve the life skills of marginalised girls by building their capacity to save, demonstrate work readiness and income-generating potential

3.5. FM IO7: Attendance²¹

Indicator: Changes in girls' attendance at opportunities for learning made available to them.

Main activities: Textbook distribution; improvement in school facilities, including ECOSAN toilets.

Key findings: Attendance of treatment girls was already very high at baseline (97%), and the midline evaluation report did not find any evidence of improvements in attendance. The increased attendance in the comparison group could be linked to changes in government legislations, government campaigns focused on attendance, as well as school feeding programmes in the region. Girls' attendance was, however, found to be linked to improved English literacy outcomes, indicating that exposure to in-school activities had an effect on English literacy.

According to the midline report, the project aimed to improve girls' attendance to school by targeting barriers that reduce girls' access and by making the learning environment more girl-friendly. This included the economic-focused activities outlined in **Section 3.2**, as well as setting up youth-friendly SRH corners in schools to reduce barriers caused by poor MHM, early marriage and teenage pregnancy; and engaging stakeholders through the School Improvement Plan process to identify and outline areas for improvement.

The midline report **did not find a visible relationship between reduced cost of schooling and increases in attendance**, which contradicted a key project assumption. This could be due to changes in the context, including in the comparison group, and the fact that comparison girls' attendance was already very high at baseline (at 97%). The midline evaluation also finds that **attendance was a predictor of girls' English aggregate literacy outcomes**; suggesting that the more girls attend school, the higher their English literacy proficiency.

At midline, the evaluation found that **average attendance improvements in the comparison group exceeded those in the treatment group**. This suggests that the REAP II project did not have a significant effect on attendance outcomes. According to the same report, attendance improvements in the comparison group can be explained by a government campaign to improve attendance, as well as new legislation prohibiting girls of school age to be employed. The two factors were identified as having potentially contributed to attendance increases. Also, two integrated school feeding programmes began in the region, which can further explain improvements. Similarly, the midline report reflects on enrolment improvements in Rwanda overall, due to construction of secondary schools, new classrooms, and the Nine Year Basic Education (9YBE) government programme. See [Section 4.5](#) for an overview of contextual factors surrounding the education sector in Rwanda.

The midline report found that the project **may have mitigated the negative effects of girls' high chore burden and girls not feeling safe in school**. The case study primary research highlighted the importance of housework responsibilities as a barrier limiting girls' regular attendance to school (see [Section 4.5](#)).

²¹ IP IO: Improve the attendance of marginalised girls in schools throughout the life of the project.

4. What worked well/ less well and why?

4.1. Overall project performance

The project delivered positive results in girls' learning, particularly in English reading skills. Girls' self-esteem, confidence and motivation emerged most strongly as the mechanism that supported these improvements. The provision of materials also supported education outcomes, at least in the short run. While there were some improvements in teaching quality, this area faced more challenges and there were considerable unmet needs. The project's limited engagement with communities and caregivers may have also limited changes in girls' transition outcomes, as had been pointed out already in the midline report.

It is important to note that case study primary research findings reflect the project's closure in 2020, and sustainability concerns came out strongly from respondents. Data collected with case study primary research respondents suggests that the end of project activities was not communicated sufficiently clearly or ahead of time. It also suggests that many of the benefits of the project have been reversed, although data remains unclear on this point.

4.2. What worked well in the REAP II Project interventions?

Access to learning materials and to other in-kind support, such as menstrual kits, were described as increasing motivation and interest in school, and encouraging regular attendance. Learning materials such as notebooks and books were particularly appreciated by learners. Further support, such as uniforms and TLM for teachers, could have further improved access and learning quality.

Despite challenges in teacher training, some improvements in the classroom environment were mentioned. This included the use of engaging, hands-on methods in class, as well as further efforts from teachers to foster participation in the classroom, including among CWD. Infrastructure improvements, including the Girls' Room, were seen as helpful to encourage girls' attendance, but were not always sufficient to respond to demand.

Awareness raising activities, particularly those which directly involved children, such as theatre and skits, and individual follow-up with girls were described as improving self-esteem and motivation.

4.2.1. Learning materials

Provision of school materials, such as books and notebooks, emerged strongly in case study primary research with boys and girls, as well as community members. Receiving school materials was described by students as being a crucial **motivational** factor, both for themselves and for parents. Overall, receiving materials enabled children to focus on their studies and do well in school. As mentioned by a group of male students:

"Before REAP came, we didn't learn properly. We were in chaos; there were no books, and the lessons we received were limited. The teacher would come and teach, but he was struggling to explain the lessons. However, after REAP arrived, the teacher had materials to study, and we received books. We could understand the lessons more clearly". (FGD with boys)

Some teachers also reported that the distribution of materials supported students to stay in school. For example:

"When a child arrives at school without supplies, it often leads to dropping out of school. If a student misses school for three or four days because of this lack of resources, knowing that they can get supplies like pens and notebooks at school helps them attend regularly. For example, there were times when we would buy notebooks and tell the teacher to take twenty notebooks and pens to distribute them to students who did not have any and to keep some in reserve. When students come to school and know that notebooks are available, they feel reassured. A student from a poor background might come to school saying that even though they lack notebooks at home, they know they will find them at school and will continue their lessons without any issues." (KII with teacher)

Some limitations in accessing materials were also highlighted, particularly by school stakeholders. At midline, the evaluation report found continuing limitations in accessing materials – including teaching and learning materials (TLM) that teachers could use in the classroom. As many as 73% of teachers in treatment schools thought their students lacked access to books and materials (compared to 88% of comparison teachers). School stakeholders who took part in the case study primary research reported that the project could have **distributed more materials to each student**. Project reports and interviews both pointed to areas where further support would have been beneficial. An

area where they did not provide support which would have been beneficial was the provision of **uniforms**, the lack of which continued to be mentioned by girls and boys as a reason to irregularly attend or drop out of school. One teacher also pointed out that this type of support, though valuable, was a short-term solution.

4.2.2. Community study groups and remedial classes

There is mixed evidence on the effects of Community Study Groups (CSGs) and Remedial Classes. The midline evaluation did not find quantitative evidence on the effectiveness of CSGs on children's learning. The same report included findings from qualitative research with girls, which indicated that taking part in CSGs helped improve their learning by allowing them to go over concepts they did not understand in class.

The case study primary research confirmed that these activities were helpful, particularly as learners were able to study together in groups. Remedial Classes were also described as helpful by the case study respondents, especially as they allowed the project to reach more vulnerable students. **Peer-to-peer learning and support** in both types of sessions was described as particularly helpful by project staff. As highlighted by respondents:

"Before, I didn't understand anything. However, the programme's weekend sessions for revising our studies were very helpful. Sometimes, we would be asked to go to the chalkboard and read to our classmates. The teacher would encourage us to read as we understood, and if we made mistakes, she would correct us". (FGD with IS girls over 18)

"I used to learn it at school as usual, with the teacher teaching us, and that would be the end of it. But then this programme came and added more energy to it. I combined the two, what I learned at school and what we were learning in the programme. I would read the small books they gave us, and through that, I learned how to read both English and Kinyarwanda." (FGD with boys over 18)

Students also reported finding the remedial classes helpful not only due to the academic support in English, Maths, Kinyarwanda and French, but also for the general life skills advice that children received during these sessions. Areas mentioned included, for example, treating each other with respect, treating others equally, hygiene and cleanliness. In terms of subjects, students mostly spoke about having improved in English, and to a lesser extent, in Maths, as a result of participation in these activities. While findings from learning assessments found a statistically significant improvement for English scores, there was no statistically significant difference for Maths.

Some challenges were also highlighted in the data. The midline report points out that positive feedback may come from a small group of girls who were already high performers in their class. In fact, further analysis found that CSGs tended to support better English oral fluency improvements among girls with higher baseline levels. The midline report identifies several reasons to explain this finding. First, it was highlighted that tutors and teachers faced challenges in fully grasping the training content and implementing learner-centred and gender responsive methods. This was due to issues with how the training was delivered (see [Section 4.2](#)) and challenges in accessing TLM to implement games and more interactive and inclusive methods in the classroom. Second, there were continued limitations in accessing materials, such as books and notebooks, for both tutors and learners, as well as some issues in classroom infrastructure, which reportedly was improved by the project over time. Third, limited sensitisation activities with parents affected children's attendance to the sessions.

Similar challenges were faced in the project's remedial lessons, with mixed evidence reported by teachers at midline. There were challenges reported in accommodating and adapting lessons to different learning needs. It was also reported that teachers needed more capacity building to accommodate children with learning difficulties. An underlying issue was that classes were taught to large groups of students, which made it even harder to respond to their differing learning needs. The case study primary research respondents highlighted that attendance in class could be low, given that these took place during weekends, when girls tended to have other household responsibilities.

4.2.3. Improved school and classroom environment

There is mixed evidence overall on changes in the school environment, with some intervention types standing out in project evaluations and IE case study research as having been particularly helpful for girls. Infrastructure improvements that were mentioned in evaluation reports and case study interviews included improvements in toilet facilities through ECOSAN, improvements to school roofs and physical infrastructure, and, most importantly, the introduction of Girls' Rooms.

Hygiene-focused interventions were overall seen as beneficial, especially for girls. For example, the ECOSAN toilet was mentioned by several teachers as improving the sanitation situation in schools. The facilities were also described as more secure and divided by gender, which increased their uptake among students.

Government partners especially highlighted infrastructure improvements in the case study primary research. For example, according to one respondent:

“[The project] addressed essential gaps, like providing girls’ rooms and necessary equipment [...]. By supplying these resources, the project allowed the district to allocate its budget elsewhere, easing the burden of having to fund these infrastructures ourselves”. (KII with government)

Despite these improvements, some infrastructure challenges remained. As highlighted in [Section 4.3](#), school businesses were at times affected by infrastructure limitations, such as issues in accessing electricity.

Another trend which emerged from the case study primary research and secondary research related to **girls’ reports of a more favourable classroom environment**. At midline, girls reported that teachers were delivering more interesting and engaging lessons. They more frequently reported feeling supported by their teachers. These classroom changes were reportedly linked to improvements in girls’ participation in class. The case study primary research found evidence of some improvements in classroom dynamics – Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with girls highlighted that classes became more inclusive, and teachers were supportive, and were more actively involving CWDs. There were numerous mentions by both girls and boys of more engaging classes and a friendlier classroom environment, in which they were able to express themselves more freely. Students appreciated hands-on approaches that helped them to engage in class and increase their learning: girls and boys both highlighted **interactive methods for teaching maths classes**, such as using stones and other small objects to visualise subtraction and addition problems. Teachers’ use of drawing and games was also mentioned as engaging.

Several teachers who took part in the case study primary research found training provided by REAP II to be helpful and applicable, including to support vulnerable children and their families. As shared by one school stakeholder:

“Generally, the training provided to teachers to help students was very effective, leading to significant improvements in their capabilities. They were trained on how to support them, including creating educational materials not only for girls but for all students. They learned how to help students who were falling behind or struggling, including those who frequently missed classes. The training also covered effective communication with parents to identify and address any issues the student or their family might be facing by visiting their local communities”. (KII with teacher/ headteacher)

Overall, this evidence points to some positive changes in the classroom environment. As highlighted in [Section 4.3](#), teacher capacity continued to be a strong barrier, and there were several areas for improvement.

The midline report found that GWD on average performed better in treatment schools compared to comparison schools, which may indicate that **teaching methods and the school environment were more inclusive**. At midline, several GWD reported that teachers paid more attention to them and helped them revise key concepts. The project faced some challenges reaching other marginalised groups, such as girls who had been pregnant. The midline report and case study primary research highlighted **continued barriers to education faced by girls who experienced pregnancy. The midline had found no effects on learning outcomes for girls who had experienced pregnancy**. Pregnancy continued to be mentioned as a reason for drop-out at midline and among case study respondents.

In terms of other school facilities, the provision of Sexual Health and Reproductive Health (SRHR) information and support through Sexual Health Corners and Girls’ Clubs was appreciated by case study primary research respondents. The **Girls’ Rooms** introduced in schools came out strongly from the case study research as beneficial for girls. Caregivers, teachers, and girls spoke at length about these facilities, where information sharing and the availability of menstrual kits for girls as supporting their ability to remain in school and reducing absenteeism. Some challenges were, however, mentioned in terms of the size and availability of facilities; with several respondents highlighting that the rooms were too small to accommodate girls’ needs, and also that more girls in the schools (namely, those in primary school) would have also benefited from the intervention.

Health corners were mentioned as important as they enabled girls to access SRHR information and support, especially as a risk of drop-out was reported where girls engage in sexual activities for gifts and favours. Several girls who took part in FGDs reported having improved knowledge about reproductive health thanks to the project. In turn, this improved their self-esteem, awareness, and choices for the future and helped them to become more resourceful.

The case study primary research with both boys and girls highlighted that corporal punishment was frequent before the project and was linked to limited attendance. While there was no explicit mention of this having reduced because of the project, there were several reports from boys and girls about the classroom environment being safer, and a positive relationship with the teacher after the project, linked to teachers feeling happier in class. For example:

“A teacher would sometimes hit us. I would say “If I go to school, a teacher will hit me.” Then, I would sometimes miss school. Other students would sometimes miss school as well.” (FGD with boys over 18)

A broader change in school safety was linked to the **safeguarding of young girls**. One School Committee Member reported that some of the local administration officials, who reportedly had engaged in sexual relationships with girls, no longer did so after REAP II. The interviewee did not provide more information about how the project supported this change, and it is unclear how widespread this issue was. At midline, the project team had already reflected on the safeguarding risks of girls engaging in sexual activities to obtain gifts, such as new shoes or clothes, resulting in early pregnancies and drop-out from school. As a response, the project started promoting visits from Health Corners custodians to project schools, to raise awareness on SRH and SGBV and the services provided by health corners. The project also trained one teacher as a safeguarding focal point in each school.

4.2.4. Economic support activities

Income generating activities, such as school businesses, banana plantations and livestock breeding, were introduced to support schools and caregivers to further invest in children's education, ultimately aiming to support the education of marginalised girls and boys. Several challenges were reported in these activities, especially linked to their sustainability after the end of direct project support. Nonetheless, the case study primary research points to some **positive results**, particularly in the short-term. Among the interventions, the **provision of livestock** emerged from the case study research as potentially supporting income generation for families, despite some practical challenges. Numerous case study respondents shared how they were able to successfully grow their businesses thanks to initial in-kind provision from the project, and one government respondent highlighted that providing livestock is an **impactful intervention for both schools and families**.

Similarly, income generating projects encouraged schools to undertake income-generating activities like grinding mills and livestock farming, reinvesting the proceeds into their own school activities. Interviews with the project team indicated that many of these businesses are still operational and supporting continued improvements in the school environment. Interviews with community respondents painted a more mixed picture, including numerous reports of businesses having discontinued their operations after the end of the project (see [Section 4.3](#)). School businesses were described by some respondents as beneficial. Boys, in particular, appreciated being able to generate an income and meet their needs, such as learning materials, that their families could not provide. For example:

"They gave us a small plot of land to cultivate, and we would sell what we harvested to buy a notebook. Because if your family didn't have money, you could buy your own notebook." (FGD with boys)

As highlighted by a school stakeholder, this type of support was a motivational factor for numerous students:

"When a child realises that the school cares for them enough to provide a piglet for them to raise, it causes a stronger connection to the school. [...] While in school, the project supported her by providing a uniform, addressing her clothing and material needs, and even assisting with pig farming, which benefited her family by providing manure and other advantages. This support increased her appreciation for the school and motivated her to continue her education, as it offered numerous incentives". (KII with teacher/ headteacher)

Findings on the effectiveness of **savings groups and Mother-Daughter Clubs (MDCs)** point to some positive changes at school and community level, despite some challenges (see [Section 4.3.2](#)). At midline, savings groups were reported to be operational and MDCs were generating a profit. MDCs were also active in raising awareness on SRHR and the importance of girls' education. Some respondents in case study primary research reported that savings groups helped instil positive behaviours among children, which could support their families and allow them to invest in income-generating activities. Others mentioned that MDCs used money that had been saved to purchase school materials for students in need, including notebooks and school uniforms.

4.2.5. Awareness-raising and home visits

The case study primary research, particularly data collection with girls, pointed to the importance of awareness-raising sessions and trainings with children on **gender equality and the importance of education**. Some sessions focusing on SRHR were also carried out, which some teachers regarded as supportive to girls' retention.

Case study respondents also mentioned scenario-based activities and skits where children **directly took part in awareness-raising activities** to promote school attendance. These types of activities were described as leading to increased awareness and motivation to stay in school, as having a positive effect on inclusion efforts, and supporting children's self-esteem. As described by one teacher:

"There was a student I had in school who had a disability. I taught her, and she developed this condition during her time at school. [...] So, we did some role-playing and skits, and it was important to include her so she could be seen by other students. This activity reminded her that despite her disability, she still had value. It helped her understand that even though she was a girl with a disability, she had no reason to feel inferior."

This realisation helped her continue her studies and navigate daily life effectively, allowing her to progress to secondary school without any issues. [...] It seems that when the children were involved in acting, it stimulated their minds and made it necessary for them to think. If there was something you were able to teach them, it helped if they participated in skits or performances, enabling them to speak confidently and without issues. They could stand before others and speak without difficulty, as before they didn't have this ability. Overall, such activities significantly helped them gain confidence and development, as they felt they were supported and that their concerns were addressed.” (KII with teacher/ headteacher)

Home visits to raise awareness of girls' education and to distribute materials were mentioned by girls who appreciated the follow-up made by REAP II facilitators, and the encouragement they received was described as increasing their motivation to remain in school and focus on their studies. A community respondent, while praising this type of approach, reported that it did not have a longer-lasting effect on girls' motivation and participation following the end of the project.

4.3. What worked less well in the REAP II Project interventions?

The project faced challenges in two main areas, that could have limited the effectiveness of its interventions. The first was teacher training and support. While appreciating the training, teachers would have required more and more in-depth training sessions, as well as further hands-on activities, coaching, and mentoring to effectively implement what they learned in training. The lack of TLM also posed a barrier to using more interactive methods in the classroom. Teacher incentives and reimbursements were deemed insufficient for the additional effort required.

The project's support for income generation faced important challenges. Savings' groups were affected by a worsening in household incomes, and most have become inactive. Girls would have required more practical, vocational skills to successfully transition into employment. School businesses and livestock interventions were appreciated by some but faced practical constraints and sustainability challenges.

4.3.1. Limitations in teacher training and incentives

Despite some improvements mentioned in [Section 4.2](#), teaching quality continued to be a barrier and was insufficiently addressed by the project. Both project evaluations and the case study primary research highlighted the need for more coaching and support for teachers, including refresher training activities, as well as incentives to compensate for increased workloads and time commitment. The midline evaluation reported that while most teachers had found training to be applicable to their work, easy to understand and illustrated with concrete examples (89%), as many as 81% of teachers said time for training was insufficient for the themes covered, and 70% that it was insufficient for them to apply new approaches in the classroom. Almost 30% of participants thought the training was not useful and not easy to apply to their lessons.

Teachers reported practical issues linked to training, which could have further been considered by the project. Some female teachers mentioned experiencing practical issues in attending the training due to childcare responsibilities – something training organisers could have further taken into consideration. There were also numerous reports that **teacher incentives and reimbursements were insufficient**, including money for transportation.

It was reported that the project did not sufficiently compensate for teachers' investment in training, in terms of direct costs such as transport; opportunity cost linked to losing other income opportunities, such as through farming; and incentives for the higher workloads resulting from new and more challenging methodologies introduced by the project. One respondent suggested that incentives could have included more teaching materials for use in the classroom (see below). A more participatory approach involving asking teachers what they would want to be trained in and aligning with those needs could have offered a potential incentive. For example, teachers mentioned requiring more support in their English language skills, which was the language of instruction since 2008 and remains a major barrier for teachers. Similar concerns about incentives were also raised regarding remedial classes, which **relied on volunteers**. According to project staff taking part in IE case study research, the project had to find ways to motivate volunteers, since they were not being paid and had to work long hours, including weekends, to meet the project's goals. One of the strategies introduced was **performance-based prizes**, such as livestock. Similar incentive mechanisms could have also been considered for teachers.

IE case study respondents fed back that given the numerous other **training activities and NGOs active in the project areas**, more coordination should have been carried out to ensure teachers not only had time to attend the training, but to provide content that complemented what was being provided through other initiatives. Headteachers pointed out that, as only a small number of teachers were trained in each school, this limited the results that could be achieved at the school level.

According to one school stakeholder, some of the training content was not aligned with teachers' pre-existing capacities and areas of expertise:

"As a teacher, sometimes I wish I acquired more skills. The skills I received were about teaching hygienic practices to girls and supporting them in learning. However, it would have been better if I received more training. It can be to increase my level of education because it was linked. A person might have A2 (advanced diploma) or A0 (bachelor's degree). However, the businesses we were trained in, for instance, the commercial business, required advanced skills because it seemed like accounting, yet I didn't have the basics about it. They trained us about it but I didn't grasp it effectively because my level of education didn't correspond with it."
(KII with teacher/ headteacher)

Several other teachers reported that the training was too short, lacked sufficient depth, and did not provide hand-outs they could refer to following the activity. The lack of **teaching aids and materials** also limited teachers' ability to implement what they learned (see below). According to another school stakeholder, training could have further been improved by having more **hands-on, practical activities, including for teachers to share their experiences**.

Additionally, other school respondents highlighted that, while training was beneficial, teachers would have required **further follow-ups and more ongoing support**. While training was considered helpful, teachers would have needed more coaching and mentoring from the project, to implement content they learned in a more effective way.

4.3.2. Savings and income generation activities

Despite being a central part of REAP II's approach, the project's income-generation activities faced important challenges. Sustainability concerns also emerged strongly from the case study primary research.

The midline report found that **while girls considered the skills taught in financial literacy to be useful, it was not clear to what extent these were applicable**, especially as the lack of materials to use in productive employment (such as sewing machines) continued to be a barrier. The cost of materials was confirmed in case study primary research as a continuing barrier to girls' transition into employment, together with a lack of employment opportunities in the girls' localities. Support to girls' entrepreneurship was overall considered to be quite limited. Areas where girls could have been further supported could have included technical training in farming, fishing, and shopkeeping, as well as provision of inputs and access to start-up capital.

Girls' savings groups also faced some challenges, particularly in the longer term. Case study primary research respondents reported that most clubs had become inactive once the project ended. While they were still operational, at midline, it was reported that increased hardship experienced by girls' families during the project intervention period meant that fewer girls were able to save between baseline and midline. Overall, while savings clubs were seen as having some initial positive effects, including in instilling behavioural change among girls, these were not sustained over time; for example, as mentioned by one respondent:

"Another positive impact was that students were saving money at school, which also had a positive effect. However, once the project stopped, they lost motivation." (KII with other respondent)

FGDs with girls carried out as part of IE case study research largely echoed the perception that the project did not provide sufficient support for savings groups and girls' income generating activities to be implemented successfully. For example:

"The thing I didn't like much about REAP was that they didn't give us much support or they didn't give it regularly. I felt that this made it hard for me to stay motivated, and it also left me discouraged because they weren't providing me with the support I needed to continue with my own projects. [...] There were times they talked about providing us with some form of support. When I saw that they didn't give us any support, that's when I felt REAP wasn't helping us in any way. We were in a group where we would save money together. Since we were saving, there were times we would think that the project we were working on, or the group would receive some assistance to increase our savings. When I saw that the project didn't provide us with such support, I would lose motivation and feel that REAP wasn't benefiting us." (FGD with IS girls under 18)

In relation to the Mother-Daughter Clubs (MDCs), some respondents similarly pointed out that the project could have done more to connect girls or their mothers to micro-finance institutions that would enable them to access larger loans and improve their business prospects.

There were several issues reported in terms of the business support to families and schools. Regarding the livestock intervention, there were numerous reports from the case study primary research respondents of livestock having died, potentially due to not being in an adequate climate, as well as issues with farming due to diseases. It was unclear from the data how the project responded to these issues, or if they happened during or after the project.

Nonetheless, several respondents reported that this led to limited results in the longer run. There were also reports of parents having sold the livestock they received due to increased poverty and household hardship.

Another challenge the project faced in managing school businesses was **ensuring that funds would be used appropriately**; namely, to fund education initiatives or infrastructure improvements, such as Girls' Rooms. While project staff worked together with government authorities to ensure funds were being used appropriately, it is unclear how they fed into school activities, if at all, particularly after the end of the project. According to one government respondent, school businesses generally did not fare well due to poor management at the school level.

4.3.3. Development of School Improvement Plans

One of the ways in which REAP II aimed to improve school governance was through training for school leadership on the development of School Improvement Plans (SIPs) that would support girls' education. The midline report discusses progress made on the development of School Improvement Plans (SIPs), through which schools were required to select three priority areas to work on. At midline, SIPs mostly prioritised improvements in teaching quality, followed by attendance, and then academic performance. The decision to prioritise attendance is surprising, given the very high baseline levels (97% on average). This suggests that the attendance data provided by schools is not accurate, or that there are further trends to consider, although this area would require additional investigation. Even though schools had developed SIPs at midline, it was reported by different stakeholders that they **were not directly involved in the process**. The midline report concluded that the SIP process should be made more transparent and more inclusive.

Some of the government stakeholders interviewed as part of the case study highlighted that SIPs helped schools identify and prioritise activities based on their resources. Participation in SIP development and implementation did not emerge from interviews with other respondents, which could point to continued limited participation.

4.3.4. Gender norm change

Awareness-raising was not a main project focus area. While some awareness-raising was done as part of activities with MDCs and CSGs, the project did not include specific activities with communities or caregivers in this area. Analysis of secondary data from the project and the case study primary research did not find evidence of change in this area. Engagement with caregivers was recognised in the midline evaluation as an area in which the project could have done more, particularly to support girls' transitions to continued education or employment.

In terms of gender norm change, as further explained in [Section 4](#), household chores were a major gender norm affecting girls' education. The midline report finds that the REAP II project mitigated the negative effects of chores on girls' learnings. However, the case study primary research points to housework and other domestic responsibilities as a continuing strong barrier to education, affecting girls' ability to study in the home. This could be due to the long-lasting effects of Covid-19, as well as indicating project efforts have not been sustained over time and reflect an insufficient focus on awareness raising and behavioural change interventions.

4.4. What were the unexpected or unintended results from the REAP II project?

4.4.1. Positive unintended effects

There were limited mentions of positive unintended effects, mostly linked to economic support activities having been effective or encouraging others outside direct project intervention to follow similar behaviours.

Negative effects were more often mentioned. Several respondents mentioned issues with perceived unfairness in how participants were selected, or support distributed, which might reflect a lack of clear communication from the project. While boys were supported by certain project activities, the focus on girls led to some pushback at the school level. There were several reports from both boys and girls about activities having been promised to them, but never taking place. The reasons for this are unclear.

Case study primary research respondents described some project interventions as more successful than anticipated. For example, one project staff member reflected that, unexpectedly, several students were hired as a result of the **internship programme (or School-to-Work Transition programme)**. Another staff member mentioned that the project surpassed expectations in its **distribution of inputs, such as starter kits for business use**. Both girls and boys were described as having benefited from these inputs, with some businesses continuing their activities over the years. This contradicts the concerns raised by respondents regarding business support (see [Section 4.3](#)), which would suggest that it was a positive outlier rather than a widespread phenomenon.

Some positive spillover effects were also mentioned, particularly in relation to **the work of cooperatives set up through the MDCs**. HPA staff shared an example of an MDC that became an economically successful cooperative, also thanks to the provision of sewing machines by the project. In turn, this reportedly encouraged other groups to set up similar initiatives. It was also reported that cooperatives contributed to girls' transition outcomes, providing training that helped them start their own business. As shared by a project staff member:

"For instance, the community provided free learning opportunities for girls who otherwise had no place to go. They organised one or two days a week for girls to come and learn skills like machine operation, which helped them start their own business. We weren't expecting it because we hadn't planned for it". (KII with project staff)

A project staff member also reported that the school business model was adopted by schools that were not initially included in the project, having observed positive results among REAP II schools.

4.4.2. Negative unintended effects

Negative spillover effects were also shared by case study primary research respondents. There were some reports of **perceived unfairness** in the distribution of materials and selection of participants, which could reflect a lack of clarity in communication on these processes. For example, one group of OOS girls reported that other groups received support with materials and with internships, but they did not. Similarly, a school stakeholder reported that not all schools were supported equally, citing the example of Girls' Rooms which were not provided to all participating schools. A few respondents mentioned the project would be beneficial for other groups as well, such as younger girls. It was argued by some that by the time girls are adolescents, it may be too late to positively impact their education. Another respondent, a government stakeholder, similarly argued that the project should have provided Girls' Rooms at the primary level; and that this could have been done by upgrading existing facilities to save costs.

Negative effects on boys and their perception of being left out by REAP II's activities were mentioned by several case study primary research participants, despite the fact that boys were included in several project activities, such as school businesses and vocational training. Numerous respondents, including teachers, mentioned that boys would have required more support, for instance with school supplies. As mentioned by school stakeholders:

"Boys were also not included that much. Girls were the ones who were targeted. [...] It would have been better if the project targeted both equally. Though we try to distribute school materials to students, the target is a girl, not a boy. As a result, when you give three pens to a girl and you give one pen to a boy, he confirms that girls are the only ones who are cared for in this country. It would have been better if the project targeted both girls and boys equally. It would have improved education for both sides. Generally, the project scope pushed us to focus on girls because the evaluation emphasizes them mostly." (KII with teacher/ headteacher)

"Thank you, boys indeed at that time they felt left out and complained saying, What about us? Everything is focused on girls. We told them to wait, to wait a bit, but it would have been good if they were also supported in terms of boys. They should have had a project, been counselled, and advised so that they too see that they are cared for and not left out. We do talk to them, but they say that everything is focused on girls and girls. They too should have been supported." (KII with teacher/ headteacher)

More broadly, the approach to gender and social inclusion focused on girls' needs, rather than considering gendered barriers to education. One teacher reported that boys would have needed to take part in training sessions as well, particularly to raise their awareness and sensitivity to gender issues. The same respondent reported that boys would mock girls experiencing their periods or try to sneak into the Girls' Room. Further attention could have been paid to integrating gender awareness also in activities with boys. As explained by a school stakeholder:

"In terms of operations, not just focusing on girls, I felt that support should also be extended to all children because boys also need such education and activities. For example, a boy or a girl experiencing puberty should not feel embarrassed or see it as a problem; instead, there should be an understanding of these natural changes. Aligning perspectives and fostering mutual respect are crucial. Therefore, the project should consider supporting all children similarly. When preparing future programmes, it would be beneficial to address all children equally." (KII with teacher/ headteacher)

Another school stakeholder highlighted that boys could have benefited from activities as well, including SRHR. Also highlighted by another school stakeholder:

"All these aspects are closely related, as boys also need to be educated about reproductive health. If a girl becomes pregnant, it is often the boy who is involved, so both should receive training together. If boys and girls learn about reproductive health together and receive appropriate guidance, it would likely yield better results." (KII with teacher/ headteacher)

Despite other respondents' negative perceptions of the project's effects on boys, FDGs with boys as part of IE case study research highlighted that they received useful support from the project, including through the distribution of uniforms, shoes, notebooks, pens, and pencils. Boys also reported taking part in additional classes in English, Kinyarwanda, and Maths, especially for those who were struggling or had failed their classes. As mentioned in a group discussion with boys:

"We found this programme beneficial, as we've already mentioned. When someone motivates you to value education and provides you with necessary materials, there are no obstacles left. They first emphasised that education is important, and with the provided supplies, you understand that you can't miss out on learning because there are no barriers. They gave us materials and supported us. They made us love school, showing us that a better future comes from education." (FGD with boys over 18)

"This programme has been valuable to us. For me and my peers, without this programme, we wouldn't have learned to read. At this moment, I would not be in school and might have ended up in the streets or involved in crime. But now, because I'm in school, I am not in trouble. I believe that studying will benefit me in the future." (FGD with boys over 18)

Anecdotally, boys participating in FDGs appear aware of gender issues. For example:

"What I know is that before the project came to our school, many students, especially girls, dropped out because they believed they didn't have the same opportunities as boys. But when REAP II came, many girls returned to school because of the advice they gave us during class sessions. They encouraged us to work together and emphasised that we all had the same rights." (FGD with boys over 18)

More broadly, there were mentions that the project had promised further support, which was not always delivered. It is unclear whether this was due to Covid-19 affecting the project close-out phase, or linked to issues in communication, or if there were other organisational issues linked to project activities. This could have been due to issues in communication, but also organisational issues linked to project activities. In one FGD with boys, respondents mentioned that they were told they would be included in a savings group, but this never took place. Similar issues were shared in FDGs with girls. For example:

"They would sometimes lie to provide materials, and we would always wait but don't receive them. They promised to give us sanitary pads. They also promised to pay school fees for the students who were from vulnerable families, but they didn't do it. We didn't receive them." (FGD with IS girls under 18)

"For instance, they would tell us that we would study normally on Saturday. However, we would go there, and the facilitators would not come. Maybe they faced a problem and could not inform us because we didn't have phones or because they were far from us. I didn't like it because we told our parents that we were going to study and end up not studying." (FGD with IS girls under 18)

A small number of respondents highlighted other negative unintended consequences, which were not widely shared among respondents. For example, there was one mention that providing livestock to students may have inadvertently encouraged drop-out, as follows:

"Some received goats, but some people left the programme saying, 'What will I go back to the programme to do if they gave me a goat?' So, some students would say 'Our parents don't give us anything, and let's keep this goat or chick and drop out of school.'" (FGD with boys over 18)

In another discussion, boys mentioned feeling shame connected with being supported by the project, particularly remedial classes:

"What I liked the least was having to stay behind for extra lessons while other children went home. As a primary school student, it felt embarrassing and made me feel like others thought I was less capable. If other children went home while I stayed for extra lessons, I felt unhappy and thought they might see me as less intelligent. I didn't like that aspect at all." (FGD with boys over 18)

4.5. To what extent and how did external contextual factors influence the REAP II Project's performance?

The project context was supportive of REAP II due to the government prioritisation of secondary education transitions, as well as girls' education. There were reports of efforts from the government to reduce girls' drop-out, as well as to improve school infrastructure. Several other education programmes were also mentioned as being active in project areas.

Negative contextual factors included poverty, which was linked to lack of school materials and the girls' (and boys') employment. The school environment also posed considerable challenges, linked to large classroom sizes, limited teacher training and limited infrastructure. Gender norms continued to pose barriers to education, with girls more likely to hold housework responsibilities and boys more likely to engage in working outside the home.

4.5.1. Supportive factors

REAP II was implemented in the context of several government education policies that supported project aims, including transition to secondary education, reduction in girls' drop-out, and gender equality. Infrastructure improvements, such as building of secondary schools and classrooms, and other initiatives supporting implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum were also mentioned. This can potentially explain the improvements observed in comparison schools. Specific initiatives to support girls' education also include quotas and changes in pass grades. As summarised by a school stakeholder:

"Previously, the pass mark for both boys and girls was the same, but now the pass mark for girls has been slightly lowered to increase their chances of progressing to secondary education. [...] Additionally, public policy changes, such as the 30% quota system, have helped promote gender equality and ensure equal opportunities for both boys and girls. HPA's training also emphasised gender equality, which has contributed to shifting attitudes and practices in this area. The constitution has played a significant role in this change as well. For instance, when recruiters seek to hire, they now prioritise a balance between male and female candidates". (KII with teacher/ headteacher)

Linked to this point, there were other donor-led programmes implemented in the project areas. This included a project which focused specifically on reading and provided learning materials, another which provided merit-based scholarship (implemented by Imbuto Foundation), and Vision Umurenge which provided learning materials. School feeding programmes were mentioned by several respondents, both as motivating children to go to school, and increasing their attentiveness in the classroom. Another programme, Girinka, distributed livestock to families to help lift them out of poverty. As above, these projects could have supported education outcomes in comparison schools, although there is no clear information on this.

4.5.2. Hindering factors

High poverty levels

Household poverty was a widely reported barrier to girls' education, both in evaluation reports and the case study primary research. The project targeted low-resource and highly marginalised schools. Widespread and worsening poverty hindered the project's economic activities, including girls' participation and contribution to savings groups. As expressed by one respondent:

"What I liked the least was joining savings groups because I often didn't have the money to participate. I didn't like going to the groups because I couldn't afford to contribute money to them". (FGD with boys under 18)

At midline, the evaluation found that the number of caregivers who reported it was difficult to afford school reduced from 79% to 42%. A similar trend was observed in the comparison group (80% to 45%). The midline nonetheless found that hardship mean scores had increased more in treatment areas, which could indicate that poverty could be more prevalent in these areas. The case study primary research highlighted that economic issues worsened due to Covid-19 (see below) and due to worsening diplomatic relations with Burundi, where a lot of families in project areas used to do business.²² Poor diplomatic relations have led to disruptions in cross-border trade.

²² For more information, see: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-67940063>

Also due to poverty, it was reported by several respondents, including teachers, boys, and girls, that children – especially boys – **frequently found employment** to support themselves and their family, including to generate income to spend on materials for schools. Case study respondents mentioned that several children, mostly boys, worked on tea plantations, as bricklayers, or in fetching firewood. While not necessarily entailing drop-out from school, this could limit their attendance and ability to focus on their studies. Similarly, the **lack of school supplies** – including insufficient uniforms and shoes, and a lack of soap to keep them clean – was mentioned by both boys and girls as a prevalent reason for absence from school. One of the areas of the REAP II project most appreciated by students was the provision of materials. A **lack of electricity in the home** was also mentioned as a reason why girls struggle to study. Poverty and lack of materials were linked with feelings of shame among caregivers and children. As mentioned by one respondent:

“The main issue was the shame I felt. I had three daughters, all born at home, which meant I didn’t have much respect or recognition in the community. They lacked necessities like notebooks, pens, soap, and even school uniforms and shoes. This shortage of school materials was a major reason they couldn’t attend regularly. Poverty and the accompanying shame undermined their self-confidence, preventing them from going to school as often as they should have. Poverty, along with these challenges, was the primary barrier.” (FGD with parents)

School factors

The schools where REAP II was implemented faced important challenges, which affected girls’ (and boys’) attendance and experience in school. One issue mentioned was in relation to the distance from school and inadequate transportation. Another issue mentioned in both project reports and the case study primary research, especially teachers and headteachers, were large classroom sizes – at times, even with two grades within the same classroom. Large classroom sizes reduces teachers’ ability to implement the curriculum and new, innovative methodologies. For example:

“At our school, overcrowded classrooms have been a persistent issue, and it remains a challenge. We had hoped the project would address this problem in a similar way to how they provided a girls’ room, as reducing the number of students per class would greatly improve student performance. For instance, if a class size were reduced from 50 to 40 students, managing the class would become much easier. A teacher responsible for 60 students and one managing 40 students do not face the same workload—the larger the class, the greater the effort required. I had hoped to see class sizes reduced from 50 to 45, or ideally 35, particularly in the lower primary grades. A class size of 35 is ideal at that level, as younger students are still adapting to school life, learning foundational skills like writing, and adjusting to classroom routines.” (KII with teacher)

Another issue expressed by teachers was the **limited assigned time for lessons** (40-minute periods), meaning that they are not able to cover the lessons in sufficient depth and support children with learning difficulties. **Despite project support, poor school infrastructure was a remaining barrier.** As expressed by one school stakeholder:

“I am grateful for the project because it helped us. However, it is not enough. For example, at our school, overcrowding in classrooms is still an issue. It is mainly caused by a shortage of chairs in the classroom. It could be a positive thing if we get a stakeholder who sponsors the school with chairs. Besides, teaching aids are also still limited. Yet sometimes a project can help us to get teaching aids including flipcharts, and markers. It can be done for competition, for example. To do it, a competition for promoting hygiene practices can be organised and the winner will receive certain awards. I think that initiative can motivate other students and help in maintaining hygiene in the school all the time. However, it was never done like that.” (KII with teacher/ headteacher)

An interview with a school committee member echoed these concerns, highlighting that the material support provided by the project was not sufficient, and there were fears that the equipment provided would not be maintained once the school was responsible for it.

There were numerous issues relating to teaching quality and insufficient teacher training (see [Section 4.3](#)). As highlighted in the midline report, there were underlying issues affecting teaching quality in Rwanda, despite the government’s ongoing efforts reflected in the National Strategy for Transformation including the shift from French to English as the language of instruction in 2008. Knowledge of English remains a barrier for both teachers and students. Also, the shift to the Competency-Based Curriculum in 2016, which focuses on child-centred learning has faced considerable implementation gaps in practice.

Covid-19

Covid-19 has had lasting negative effects in project communities and coincided with the end of the project.

Although the pandemic did not overlap with project implementation, its long-term effects emerged strongly from the case study primary research. It appears that the project closed out rapidly while schools were closing. School closures lasted a year and led to children falling behind in their education. KIIs with community stakeholders highlighted that phone-based instruction in remote areas was not successful. For example, radio programming was described as unsuccessful as children would listen to other programmes instead. As mentioned by a community stakeholder:

“The Covid-19 pandemic has had really huge impacts on many things. It is obvious that some students didn’t go to school during that period. Some of them dropped out of school and went to work on tea farms. Some of them also went to different families, and didn’t go back to school. Due to pandemic? The pandemic had impacts definitely because not all students could afford a telephone. Some students didn’t get access to telephones back home. Socio-economic statuses are different. Some students were able to learn online while others didn’t. The Covid-19 pandemic was a contributing factor to poverty among families. There were many students who didn’t have facilities for online learning. Poverty in families also hindered online learning.”
(KII with community stakeholder)

Although the project ended in 2020, respondents mentioned that teachers continued engaging with students during school closures, including over the phone. This aimed to keep children engaged and provide feedback on their learning. Nonetheless, widespread learning loss was reported by case study respondents. There were also several reports of radio programming having been introduced for children in different grades, although many families (particularly those facing high levels of poverty) did not have access to either phones or radio. Children from poor families were reported to have fallen particularly behind. Some children started working during Covid-19 school closures and eventually lost interest in their education. Primary research case study respondents perceived that the project seemed to have ended abruptly, and the pandemic may have affected the level of engagement with project participants during the close-out phase.

Gender norms

Both evaluation reports and the case study primary research revealed the continuing impact of gender norms on girls’ education.

At midline, the evaluation found that the impact of household chores had reduced, with a decrease (in both treatment and comparison) in the share of girls reporting half a day or more of chores per week. The midline also found that the high chore burden was correlated with decreased English literacy for the comparison group, but not the treatment group. This was taken to indicate that the project had a role in mitigating the negative effect of chores on girls’ learning. The midline report also found that some participants in MDCs expressed more gender equitable attitudes to household chores. The case study primary research suggested that household chores continued to be a barrier to education, including for boys:

“Sometimes, the other kids at home would divide the chores among themselves. For example, on the first day of school, I wouldn’t go because I had chores to do. [...] I knew there weren’t any lessons yet, so they would tell me to go on the second day when lessons started”. (FGD with boys under 18)

Girls – and especially boys – mentioned supporting their parents in economic activities, mostly farming. While chores were mentioned by both, girls more frequently mentioned housework, while boys mentioned animal rearing, supporting with agricultural work, and fetching water for the house.

While the support provided in the Girls’ Rooms was overall deemed helpful (see [Section 4.2](#)), several girls mentioned lacking sanitary pads, and experiencing feelings of shame during menstruation, which was linked to low attendance of girls during their periods. This confirms the midline finding that approximately 34% of girls in the treatment group and 35% of girls in the comparison group found it difficult to attend school due to menstruation.

Early pregnancy was also reported to be a continuing issue leading to girls’ drop-out. This indicates that more could have been done in this area; for example, as mentioned by a school stakeholder:

“Except for the awareness campaigns on preventing unintended pregnancies, where some students still became pregnant and were unable to complete their education, showing that more effort is needed. For example, seeing many cases in a community indicates that these campaigns may need further strengthening”. (Interview with teacher/ headteacher)

The situation varied between locations: for example, other teachers mentioned that project awareness-raising and follow-up prevented early pregnancy in their community. Another community stakeholder reported a change in the behaviour of girls who experience early pregnancy, whose drop-out rate has decreased:

“It is really different from what happened before because girls who get early pregnancies didn’t mind going back to school. They stayed at home. But now they go back to school”. (KII with community stakeholder)

An area for improvement highlighted by the project team was that having a digital tracking system could have helped monitor project progress more effectively and maintain regular follow-ups. A school-level respondent highlighted that this type of individual support for girls, for instance through at-home visits, could have provided useful guidance and support, for instance against early pregnancy.

Infrastructure and access issues

Inaccessibility of Nyaruguru region was also mentioned by several respondents, especially from the project team, as hindering activities, as well as school business performance. Poor road infrastructure was challenging and posed some limitation in reaching project schools. These were mostly resolved by the project (see [Section 4.6](#)).

4.6. What were the implementation factors behind the REAP II Project’s success or lack of success?

Enabling project implementation factors included the project team’s familiarity and prior experience in the district, as well as positive collaboration with government and community local leadership.

In terms of hindering factors, limited sustainability, especially of the more costly activities (infrastructure improvements and business support) were a primary issue. Reports of activities having closed suddenly suggest potential issues in communicating the project’s close-out, as well as the effects of Covid-19. Budget limitations were also a constraint, which meant the project did not reach all the planned target locations. There were also reports that budget constraints led to limited resources being distributed at the school level.

4.6.1. Supportive factors

Implementation factors were identified through the case study primary research but did not emerge from evaluation reports. Several enabling factors were identified by case study respondents, especially by the project team.

The HPA team was familiar with the project’s areas of intervention and was able to adapt its approach based on contextual needs. For example, they decided to rely on motorcycles as a way to reach schools and ensure smooth operations. Using a local office was also seen as supporting project efforts, such as monitoring activities, engagements with communities and partnership building.

The project was able to successfully collaborate with government stakeholders. A government respondent highlighted that the project operated in a transparent way and that government authorities had an active role in monitoring and supporting the initiative. This positive collaboration was made possible by regular visits on the part of project staff and regular communication. One project stakeholder mentioned that REAP II was able to support schools to develop strategic plans and foster collaboration with various stakeholders to enhance school performance. This was seen as helpful for developing plans to utilise government budgets effectively.

Community representatives also praised the project’s collaboration with local leaders. Local authorities were reportedly highly involved in implementation – as mentioned by a project staff member:

“The leadership, from the mayor down to the local authorities, played a crucial role—particularly the mayor. He was highly engaged and stayed up to date on the project’s progress. When the leadership is proactive, it encourages those below to perform better. In terms of making decisions and adapting to challenges, we regularly met with regional leaders, and based on the evolving situations, we coordinated closely with them to make adjustments as needed.” (KII with project staff member)

Another community stakeholder, on the contrary, pointed out that **a stronger collaboration with local government representatives could have strengthened prospects for sustainability**. For example, further arrangements with government partners could have been helpful in terms of providing ongoing support, follow-up and materials to girls who took part in REAP II.

4.6.2. Hindering factors

Several hindering implementation factors were identified by both project teams and other case study respondents.

Limited sustainability and issues in communicating project close-out were highlighted by numerous respondents as a major project limitation. Some contradictory information was shared by the project team regarding

sustainability planning. One respondent reported that the project developed an exit strategy together with the local authorities, including a handover plan with the district. Another pointed out that the project did not have a 'formal' sustainability plan, but instead relied on informal sustainability planning, for instance aiming to hand over activities to the community and local institutions.

Project respondents also pointed to differing levels of sustainability depending on the type of activity. For example, it was reported by HPA team members that the Girls' Rooms, school businesses, MDC businesses run by women, and girls' savings cooperatives would continue their activities after the end of the project. Other respondents reported that some activity types, such as training, were more beneficial in the long run. More challenges were reported in sustaining infrastructure, school libraries, and activities which are more costly to run, such as business support. A school stakeholder reflected that the project could have done more to follow-up with participating schools and encourage continuation of activities independently of the project, even after the end of activities. As mentioned by a government partner:

"While the project was initially well-executed, there was no long-term plan for ensuring community responsibility and continuity. For example, libraries and reading rooms were not established in the communities, and the books were managed temporarily by individuals. Once these individuals were no longer involved, the programme ended, and there was no permanent system in place to sustain it. Similarly, school businesses, which showed positive results while active, did not last after the initial project supervision ended. Schools were tasked with managing both education and business initiatives, which was challenging to maintain in the long run." (KII with government official)

A government stakeholder also reported that the authorities are attempting to continue to provide resources, such as menstrual kits in Girls' Rooms, but that they faced budgetary constraints:

"Currently, we are working to secure budgets to provide these materials, but funding is often insufficient, especially considering the needs of the entire district. For example, we now have 118 schools, and some still lack access to these vital resources." (KII with government official)

The case study primary research highlighted widespread perceptions from community members that the project did not clearly communicate its close-out, with various commenting that activities closed suddenly and without prior notice.

There were reports of budget constraints affecting implementation. It should be noted that REAP II had the smallest budget in the GEC-T portfolio. According to a project staff member, the project was not able to fully meet community needs and demand for support due to budget limitations, and the team had to prioritise areas where the problems they were seeking to address were more widespread. Some budget limitations were also reported by schools: one school stakeholder reported that project budget constraints led to an insufficient number of notebooks to students. There were also reports that limited resources sometimes led to delays and challenges at the school level. For example, another school stakeholder reported that the project was not able to provide water disinfectant to their school due to budgetary issues, and that it was supplied with a delay. This was seen as hindering the project's objectives of supporting a positive school environment.

4.7. Key lessons learned

Teacher training interventions that aim to introduce interactive and innovative methods are more effective when accompanied by tailored incentives and follow-up.

When providing training on learner-centred and gender-sensitive methodologies it is important to carefully consider the constraints faced by teachers in implementing these in practice. When developing teacher training, further tailoring to existing capacities, as well as accommodating practical constraints including a lack of time and travel costs can encourage participation, engagement, and take-up among teachers. More practical training that reflects the conditions in which teachers are working could include practical advice to implement methods within large classroom environments and with limited materials. For example, guidelines to implement group activities within large groups or to develop their own materials could be helpful. It is important to consider that teacher capacity building does not stop at training activities; alignment with existing mentoring, coaching and follow-up, or provision of trained facilitators with specific technical expertise could support effectiveness. When delivering training, including incentives for teachers can be helpful to encourage engagement; particularly in contexts where there are numerous training activities happening in parallel, such as in Rwanda. Even small incentives such as provision of data bundles for teachers or small prizes based on school performance could encourage further participation.

Economic activities at the school level can lead to positive behavioural change and short-term investments in school resources; however, they require careful planning and follow-up both to ensure that funds are used for education activities, and that they are suited to the economic context.

Economic activities at the school level, such as savings' groups and school business activities, have potential to support behavioural and attitudinal change, as well as allowing for re-investment of profits into education activities, school infrastructure and materials. School-led business activities can also support students' interest in vocational training and entrepreneurship; though careful messaging is required by projects to avoid inadvertently causing early drop-out from school by girls who choose to pursue economic activities. Despite their potential, economic activities and infrastructural investments require careful planning, including for close-out. Adequately prioritising sustainability planning for the start of new interventions can help ensure that these activities can progress without direct project support.

Including boys in specific activities, such as those that focus on awareness raising and gender norm change can be helpful to foster gender-responsive and inclusive school environments.

Girls' education projects, and gender responsive initiatives more generally, can benefit from the inclusion of boys, which can support gender norm change and limit backlash at the local level. To deliver effective gender norm change and foster a more inclusive environment, it is not sufficient to include boys in programme activities designed for girls. Rather, considering boys' engagement and their specific gendered needs (and barriers) as an integral part of the project design can be more effective to support gender norm change and support community engagement. Awareness raising activities with boys on the barriers that girls face to their education, and their own role in fostering a more inclusive environment, are beneficial. It is important to recognise that boys may also face specific barriers to their education that are gendered. For instance, boys may face greater societal pressure to leave school early to enter the job market and support their families financially. Discussions on positive masculinities and boys as agents of change could help reduce potential backlash on the part of boys and other community stakeholders.

Careful communication of project close-out plans and sustainability planning throughout implementation can help avoid confusion and potential issues among community members.

Carefully and clearly communicating project plans, including when starting to scale-down activities, is essential to avoid potential issues at the community level, and disgruntlement that could potentially lead to challenges in re-engaging with community members in future projects. Clear communication is at the foundation of the trust that is needed for long-term engagements in communities. Careful planning with community groups and government partners for a later hand-over is something that can shape discussions with partners throughout project timeframes, to avoid surprises and potential backlash at the end of direct implementation.

5. Conclusions

Improvements in English literacy

For in-school girls, participation in REAP II activities led to significant improvements in girls' English literacy, but not in Kinyarwanda. This can be explained by the fact that English is the language of instruction, while Kinyarwanda is one of many school subjects. That said, REAP II did not achieve significant improvements in numeracy either. Moreover, the positive results in English literacy were primarily driven by girls' ORF and were not evenly distributed among grades. This suggests that learning improvements were overall mixed; perhaps linked to the challenges in teacher training. While teachers appreciated the training, they would have required more in-depth training, including coaching and mentoring, as well as access to TLM to be able to implement what they learned in the classroom.

High in-school transition rates, but limited results from REAP II

Most girls (95%) transitioned into further education in the evaluation sample, with work-based transitions and TVET transitions accounting for only 1.5% of the sample at midline. Girls participating in REAP II activities showed only marginal improvements in relation to the comparison group, with no statistically significant difference between treatment and comparison groups at midline. This could be linked to numerous other government or non-government initiatives supporting girls' education in the project period. The lack of specific information on the comparison schools' participation in other initiatives, as well as the lack of endline evaluation due to Covid-19 makes it challenging to accurately assess the project's impact on girls' transitions into education or employment.

Improved self-esteem and participation in class

At the IO level, REAP II led to improvements in girls' life skills and self-esteem as the result of interventions including Girls' Rooms, sexual health information and services, and the distribution of learning materials. In turn, improved self-esteem supported active participation in class: girls asked more questions and were overall more active in school activities. Girls' increased confidence and ability to participate in school activities could be linked to the improvements observed in reading at midline. Other IO areas saw more limited evidence of change. There were some positive results in terms of economic and financial activities, including Mother-Daughter Clubs, but these were challenging to sustain after the end of the project. There were some improvements in teaching, but comparison schools performed better than treatment schools across various dimensions, likely indicating that other teacher training initiatives took place in comparison schools at the same time.

Limited parental and community engagement

REAP II focused its interventions at the school level, primarily with infrastructure improvements, school businesses and teacher training. Engagement with communities and caregivers was a limited feature of the project's design. Lack of community and parental engagement is reflected in the challenges the project faced in shifting gender norms, for instance linked to girls' household commitments and surrounding early pregnancy. Both of these areas continued to be important barriers to girls' education following the end of project support. Overall, the project found it challenging to effectively reach the most marginalised students, particularly girls who had experienced pregnancy and children with disabilities.

Methodological limitations due to length of time since project closure

It should be noted that the REAP II project closed out in 2020, and it was not possible to carry out an endline evaluation due to the Covid-19 school closures. The large amount of time since project implementation and considerable education challenges brought about by Covid-19 meant that the case study primary research respondents could not always clearly recall what was linked to the project, and what was linked to later changes. As a result, the evidence base on REAP II is relatively sparse compared to other case studies supporting the evaluation of the effectiveness of the GEC II portfolio.

6. References

None.

Annex H: Case Study Report: Cheshire Services Uganda (Uganda), Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education

Project Case Study Report: *Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education*, Cheshire Services Uganda (Uganda)

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to this report

This report summarises the key findings, lessons learned and conclusions from the IE Team's case study primary research of the **GEC-T project Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education, implemented by Cheshire Services Uganda (CSU)**. The purpose of the six project case studies is to provide an in-depth examination of reported results (i.e., outcomes and Intermediate Outcomes); how and to what extent project interventions worked well or less well, why, for which types of beneficiaries; and the influences of contextual factors and Implementing Partners' (IPs) delivery capacities. The structure of this report aligns with the evaluation sub-questions to enable the synthesis of the findings across the six case studies. The report structure also aligns with the structure of the main report to ensure that findings from the case study research complement and enrich the findings from the portfolio assessments of the GEC-T and LNGB Windows.

1.2. Project background

The *Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda* project was implemented by Cheshire Services Uganda (CSU) for a seven-year period (April 2017-March 2024). The project aimed to support the same girls reached through GEC Phase I (2012-2017) to transition and progress through primary, lower, upper secondary, and tertiary education. This included transition to university, although the project did not pay for tuition fees, and to technical and vocational skills education and training (TVET), leading eventually to employment. Starting at baseline, the project supported 2,060 girls with disabilities in **primary education (P1 to P7) and lower secondary education (S1 to S3)**¹. It focused on ensuring they **progress through school and join secondary school**, move from lower secondary to **higher secondary (S4 and S5)**, and **into TVET institutions or further education**, as applicable.²

The project was designed to address the physical, behavioural, social, systemic and policy, economic and psychosocial barriers to the education of girls with disabilities. This entailed different intervention types. First, girls with disabilities in 10 target primary schools were supported directly through accessible infrastructure and sanitary facilities. The project improved teacher capacity to employ inclusive teacher practices in the classroom. It also provided life skills training, career guidance, child protection support, and opportunity for co-curricular activities to girls, with the aim of improving their life skills and self-esteem. To raise awareness on the rights of girls with disabilities to education, CSU carried out sensitisation activities for schools, families and education system stakeholders on gender and inclusive education. Target secondary schools were supported in these areas indirectly, through advocacy efforts.

Following Covid-19 – and the longest school closures in the world – there were some changes in project activities (see [Table 1](#) below). While some activities were terminated, new activities were introduced to focus on learning, safety, and wellbeing of girls with disabilities. The **budget was reduced at this time**, but the number of girls with disabilities targeted by the project remained the same.

Table 1: Overview of the Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education project

Dimension	Project characteristics
Project name:	Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education
Implementing Partner:	Cheshire Services Uganda (CSU)
Funding Window:	GEC-T
GEC Phase I:	Improving Life Chances for Girls with Disabilities in Kampala, Uganda
Budget:	£4.3 million
Project start / end dates (duration):	April 2017 – March 2024

¹ Uganda's education system includes seven levels in primary (P1 to P7), four levels in lower secondary (S1 to S4), and two levels in upper secondary (S5 to S6).

² Vocational education provides training focused on practical skills and technical knowledge required for specific trades or careers, and is accessible to students after completing P7, S4 (O-Level), or S6 (A-Level).

Dimension	Project characteristics
Geographical focus:	Uganda (Greater Kampala – focus on slum areas): low-income urban / peri-urban communities of the four (of five) Kampala City divisions of Nakawa, Kawempe, Rubaga and Central and in the surrounding districts of Wakiso and Mukono
Beneficiary groups:	Girls with disabilities at primary, secondary, and vocational education
Number of direct beneficiaries:	Girls with disabilities (at baseline): 2,060 in grades P2 to S3 Boys with disabilities (at baseline): 586 in grades P2 to S3
Number of indirect beneficiaries:	N/A
Other beneficiaries³:	Teachers/ Headteachers (HT): 2,123 Caregivers/ parents: 3,607 Community members: 2,655 Government partners: 77
Marginalisation focus:	Girls with different types and severity of disability from low-income households in urban settlements in and surrounding Kampala City
Type of interventions:	
<i>Economic</i>	Before Covid-19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payment of school fees and other school-related costs (such as scholastic materials and sanitary pads, transportation, and medical treatment) • To an extent, supporting families to improve their incomes Added during Covid-19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash transfers to project beneficiaries
<i>Infrastructure and resources</i>	Added during Covid-19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of learning packs for children • Provision of reproductive health information and kits to beneficiaries
<i>Teacher training and support</i>	Before Covid-19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher training on the rights of children with disabilities and on inclusive teaching methods
<i>Community Based Awareness, Attitudes and Behaviour</i>	Before Covid-19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability management and gender sessions with parents/ caretakers
<i>Extra-Curricular Activity</i>	Added during Covid -19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensified sensitisation of beneficiaries and their families on Covid-19
<i>School Management and Governance</i>	Before Covid-19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitisation of schools, community, policy, and education actors for these systems to maintain the support of inclusive education and needs of girls with disabilities • Lobbying for education policies that support gender and inclusion After Covid-19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training of staff on duty of care and tools for spot check and risk assessment to enhance understanding of duty of care increases knowledge of beneficiary specific welfare and learning needs • Training MEL team and individuals who collect data in GESI and Safeguarding sensitive approaches and as well Mainstream GESI & safeguarding in MEAL tools and systems • Conduct a stakeholder analysis of key actors who are promoting/ advocating for the rights of people with Disabilities and develop a CSU stakeholder engagement strategy to enhance contribution to policy change and implementation and improve CSU's collaboration and referral systems • Advocacy for the national inclusive education policy to contribute to national wide outlook to education inclusion of Children with Disabilities
<i>Empowerment & Self Esteem</i>	Before Covid-19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interventions to improve confidence, self-esteem, and aspirations of girls with disabilities

³ As reported in the Midline 2 report. Please note we were not able to independently verify these figures.

Dimension	Project characteristics
	After Covid-19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduced new activities such as transition plan support and tracking to increase girls' aspirations
<i>Violence against Children</i>	Added during Covid-19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychosocial support especially for children who had suffered GBV during school closures After Covid-19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school beneficiary welfare spot check and institutional risk assessment and basic safety plans data collection to document and ensure the safety and welfare of project beneficiaries School break spot checks for girls in boarding, care homes and VTI hostels to identify the risks likely to be faced by the girls during school break, develop plans and respond to the risk and to engage different stakeholders on supporting beneficiaries Implementation /follow up on the emerging issues from the basic safety plans; risks identified during the documentation of the individual basic plans will be responded to in line with identified need Safeguarding trainings for focal persons in schools Improve safeguarding reporting pathways in schools
Baseline data collection (report) dates:	April 2018 (November 2018)
Midlines data collection (report) dates:	Midline 1: October and November 2019 (September 2020) Midline 2: September 2021 and April 2022 (November 2022)
Endline data collection (report) dates:	October-November 2023 (April 2024)

Where the project worked

The project supported girls (and boys) with disabilities in the Nakawa, Kawempe, Rugaba, and Central divisions of Kampala City Authority, as well as surrounding districts of Wakiso and Mukono. [Figure 1](#) presents the locations reached by the project.

Figure 1: Map of project intervention areas



External Evaluation: four rounds conducted (baseline, two midlines and endline)

The baseline data was gathered in November 2018, followed by the first midline (ML1) which took place between October and November 2019, both prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. As the academic year in Uganda runs from February to December, the baseline was conducted before completion of the school year, and ML1 at the start of a new school year. See [Figure 2](#) for a summary of the evaluation timeline.

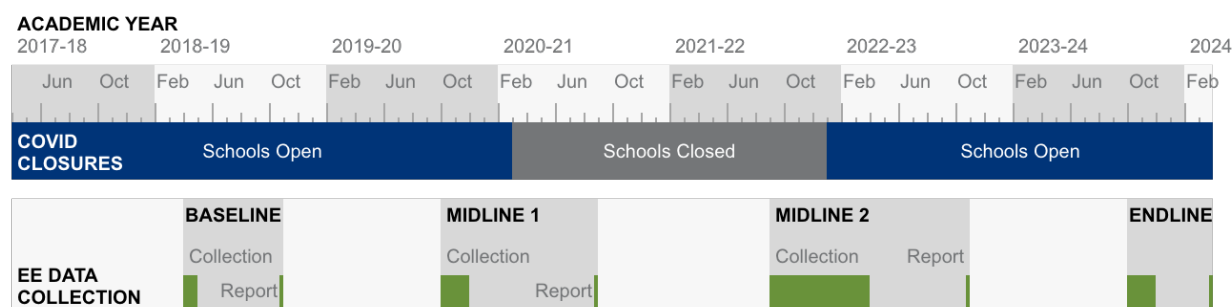
The Covid-19 pandemic had an important impact on CSU's operations, with Uganda experiencing one of the longest school closures globally – from **March 2020 to January 2022**. During this period, CSU adapted its approach to support learning and transition for girls with disabilities, including remote learning strategies such as phone-based follow-ups, the distribution of adapted learning packs, and cash transfers to help families meet essential needs. In addition, psycho-social support was provided to address the mental health challenges caused by the pandemic. Data

for the second midline (ML2) was collected between September 2021 and April 2022, with school-based data collected in April, several months after schools reopened.

Additionally, in the final year of implementation, CSU and the Fund Manager (FM) conducted a comprehensive review of project activities to identify which interventions provided the best value for money and supported meaningful learning and transitions. This review led to a redesign of activities, focusing on safety and wellbeing, as well as aiming to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying factors driving observed project outcomes. This became the central focus of the endline evaluation, which aimed to unpack the “how” and the “why” behind project outcomes. The endline evaluation was initially planned for March 2024, with the final report published in April 2024.⁴

This project was shortlisted for case study research because it **did not meet its targets**.

Figure 2: Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education project and evaluation timeline



Note: The whole frame indicates project start and end dates (April 2017 to March 2024).

⁴ There is no information on the dates of data collection for the endline evaluation.

2. What outcomes did the project deliver?

2.1. Review of changes to Logframe outcome indicators

To evaluate the project's effectiveness, four rounds of external assessments were conducted: baseline, two midline assessments (ML1 and ML2), and an endline evaluation. The baseline and ML1 were collected prior to the onset of Covid-19, ML2 was conducted between September 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic and April 2022 after schools had reopened, and the endline evaluation took place in 2024.

A mixed-methods approach with a longitudinal framework was employed between the baseline and midline evaluations (ML1 and ML2). To measure each of the outcomes, data were collected from the recontacted⁵ sample of girls. CSU exclusively targeted girls with disabilities (GWD), who formed the treatment group. For the baseline and ML1, the comparison group consisted of girls with no disabilities (GWND) attending the same school as the girls in the treatment group. **ML1 aimed to measure the levels of proficiency in literacy and numeracy** competencies among girls with and without disabilities two years after the start of the programme.

The primary aim of ML2, conducted in the same calendar year that schools reopened after Covid-19 closures, was to assess whether CSU's inputs and strategies supported learning continuity, resilience, and social protection for girls with disabilities during the Covid-19 lockdown and school closures. It also examined if these inputs improved outcomes or equity in school return and reintegration, focusing on learning, economic support, empowerment, and transition. After Covid-19, ML2 discontinued the use of a comparison group, though learning data continued to be collected albeit with some changes to the assessments.

The **endline evaluation, conducted four years after Covid-19, employed a qualitative methodology** with a phenomenological approach.⁶ The endline report indicates that this decision was driven by the need to address multiple educational transitions amidst barriers such as societal attitudes toward disability, Covid-19 disruptions, and systemic educational limitations, which required a methodology that went beyond quantitative measures. Consequently, the methodologies of difference-in-differences (used at ML1), or before-and-after (used at ML2), applied during the midline evaluations were dropped at endline. Similarly, no comparison group was considered in this evaluation. Instead, the endline evaluation aimed to investigate the underlying factors influencing the results observed in the midline assessments (ML1 and ML2). For this evaluation, girls with disabilities were purposively sampled to ensure the representation of three broader categories of impairment (physical, visual, and self-care such as washing or dressing).

Below, the changes to Logframe outcome indicators are explained in detail.

2.1.1. Review of changes to the Learning Outcome indicator

Learning outcomes were assessed at the baseline and both midline assessments (ML1 and ML2) using standardised tools: the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Secondary Grade Reading Assessment (SeGRA) for English literacy, along with the Early Grade Math Assessment (EGMA) and Secondary Grade Math Assessment (SeGMA) for numeracy. These assessments were administered to girls ranging from Grade 3 (P3) in primary school through to Grade 3 (S3) in lower secondary at baseline. During ML2, these assessments were scaled down, and a new assessment on functional numeracy and literacy was introduced.

For literacy, the EGRA test comprised five subtasks: letter sounds, invented word reading, oral reading fluency, reading comprehension, and listening comprehension. The SeGRA test included three subtasks: short reading comprehension, long reading comprehension, and short essay construction. In numeracy, the EGMA test comprised six subtasks: number identification, number discrimination, missing numbers, addition, subtraction, and solving number (word) problems. The SeGMA test included three subtasks: advanced arithmetic, algebra, and word problems (data interpretation).

Between baseline and ML1, improvements in learning outcomes were assessed through the difference in standard deviations (SDs) compared to a comparison group. Although the data collection followed a longitudinal design by tracking the same girls over time, the methodology used to assess improvements in learning employed a cross-sectional Difference-in-Differences (DiD). This means that, rather than tracking the same individuals over time – or

⁵ In instances where recontacting sufficient participants proved challenging, new girls were included in these data collection phases to maintain the integrity of the evaluations.

⁶ A **phenomenological approach** is a qualitative research method that focuses on exploring and understanding individuals' lived experiences from their own perspectives. It aims to uncover the essence of these experiences by studying how people perceive and make sense of the world around them. (Creswell, & Poth, 2018).

longitudinally – the analysis compared results from different groups of students in the same grade across different evaluation rounds (i.e., comparing students in S3 at baseline with students in S3 at ML1).

During the ML2 period, following the discontinuation of the comparison group, the evaluation's focus shifted from accountability to learning. In addition to learning data, the qualitative data primarily captured lessons on the impact of Covid-19.

The standard assessments (EGRA, EGMA, SeGRA, SeGMA) were scaled down to a few subtasks. In literacy, the original five EGRA subtasks were reduced to two: oral reading fluency, and reading comprehension, with letter sounds and listening comprehension dropped, and a new subtask – familiar word reading – was added. Similarly, SeGRA was limited to short reading comprehension, excluding reading comprehension, and short essay construction. For numeracy, EGMA was reduced to four⁷ subtasks: missing numbers, addition, subtraction, and number (word) problems, with number identification and number discrimination dropped. The SeGMA retained only the arithmetic subtask, dropping algebra and word problems requiring data interpretation. As a consequence, the report indicates that the difficulty level of the tests at ML2 is below the current grade level of most learners, suggesting a reduction in assessment difficulty compared to BL and ML1. Due to the difference in the number of subtasks administered at ML2, and according to the report, results are presented as standardised scores (as well as means) following the FM's recommended procedure.⁸

Table 2 presents a summary of learning assessments that were administered to learners by grades from baseline to ML2, including the new assessment focused on applying functional skills – reading and maths skills in real-life tasks – introduced in ML2.

Table 2: Learning assessments conducted by grade

Class /Grade	EGRA	EGMA	SeGRA	SeGMA	Functional Reading	Functional Mathematics	Learner Context
Round	BL/ ML1/ ML2 ²	BL/ ML1/ ML2 ²	BL/ ML1/ ML2 ²	BL/ ML1/ ML2 ²	ML2	ML2	ML2
P3-P4 ¹	X	X			X	X	X
P5-P7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
S1-S6 + VTI	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Note: ¹ In ML2, there are no girls in P3, and only three girls remain in P4. The results for P4 are not included in the tables, likely due to the small sample size, though no explicit reason is provided. However, P4 is still mentioned in the description of the results accompanying the tables. In ML2 the subtasks for each grade were modified with respect to ML1 and BL.

At endline, the methodologies of difference-in-differences (used at ML1) and before-and-after (used at ML2) were dropped. The evaluation did not incorporate learning data, a comparison group, or benchmarks to draw comparisons. Given the qualitative nature of the evaluation, the measurement of learning outcomes focused on girls' perceptions of how the project supported their continued enrolment in school and enhanced their learning. Data were collected through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with girls, parents, teachers, and key informants. The results from endline are not comparable against either baseline or the midline assessments. Additionally, the endline evaluation does not include a comparison group or benchmark for comparison. See *Table 3* for a summary of changes in how learning outcomes were measured.

Table 3: Summary of changes in measurement of learning outcomes

Parameters	Literacy				Numeracy			
Evaluation round	BL	ML1	ML2	EL	BL	ML1	ML2	EL
Instrument	EGRA/ SeGRA	EGRA/ SeGRA	EGRA/ SeGRA/ Functional literacy	—	EGMA/ SeGRA	EGMA/ SeGMA	EGMA/ SeGMA/ Functional numeracy	—
Language assessed	English	English	English	—	—	—	—	—
Comparison group	Yes	Yes	No	—	Yes	Yes	No	—
Grades assessed (at baseline)	P3-S3	P3-S3	P3-S3	—	P3-S3	P3-S3	P3-S3	—

⁷ The ML2 report contains inconsistencies in the subtasks listed between Table 4 and Table 16. For consistency with the reported results, we have used the subtasks from Table 16.

⁸ This is because mean scores are not comparable when the two tests differ in difficulty level, while standardised scores allow some relative comparisons.

Parameters	Literacy				Numeracy			
Grade assessed (as per progression)	P3-S3	P3 ¹ -S4 + vocational ²	P4 ³ -S5 + vocational ⁴		P3-S3	P3 ¹ -S4 + vocational ²	P4 ³ -S5 + vocational ⁴	
Sample of girls	IS	IS	IS	—	IS	IS	IS	—
Sample size	T:268, C:270	T:237, C:179	T:201	—	T:268, C:270	T:237, C:179	T:201	—
Planned data collection	May 2018	Mar 2020	Mar 2022	Mar 2024	May 2018	Mar 2020	Mar 2022	Mar 2024
Actual data collection	April 2018	Oct-Nov 2019	Sept 2021 – Apr 2022	Unknown	April 2018	Oct-Nov 2019	Sept 2021 – Apr 2022	Unknown
Publication date of the evaluation report	November 2018	September 2020	November 2022	April 2024	November 2018	September 2020	November 2022	April 2024

Notes: ¹ P3 learners at ML1 were found to have repeated a grade. ² They estimated the results for S4 and vocational students, but these grades were not included in the DiD analysis. This is because the project uses a cross-sectional DiD approach, and S4 is excluded as there were no corresponding results for the same grade in the baseline. ³ Students below P6 repeated at least one grade. The results in learning for ML2 do not include P4, this is probably because of the sample size (three girls) but it is not mentioned explicitly in the report. ⁴ The grade S4, S5 and vocational are not included in the cross-sectional before and after estimation as there were no corresponding results for the same grade in the baseline. ⁵ The sample was divided in three groups: Primary, post primary and transition to employment. ⁶ The majority of this girls were part of the treatment group, but the report indicates that a few non-GEC girls in the project target institutions were also purposefully selected (and individually interviewed) across the different institutions for comparison.

2.1.2. Review of changes to the Transition Outcome indicator

The transition outcome tracked the progression of girls with disabilities to the next stage of education, training, or employment. This was assessed comparing the grade a girl was enrolled in at baseline to her status at ML1, and subsequently at ML2.

As the project supported girls enrolled in formal education, they were expected to progress through school and transition out of school during the lifetime of the project. [Table 4](#) below presents the expected transition levels for ML1 and ML2 based on the grade at baseline.⁹

Table 4: Expected transition levels by grade in each round of evaluation

BL (2018)	ML1 (2019)	ML2 (2022)
P3	P4	P6
P4	P5	P7
P5	P6	S1, vocational school
P6	P7	S2
P7	S1	S3
S1	S2	S4
S2	S3	S5, vocational school
S3	S4	S6
S4	S5	Working, vocational school, university

Consequently, a successful transition – as defined in the baseline, ML1 and ML2 reports – includes moving to the next grade (in-school progression), entering a new educational cycle (e.g., from primary to secondary school), enrolling in technical and vocational education and training (TVET), or gaining employment. Conversely, unsuccessful transitions included repeating a grade, dropping out or moving into employment below the minimum wage¹⁰ or legal age. These transitions pathways were tailored to be appropriate for children at different grades levels.

⁹ Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) issued guidelines for the reopening of schools, stipulating that all returning learners in primary and secondary would be promoted to the next grade level from the class they were in when schools closed in 2020 (e.g., a learner in grade 5 in 2020 would start grade 6 in 2022).

¹⁰ This definition was established in the ML1 report, despite the absence of a minimum wage in Uganda. This issue was highlighted in the ML2 evaluation report, which suggested the need to clarify this for the endline assessment.

In practice, at ML1 and ML2, girls who repeated a grade, dropped out or became uncontactable despite multiple attempts to track them¹¹, were considered as not having successfully transitioned. This means that girls who had transferred to other schools, as reported anecdotally by teachers often based on information from other students, were considered as having made unsuccessful transitions, if the external evaluators could not track the girls and verify this information.¹² At endline, girls who completed vocational skills training and qualifying for work/ self-employment were considered “completed”; however, they were not considered in the transition rate as successful transition¹³.

Between baseline and ML1, a before-and-after estimation was used to compare transition rates.

For ML2, the report presented transition data at baseline, ML1 and ML2, disaggregated by: 1) sample found (and tracked by ML1 and ML2), 2) unsuccessful transition due to dropout or transfer to a new school where the learner could not be tracked, repeater, and absent or lost from the sample, and 3) successful transition to expected class.

Transition rate for ML1 is re-estimated in ML2, though it is not mentioned how this is done. For ML2 the transition rate was calculated dividing the number of learners who successfully moved from their ML1 grade (2019) to their appropriate ML2 grade (2022), divided by the number who were successfully tracked and found at ML1. Learners who had transferred schools or were absent during ML1 but found at ML2 were included in this estimation¹⁴.

At the endline, the evaluation shifted to a fully qualitative approach. Despite the qualitative nature of the endline evaluation, the endline report did measure transition rates, but this was done using monitoring data for all girls in the project (provided by CSU) rather than a sample tracked through primary data. Monitoring data included all girls, so the issue of girls being wrongly classified as unsuccessful transitions due to tracking difficulties did not arise at endline.

Table 5 provides a summary of changes through the evaluation’s rounds, in terms of instruments used to record the grade level at which girls were enrolled, its implication on sample sizes, and the use of comparison group data.

Table 5: Summary of changes to transition

	Parameters	Transition rate			
		BL	ML1	ML2	EL
Parameters IS	Instrument	HH survey: grade level of girl; Girl’s survey (grade repetition)	HH survey/Head Teacher (HT) and Teacher Interview	Girl’s survey and project tracking ¹	Monitoring data
	Comparison group	Yes	Yes	No	No
	Grades assessed (as per baseline grade)	P3-S3	P3-S3	P3-S3	P3-S3
	Grade assessed (as per grade progression)	P3-S3	P3-S3	P3-S4	P3-S6 + TVET/tertiary + completed ²
	Sample size	T: 268 C: 270	T: 237 C: 179	T:237	T:2063
Evaluation dates	Planned data collection	May 2018	March 2020	March 2022	Mar 2024
	Actual data collection	April 2018	Oct – Nov 2019	Sept 2021 – April 2022	Unknown
	Publication date of the evaluation report	November 2018	September 2020	November 2022	April 2024

Notes: ¹ At ML2, learners were asked to self-report their grade level in March 2020, before schools closed, while their actual grade level at ML2 was tracked by the evaluation team.² The project did not count girls who dropped out and completed vocational training towards the denominator of the transition rate.

¹¹ The ML2 report highlighted significant challenges in data management of all girls in the project. It noted that the “lack of aggregated, complete data on each girl in CSU’s records”, led to disproportionate amount of time spent harmonising CSU records with the study’s sample lists, delayed fieldwork, and made it difficult to track girls from their last known locations at ML1 and ML2 given the limited information CSU had on whether they had transferred or dropped out.

¹² This is explicitly acknowledged in the EE report.

¹³ Even though the project does not classify these girls as unsuccessful transitions, they are not included in the numerator of the transition rate calculation, but they are included in the denominator.

¹⁴ Girls who were found in M2 but not in ML1 were consider in the numerator of the estimator but not in the denominator.

2.2. Outcome results delivered

2.2.1. Learning outcomes

Baseline to ML1

To evaluate the impact of the intervention, a cross-sectional Difference-in-Differences (DiD) methodology was employed. This means that instead of comparing the same girls over time (longitudinally), the evaluation compared girls from the same grade between baseline and ML1 (e.g., students in S3 at baseline with students in S3 at ML1). The target was a 0.38 standard deviation (SD) improvement in both literacy and numeracy over the 1.5-year period between baseline and ML1, equivalent to an annual improvement of 0.25 SD.

Literacy and numeracy results are presented by grade and further disaggregated by treatment and comparison groups. Results are reported as weighted means, based on the proportion of correct items for each subtask, with all subtasks equally weighted in the overall score.

At baseline, the comparison group (girls without disabilities) outperformed the treatment group in both literacy and numeracy across all primary grades (P3 to P7), although no statistical analysis of significance was conducted. In secondary grades (S1 to S3), the treatment group showed a slight advantage (in means) over the comparison group in both literacy and numeracy.

Between baseline and ML1, literacy scores increased for nearly all grades in the treatment group (*girls with disabilities*), with the exception of P3 and S3. However, the comparison group (*girls without disabilities from the same schools*) showed greater improvements in most grades, except for P6. This further widened the achievement gap in literacy between the treatment and comparison groups in primary grades and created a gap in secondary school. In numeracy, ML1 showed a decline in performance, as the treatment group experienced decreases in scores across most grades, except for P4 and P6. Meanwhile, the comparison group showed mixed results, leading to a wider gap in all the grades.

The DiD regression estimates are grouped into three categories: P3-P4, P5-P6 and P7- S3. [Table 7](#) summarises the DiD mean scores by grouping categories, as reported in the ML1 report. The DiD results were not statistically significant for the groupings P3-P4 and P5-P6 in both literacy and numeracy. For P7-S3 girls, the results were negative and statistically significant for both tests.

In the FM's scorecard, the results were analysed, and conclusions were based on aggregated data for all grades combined, consistent with other external evaluations. This led to differences in reporting; thus, the results from the FM scorecard are also summarised and compiled in [Table 7](#).

The DiD analysis from the FM between baseline and ML1 indicated negative results. For literacy, there was a reduction of 0.25 standard deviations between the treatment and comparison groups, though this result was not statistically significant. In numeracy, the reduction was more pronounced, with a decrease of 0.67 standard deviations, which was statistically significant and consistent across all grades.

ML2 comparisons: BL to ML2 and ML1 to ML2

At ML2, results for literacy and numeracy are reported separately, focusing on both **foundational skills** – assessed through scaled-down versions of EGRA, SeGRA, EGMA and SeGMA – and **functional skills**, assessed through a new assessment. The scaled-down foundational assessments targeted key reading and maths subtasks. This lowered the difficulty of the test as more challenging subtasks were dropped. Functional skills focus on numeracy and literacy real-life skills.

The ML2 sample included both recontacted girls from baseline and ML1 from the treatment group (as there was no comparison group at ML2), as well as new girls to meet the required sample size. Two main issues affected the desired sample size. First, girls who were sampled from P3 at baseline and were below P6 had not successfully transitioned and had repeated at least one grade; if they had progressed as expected no students below P6 would have been included in ML2. The cross-sectional design, further impacted by Covid-19 school closures, introduces a selection bias into the sample, as it disproportionately included girls who had failed to advance to the next grade. This also affected the mean scores for these grades due to small sample sizes, warranting cautious interpretation of comparisons for the lower grades. Second, many learners transitioned to secondary school or TVET institutions that were not supported by CSU, meaning the interventions no longer reached them and they could not be administered the learning assessments.

Foundational learning results

Cross-sectional before-and-after (B&A) estimation are presented comparing ML2 against baseline and ML1. Due to changes in the number of subtasks and the variation in difficulty levels compared to the tests used at baseline and ML1, standardised calculations (anchoring all standardised scores to the baseline distribution) were used alongside mean-based results to allow for fairer comparisons in the foundational learning results. Here, we only report results based on standardised scores which, as stated in the report, allow for fairer comparisons across different assessment rounds.

For foundational literacy, as measured by the EGRA and SeGRA assessments in ML2, improvements in literacy relative to both baseline and ML1 are observed only for P7. The ML2 report explains that “P7 is a candidate class in Uganda and therefore learners often work extra hard through participating in extra revision or even coaching in anticipation of the primary leaving exams held in the third term of the year (p.49)”. Learners in P5, S2 and S3 showed lower performance compared to ML1 and baseline, indicating challenges in progression for these grades. On the other hand, learners in P6 and S1, showed improvement relative to baseline, but declines relative to ML1. Despite the improvements for these students, many learners across these grades were still performing below the expected levels for their age and grade.

In foundational numeracy, as measured with EGMA and SeGMA in ML2, improvements relative to both baseline and ML1 are observed for learners in P7 to S3. However, for learners in P5 and P6, performance declined compared to baseline and ML1.

Functional learning results – at ML2

In functional reading, assessed exclusively at ML2, learners demonstrated confidence in applying their reading skills to everyday tasks, achieving accuracy rates ranging from 75% to 95% in some tasks, such as recognising familiar words. However, reading comprehension remained an area with gaps in understanding. Mean scores for functional reading are presented in [Table 6](#) below.

Similarly, for functional maths, which was also assessed exclusively at ML2, learners performed well in practical tasks such as pattern-making and division. However, they struggled with more conceptual tasks, such as market transactions, indicating difficulties in applying mathematical knowledge to real-life situations.

Table 6: Mean scores in functional literacy and numeracy by subtask excluding zero score

Literacy Subtask	Mean Literacy (% correct)	Numeracy Subtask	Mean Numeracy
Word Matching (out of 30)	24 (80%)	Pattern Extension (out of 5)	3.4 (68%)
Receptive Vocabulary (out of 10)	9.7 (97%)	Division (out of 3)	2.2 (73.3%)
Expressive Vocabulary (out of 10)	7.4 (74%)	Market Transactions 1 - Actual (out of 4)	2.6 (65%)
Reading Comprehension - Invitation (out of 10)	6 (60%)	Market Transactions 2 - Hypothetical (out of 3)	1.9 (63.3%)
Reading Comprehension - Schedule (out of 8)	4.7 (58.7%)		

Midline 2 to Endline

At endline, no indicator measured changes in learning outcomes. The evaluation focus on perceptions around the support provided.

[Table 7](#) below summarises the results for all rounds using the EGRA, SeGRA, EGMA and SeGMA assessments. For ML1, results showing overall impact for the whole sample (P3 to S3) were only reported by the FM and are presented at the bottom of the table for reference. Overall impact by grouping categories (P3-P4, P5-P6 and P7-S4) is sourced from the external evaluation and presented as follows.

Table 7: Learning scores at baseline, ML1, ML2 and endline in treatment and comparison groups

		Literacy				Numeracy			
		BL	ML1	ML2 ¹	EL	Baseline	ML1	ML2	EL
	Instrument	EGRA/ SeGRA	EGRA/ SeGRA	EGRA/ SeGRA/	—	EGMA/ SeGRA	EGMA/ SeGMA	EGMA/ SeGMA	—
Source: EE		Overall impact (P3-P4 girls)							
		EGRA	EGRA	EGRA/ Functional literacy	—	EGMA	EGMA	EGMA/ Functional numeracy	—
Results by group	Treated	28.1	31.5	—	—	47.5	50	—	—
	Comparison	42.7	59	—	—	62.5	73.8	—	—
BL to ML1	Results DiD (SD)	—	-0.486	—	—	—	-0.299	—	—
	Target (SD)	—	0.375	—	—	—	0.375	—	—
	Achievement against target	—	Not reported	—	—	—	Not reported	—	—
Source: EE		Overall impact (P5-P6 girls)							
		EGRA/ SeGRA	EGRA/ SeGRA	EGRA/ SeGRA/ Functional literacy	—	EGMA/ SeGRA	EGMA/ SeGMA	EGMA/ SeGMA/ Functional numeracy	—
Results by group	Treated	37.9	45.7	P5: 19.1 P6: 39.2	—	59.9	61.0	P5: 34.8 P6: 41.2	—
	Comparison	53.2	59.9	—	—	65.3	70.7	—	—
Baseline to midline	Results DiD (SD)	—	0.059	—	—	—	-0.221	—	—
	Results Mean (SD) ²	—	—	P5: -0.8 P6: 0.0	—	—	—	P5: -0.9 P6: -0.8	—
	Target (SD)	—	0.375	—	—	—	0.375	—	—
	Achievement against target	—	Not reported	—	—	—	Not reported	—	—
Source: EE		Overall impact (P7-S3 girls)							
		EGRA/ SeGRA	EGRA/ SeGRA	EGRA/ SeGRA/ Functional literacy	—	EGMA/ SeGRA	EGMA/ SeGMA	EGMA/ SeGMA/ Functional numeracy	—
Results by group	Treated	45.0	59.2	P7:44.8 S1:57.5 S2:57.4 S3:62.3 ⁴	—	42.6	35.5	P7:51 S1:67.5 S2:69 S3:73.5 ⁵	—
	Comparison	46.8	60.5	—	—	41.3	50.8	—	—
Baseline to midline	Results DiD	—	-0.671***	—	—	—	-1.470***	—	—
	Results Mean (SD) ²	—	—	P7:0.5 S1:0.4 S2:-0.1 S3:-11.3	—	—	—	P7:1.8 S1:0.7 S2:1.6 S3:0.2	—
	Target (SD)	—	0.375	—	—	—	0.375	—	—

		Literacy				Numeracy			
		BL	ML1	ML2 ¹	EL	Baseline	ML1	ML2	EL
	Achievement against target	—	Not reported	—	—	—	Not reported	—	—
Source: FM scorecard		Overall impact (P3-S3 girls)							
Baseline to midline	Results DiD ³	—	-0.246	—	—	—	0.669**	—	—
	Target (SD)	—	0.375	—	—	—	0.375	—	—
	Achievement against target	—	0%	—	—	—	0%	—	—
At endline	FM's RAAG rating	—	Red	—	—	—	Red	—	—

Notes: Difference coefficients with three asterisks are significant at the 99% confidence level (P-value lower than 0.01=1%), two asterisks are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level (P-value lower than 0.05 = 5%), and those with one asterisk are statistically significant at the 90% level (P-value lower than 0.1 = 10%).

¹The results presented for ML2 as mean scores are not directly comparable with baseline and ML1 because the subtasks have been modified. For comparison, please refer to the Results Mean (SD). ²The standardised mean scores for literacy at ML2 were calculated based on the baseline mean and standard deviation for each grade. The standardised score at ML2 is derived by subtracting the baseline mean for the grade level from the learner's weighted score at ML2 and then dividing the result by the baseline standard deviation. This method allows comparisons between ML2 results and the baseline, anchoring all standardised scores to the baseline distribution. ³The DiD estimators were not presented in the report but were exclusively included in the scorecard created by the Fund Manager (FM). While the numeracy estimator is mentioned as being significant, no confidence level is reported. We assume the significance level is 95%. ⁴Results for S4, S5, and Vocational are also presented as follows: S4: 64.7, S5: 60.2, and Vocational: 41.6. These grades are not included in the analysis because there were no girls in these grades at baseline, so no comparison could be made. ⁵Results for S4, S5, and Vocational are also presented as follows: S4:74.8; S5:74.4; Vocational 48.4. These grades are not included in the analysis because there were no girls in these grades at baseline, so no comparison could be made.

IE Conclusions on Learning

The CSU project's external evaluations showed poor learning outcomes up to the midline, as the endline evaluation did not assess learning. **Methodological challenges inherent in the evaluation design further complicate the interpretation of findings and comparisons drawn.** Key issues include:

Limitations in the cross-sectional design

To assess project effectiveness, the evaluation at ML1 and ML2 employed a cross-sectional DiD approach, comparing results by grade (P3 to S3) across different data collection rounds (e.g., students in P5 at baseline with students in P5 at ML1 or ML2). However, this approach presented significant limitations over time. By ML2, no students should have been in P6 or below if they had progressed as expected from baseline. As such, these grades were disproportionately composed of repeaters and girls struggling to progress, raising concerns about sample bias. Despite this, the evaluation continued to draw grade-level comparisons for the lower grades (P3 to P6) without addressing the changing composition of the sample or the implications for the validity of the comparisons.

Additional complications arose at each midline round, further impacting the reliability and interpretation of the findings.

Challenges in disability comparisons at ML1

The evaluation approach employed at ML1 aimed to compare the progress of girls with disabilities to that of non-disabled girls in the same schools. However, this design lacks a robust evidence base, as highlighted by the FM in the ML1 scorecard analysis. While the choice was influenced by ethical considerations – such as ensuring support was not withheld from girls with disabilities – alternative designs, such as a stepped-wedge approach ¹⁵, could have offered a more rigorous comparison without compromising ethical principles.

Assessment changes at ML2

Changes in assessments subtasks at ML2 raises further questions about the validity of the conclusions drawn by ML2. A more consistent evaluation, where identical subtasks are used to compare progress across rounds (by re-estimating the scores for baseline and ML1 among matching subtasks), would have provided a clearer understanding of improvements over time.

Despite the methodological challenges outlined above, the evaluations provide insights into CSU project's outcomes. Below, the key results observed across the evaluation rounds are summarised and contextualised.

At ML1, learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy, especially those in lower grades did not meet expectations, with most learners categorised as either non-learners or emergent learners across key subtasks. The DiD analysis

¹⁵ In a stepped-wedge design, the intervention is phased across groups so that "later" intervention groups serve as benchmarks for early participants before ultimately transitioning into treatment groups.

revealed widening achievement gaps in both literacy and numeracy, but most notably in numeracy among secondary students. This finding aligns with observations from “*Study 3: Aggregate impact of GEC-T projects between baseline and midline*” (Poli et al, 2022). However, these results should be interpreted cautiously, as the comparisons between disabled and non-disabled students do not provide a clear understanding of how girls with disabilities might have progressed in the absence of intervention.

By ML2, results from the before-and-after analysis indicated that consistent improvements in literacy and numeracy were only observed in P7, likely due to their extra efforts in preparing for the primary leaving exams. In literacy, performance in other grades either maintained or declined. In contrast, numeracy showed consistent improvements from both baseline and ML1 in grades P7 through S3. Poor results observed in lower primary grades likely stemmed from the cross-sectional evaluation design, which predominantly captured the struggles of students who had repeated grades and faced ongoing learning challenges. Gains in secondary, however, may have been influenced by the reduction in test difficulty at ML2, despite the use of standardised scores to enable fairer comparisons.

Additionally, ML2 tracked progress in terms of increased acquisition of a skill.¹⁶ This functional skills assessment provided insights into what these girls are able to do after four years of intervention: while girls demonstrate competency in tasks like pattern-making and basic division, they face significant challenges with everyday scenarios, such as managing market transactions and reading comprehension.

The endline evaluation did not include a quantitative assessment of learning outcomes. According to interviews with the IP, this was intentional, as learning progress had already been assessed at ML1 and ML2. Instead, the endline focused on generating lessons learned rather than accountability metrics. However, the absence of quantitative data limits the ability to evaluate sustained impact or progress during the post-Covid-19 period. Based on available evidence, it is evident that the project faced significant challenges in effectively supporting the learning outcomes of girls with disabilities.

2.2.2. Transition outcomes

Baseline to Midline 1

At baseline, transition rates were measured relying on girls’ self-reported data on grade repetition. The transition rate was 90.4% for the treatment group and 92.1% for the comparison group. The project set a target of a 7% increase in transition rates from baseline to ML1, using a before-and-after estimation based on girls’ and household surveys. This design, while tracking transition rates for both treatment and comparison groups, defined the target specifically for treatment girls only.

The report only provided transition rates for treatment or comparison groups by grade level and showed that none of the grades achieved the intended 7% increase in transition rates, demonstrating that the project failed to meet its targets at grade level. Nevertheless, it must be taken into account that the comparison group consists of girls without disabilities, while the treatment group consists of girls with disabilities. Transition rates by grade varied between approximately 60% and 90%, with the lowest rates seen in the transition from primary to secondary schooling.

In the FM scorecard available at ML1, an overall transition rate was estimated for the treatment group (70%) and for the comparison group (68%). Based on this difference, the FM assigned a green rating (see [Table 8](#)). The evaluation report mentions two factors positively correlated with transition: the use of assistive devices among girls in the treatment group and consistent school attendance. In the interview with the IP, the positive performance of the treatment group was explained mainly by the CSU covering school fees for the treatment girls, along with additional support for transportation, either through a bus service or cash assistance.

Midline 1 to Midline 2

At ML2, an overall transition rate was presented for both ML1 and ML2. The transition rate for ML1 was re-estimated and reported as 55.2%. The report does not explain how this re-estimation was done, but it seems inconsistent, as it significantly differs from the 67.8% calculated from the data provided by grade¹⁷, as well as the FM’s reported figure. For ML2, the transition rate was calculated based on the number of girls who were tracked from ML1, yielding a rate of 61.6%. Despite the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, this represents an overall improvement in transition rates compared to ML1 (as documented in the ML2 report).

¹⁶ This was in response to guidance provided by the FM in 2022 recommending projects to track learning data using relevant indicators from four contributory lines of evidence: 1) improvement in mean scores over a prior evaluation point, 2) a decrease in non-learners over a prior evaluation point, 3) an increase in girls meeting benchmarks over a prior evaluation point, and 4) an increase in girls acquiring a reading skill. This project reported on indicators 1, 2 and 4, as numbered.

¹⁷ If we divide the number of successful transitions reported by the evaluator (187) by the number of the baseline girls (276) the transition rate for ML1 is set at 67.8%.

In this evaluation round, the project aimed for an 8% increase in transition rates for each grade, but none of the grades achieved this target. At the grade level, the results were largely poor. Transition rates fell across all grades from P4 to S3, with the exception of P3 and S3. P3 demonstrated an exceptional transition rate (160%), but this outcome was largely due to the fact that some students who were absent or untracked at ML1 were found at ML2.¹⁸ In addition, the gains observed in S3 are questionable due to small sample sizes.

The evaluation report acknowledged that these transition rates did not reach the target partly due to the way the indicator was calculated. Learners who were not found at ML2 were considered as “unsuccessful transitions,” even if they were still continuing their educational journey but had transferred to another school or were in a vocational training institution (VTI) that could not be visited during the evaluation.

Midline to Endline

At endline, the transition rates for girls with disabilities were measured using monitoring data. This showed that around 80% of the girls supported by the project successfully moved through the GEC-T pathways, transitioning into, or progressing through school, vocational training, or work. However, the report indicates that around 14% of the girls had not yet transitioned to secondary school, despite being supported by the project for seven years. The Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in nearly two years of school closures, contributed to this delay. On a positive note, about 66% of the girls reached secondary or tertiary levels, which compared favourably to Uganda’s national average transition rate to secondary school (59%). Finally, about 10% of the girls dropped out of the project, mostly due to family relocations, while another 10% completed vocational training and transitioned into work or self-employment.

Table 8: Transition rates at baseline, Midline 1 and Midline 2 and endline in treatment and comparison groups

		Transition rate			
	Parameters	Baseline	ML1 ¹	ML2	Endline
	Instrument	HH survey: grade level of girl; Girl's survey (grade repetition)	HH survey/Head Teacher (HT) and Teacher Interview	Girl's survey and project tracking	Monitoring data
Overall impact (IS girls)					
Results by group	Treated	90.4%	70% 55.2% (re-estimated at ML2)	ML2: 61.6%	80%
	Comparison	92.1%	68%	—	—
Baseline to midline	Results B&A	—	-20pp	6.4 pp (own estimation)	18.4pp (own estimation)
	Target B&A	—	7 pp	8 pp	—
	Achievement against target	—	0% (own estimation)	80% (own estimation)	—
	FM's RAAG rating	—	Green ²	—	—

Note: ¹ Results are taken from CSU Uganda scorecard at midline, as results in the EE report are provided by grade level. ² The FM awarded a GREEN rating to this project because: “Transition rates overall are higher in the treatment group than in the comparison group. Amongst the treatment group, characteristics and barriers that are associated with lower transition rates are: girl comes from a female headed household, is a single orphan, walks to school, has a high chore burden at home, lacks assistive devices, faces challenges while at school and has multiple disabilities.” (p.1, CSU Uganda scorecard: midline)

IE Conclusions on Transition

Several methodological challenges inherent in the evaluation design pose difficulties in interpreting the findings. First, the use of girls without disabilities as a comparison group (at ML1) and the absence of a comparison group at ML2 and endline limit the ability to rigorously and fairly assess the relative impact of the treatment group compared to their peers. Second, the data sources used to measure transitions – whether through household surveys, head teacher interviews, or monitoring data – varied across the rounds, with no clear rationale for these changes or for the exclusion of monitoring data in earlier evaluation rounds. Lastly, the method used to calculate transition rates at ML2 differed from earlier rounds. While earlier rounds relied on aggregated figures, ML2 calculated rates based on the number of girls tracked from ML1, leading to potential underestimation of the transition rates, and leaving the justification for this approach unclear.

¹⁸ This means that girls who were tracked at ML2 but not at ML1 were only included in the numerator of the indicator.

Despite the methodological challenges outlined above, the evaluations provide insights into CSU's transition outcomes. Overall, targets were not consistently achieved. The project aimed for a 7% increase in transition rates at ML1 and an 8% increase at ML2, but none of the grades achieved these targets in either round.

At ML1, the treatment group experienced a significant decline in transition rates of approximately 20%. However, the treatment group still maintained higher transition rates compared to the comparison group, which consisted of girls without disabilities. Although no significance analysis was conducted, a Difference-in-Differences (DiD) analysis estimated a +3.7 percentage point difference, suggesting relatively better performance by the treatment group than the comparison group. Based on the latter the FM assigned a Green rating, which is generous, especially considering the broader failure to meet grade-level targets.

At ML2, despite challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the project reported an increase in transition rates. However, further analysis suggests this improvement was likely due to a methodological error rather than actual progress. The evidence suggests a decline in transition rates between ML1 and ML2. The project acknowledged that the transition rate indicator may have been influenced by how transitions were calculated, particularly in the secondary grades. Learners who could not be located at ML2 – many of whom may have transferred to other schools or vocational training programmes – were still classified as "unsuccessful transitions," leading to artificially lower transition rates. Without a comparison group, it is challenging to judge these declines in practice.

At endline, the transition rate for girls with disabilities was reported at approximately 80%, reflecting a 10 percentage point improvement from ML1, using monitoring data. This data is more positive than the external evaluation data from previous rounds, which only track a sample of girls. In the monitoring data reported in the endline, about 66% of the girls reached secondary or tertiary levels, which compared favourably to Uganda's national average transition rate to secondary school (59%). As such, we conclude that the project improved girls' transition outcomes compared to what might have occurred in the absence of the intervention.

3. What intermediate outcomes did the project deliver?

3.1. Overall project performance

CSU reported some progress against Intermediate Outcomes (IOs), although considerable challenges remained. The project was able to support attendance and reduce financial barriers to education, at least in the short-run. Girls' self-esteem was described by primary respondents as being the main area of project results, but data from the midline report paints a mixed picture. Teaching quality was difficult to shift, and training provided seems insufficient to support inclusive classrooms, although there were some improvements according to classroom observations. School infrastructure and awareness raising in the school and community environment had some positive results, but important challenges remained. See [Table 9](#) for a summary of project progress towards its IOs, according to its evaluation reports.

This section provides a brief overview of the main reported changes according to CSU evaluation reports and IE case study research. While CSU reported on project-specific IOs, in this section we follow the FM IO definitions, and group project indicators therein.

Table 9: Progress towards Intermediate Outcomes

FM IO	IP Indicator	Baseline	Midline 1	Midline 2
FM IO2: Reducing financial barriers	IP IO (ML1): Proportion of parents of disabled girls with improved income that contribute to child's school fees, scholastic materials, and uniform	Difficulty hearing: 37.5% Difficulty seeing: 50% Difficulty walking: 33.3% Difficulty remembering: N/A Difficulty communicating: N/A Difficulty self-care: N/A Average: 40%	Difficulty hearing: 50% Difficulty seeing: 67.9% Difficulty walking: 61.7% Difficulty remembering: 38.3% Difficulty communicating: 50% Difficulty self-care: 75% Average: 57.15%	N/A
	IP IO (ML1): % of girls with disabilities who report that they get fewer things compared to their siblings without disability from their caregivers.	N/A	Difficulty hearing: 32.7% Difficulty seeing: 37.4% Difficulty walking: 32.4% Difficulty remembering: 28.9% Difficulty communicating: 16.7% Difficulty self-care: 0% Average: 24.68%	N/A
	IP IO (ML1): Parents link their increase in ability to support the education of their disabled daughters to the project interventions.	N/A	88%	N/A

FM IO	IP Indicator	Baseline	Midline 1	Midline 2
FM IO3: Improved teaching	IP IO (ML1): Percentage of teachers that are observed to use adaptive materials, equitably engage girls and boys, and both children with disabilities and children without disabilities	Uses adaptive materials (3%) Engages both girls and boys (79%) Engages both children with disabilities and children without disabilities (60%)	Uses adaptive materials (10.9%) Engages both girls and boys (72%) Engages both children with disabilities and children without disabilities (71.9%)	N/A
	IP IO (ML1): The extent to which teaching process in the project schools meets the learning needs of pupils on a scale of 1-3.	Unclear	Teachers who scored 3 (great extent) Female teachers: 87.2% Male teachers: 84%	N/A
	Additional indicator (ML1 and 2): Knowledge of inclusive education	Teachers who have heard of inclusive education: 94.2% Teachers who agree that children with disabilities should be included in mainstream classrooms: 95.2% Teachers who believe that inclusion happens in their school: 97.9%	Teachers who have heard of inclusive education: 92.7% Teachers who agree that children with disabilities should be included in mainstream classrooms: 94.4% Teachers who believe that inclusion happens in their school: 98.9%	Teachers who have heard of inclusive education: 96.3% Teachers who agree that children with disabilities should be included in mainstream classrooms: 95.5% Teachers who believe that inclusion happens in their school: 100%
FM IO5: Safer learning environments	IP IO (ML1): % of Girls with disabilities, teachers and caregivers who agree that they feel empowered to report cases of abuse	N/A	GWDs: 60.7% Teachers: 50.9% Caregivers: 44.8%	N/A
	IP IO (ML1): % of Parents/ caregivers that link their current level of knowledge of child protection to project interventions.	N/A	13.2%	N/A
	IP IO (ML1): % Girls with disabilities, caregivers, teachers, and education authorities agree that project interventions have changed attitudes so that girls have increased access to education, have improved retention, and improved learning.	N/A	Girls: 61.5% Caregivers: 87.5% Teachers: 92.5%	N/A

FM IO	IP Indicator	Baseline	Midline 1	Midline 2
FM IO6: Empowering girls	IP IO (ML1): % of girls with disabilities who report to have high self-esteem and life skills as measured by the combined self-esteem and life skills index	Difficulty hearing: 33.3% Difficulty seeing: 76.9% Difficulty walking: 45% Difficulty remembering 75% Difficulty communicating: 80% Difficulty self-care: 50% Average: 60%	Difficulty hearing: 50% Difficulty seeing: 65.2% Difficulty walking: 63.6% Difficulty remembering 30.6% Difficulty communicating: 60% Difficulty self-care: 0% Average: 44.9%	N/A
	IP IO (ML1): Percentage of girls, parents, and teachers who link the change in the self-esteem, confidence and life skills to the project's life skills and mentoring support interventions.	N/A	GWDs: 23.1% Parents: 86.9% Teachers: 92.5%	N/A
FM IO 7: Attendance	IP IO (ML1): Improvement in disabled girls' attendance in schools).	Difficulty hearing: 78% Difficulty seeing: 60.2% Difficulty walking: 52.3% Difficulty remembering 55.6% Difficulty communicating: 90% Difficulty self-care: 50% Multiple difficulties: 87.5% Average: 67.66%	Difficulty hearing: 77.6% Difficulty seeing: 75.9% Difficulty walking: 70.6% Difficulty remembering 60% Difficulty communicating: 83.3% Difficulty self-care: 66.7% Multiple difficulties: 66.7% Average: 71.54%	N/A
	IP IO (ML1): Stakeholders' views on the extent to which project interventions have contributed to school attendance of disabled girls.	N/A	Respondents who scored 3 (Great extent): Teachers (84.2%) GWDs (83.8%) Caregivers (92.1%)	N/A
	Additional indicator (ML1 and 2): Learner missed school within the last week (self-reported)	P3-P4: 23.2% P5-P6: 47% P7-S4+voc: 43.1%	P3-P4: 51.6% P5-P6: 27% P7-S4+voc: 17.1%	P3-P4: 22.2 P5-P6: 46.2% P7-S4+voc: 20%
	Additional indicator (ML1 and 2): Teacher missed school within the last week (self-reported)	P3-P4: 30.3% P5-P6: 31% P7-S4+voc: 0%	P3-P4: 46% P5-P6: 25% P7-S4+voc: 7.7%	P3-P4: 43 P5-P6: 21.9% P7-S4+voc: 10.3%

3.2. FM IO2: Reducing financial barriers¹⁹

FM Indicator: Changes in financial barriers that improve the chances of girls participating in learning.

Main activities: Payment of school fees and other school costs; support to family incomes through trainings and loans; cash transfers during Covid-19.

Key findings: The project led to increased attendance and participation in class, which was described as an essential precondition for girls to improve their learning. The most effective mechanism to do so was the payment of school fees, which parents previously struggled paying. Coupled with the provision of specialised materials, this fostered an environment where girls could more easily be included in the classroom. Efforts to improve family incomes and business prospects were less successful, both due to the limited support provided and the challenging economic environment. Ultimately, the fee payments provided by the project were seen by many case study primary research respondents as unsustainable by design, with cost-sharing arrangements deemed a potential alternative that could have led to less dependency on the part of parents.

The CSU project had a strong focus on reducing financial barriers for caregivers, both **through direct payment of school fees, as well as support for their business endeavours through loans and training**. Secondary and primary data analysis indicates that, at least in the short term, the project was able to reduce financial barriers to education.

Evidence from secondary and case study primary research points to the importance of support to cover **school fees** and other education costs, such as materials, uniforms, and transport, especially as CSU focused on reaching low-income households. Reliance on direct payment from CSU led to important sustainability issues. As shown in **Section 4.4**, an unintended effect of the project was a **dependency on payment of fees**. As stated in the End of Project Review (Okuni, 2024):

“Cost-sharing with the parents of children with disabilities right from the outset of the project support [...] could have been a big incentive for the parents/ caregivers to engage more effectively in income generation to finance their girls’ shared costs of transition.” (p. 33)

According to the Midline 1 Report, **88% of parents reported that project interventions allowed them to increase support to their daughters’ education**. Changes mentioned by sampled parents included ability to start a business to supplement household income, increase in savings, and provision of transport money for girls. While CSU provided training on income-generating activities and access to loans to set up businesses, important barriers remain to access loans, such as the need for collateral. These barriers are largely linked to the targeting of areas with high poverty levels, as highlighted in the Midline Scorecard²⁰. An additional challenge is posed by the high mobility of families, who are usually tenants and may not have permanent addresses, as shared by IE case study respondents. This adds to the perceived riskiness of lending to them. The Midline 1 Report also points out that the high number of low-income, small-scale entrepreneurs in the local market meant that CSU’s business support activity was unlikely to be successful due to high levels of competition. The endline evaluation report highlighted that parents would have needed more financial and technical business support and financial literacy, and that they considered the entrepreneurship training provided by the project to be insufficient. Several parents also reported that their businesses had collapsed during the project lifetime. According to the report, this could be due to lack of basic financial and bookkeeping skills and is in alignment with literature on challenges to the performance of small, micro and medium enterprises in Uganda (Kakooza et al, 2023). As further explained in [Section 4](#), there were many challenges in how this component was implemented.

Some changes in caregivers’ **perceptions and prioritisation of the cost of girls’ education** were also reported by the project, though this was less evident in the case study primary research. As highlighted in the Midline Scorecard²¹ (2020):

“While the majority of caregivers/ parents who have an improved income since baseline report that they use improved income to support their CWDs’ schooling, the proportion of caregivers who have actually seen increases in income is low (17%)”. (Midline Scorecard, p. 4)

¹⁹ IP IO4: Families use their improved income to financially support the education of their girls with disabilities.

²⁰ CSU Uganda Scorecard: Midline (September 2020)

²¹ CSU Uganda Scorecard: Midline (September 2020)

Similarly, the interview with IP staff carried out as part of case study primary research (October 2024) highlighted that, as a result of the project, there was a decrease in the economic barrier to girls' education, likely because of parents' **attitudes and willingness to take on this cost**.

Some parents were still unable to pay school fees, even with the project's support. The project encouraged those families to identify government-aided schools (Universal Secondary Education schools), which are more affordable. As explained further in [Section 4.3](#), respondents highlighted that a high share of project participants have dropped out of school since the intervention, and pointed to the lack of means to pay for school fees as the key reason. Therefore, the project was not able to address economic barriers to education in the longer-term.

3.3. FM IO3: Improved teaching²²

FM Indicator: Improvements in the quality and effectiveness of teaching, facilitation, and support to learning.

Main activities: Teacher training on the rights of children with disability and inclusive education.

Key findings: The project faced huge challenges in teacher training and support, and the evidence ultimately points to continued low quality of teaching in project schools. While teachers report being more aware of and interested in inclusive education – which was confirmed by girls and other case study primary research respondents – most lack the practical skills to implement inclusive education methods successfully in their classroom environment.

Due to the project's focus, this section focuses on both on general teaching quality, and the use of inclusive education methods to foster a positive learning environment for GWDs.

Project evidence on learning improvements is limited and challenging to interpret. The Midline 2 Report suggests that there has been a **worsening in performance across various sub-tasks, both among girls with disabilities and girls without disabilities, following a slight increase from Baseline to Midline 1**. The report points to continued **poor teaching quality and limited resources** in project schools as driving these results. Challenges in improving the quality of teaching emerge strongly from both the secondary and case study primary research.

Secondary data points to perceived improvements in inclusive education methods, but it is important to note that these are self-reported. In terms of teachers' awareness and beliefs on inclusive education, the data shows a slight improvement in teachers' understanding of, and agreement with inclusive education; however, the starting point was already high – with an average of over 90% for all questions at baseline. Almost all girls in the evaluation treatment group (92%), said at Midline 1 that their teacher made them feel welcome, compared to 64% at baseline. This could reflect an improvement in teachers' skills and attitudes, compared to baseline levels. At midline, both male and female teachers felt that the teaching process in project schools met the learning needs of pupils to a great extent (more than 80%). Further, 81% of teachers at Midline 1 reported designing their lesson plans so they could cater to children with disabilities, while only 67% reported catering for all children with disabilities in the design of their assessments or examinations.

Classroom observations present a different picture. At Midline 1, there was a slight increase in the percentage of lessons which catered to learners with different disabilities, but the majority of observed lessons still did not accommodate those learners. There was also an increase in the percentage of teachers who used games, instructional charts, and posters in their lessons, but this remained about 25% of observed teachers. The midline also found that while the percentage of teachers using resources adapted for children with disabilities increased, almost 90% continued to not use them. Classroom observations at Midline 1 found an increase in share of teachers who call on both children with disabilities and children without disabilities (from 60% to 72%), indicating greater involvement of children with disabilities in the classroom.

Data collection with teachers highlighted some remaining barriers. About **6% of teachers at Midline 1 (compared to 5% at baseline) reported not supporting the idea of having children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms**, as these are not equipped to provide a supportive and appropriate environment for their learning. Respondents also expressed a need for further training: teachers who took part in Midline 1 requested capacity building on SEN (28%) and teaching for children with disabilities (25%). In the Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) questionnaire distributed as part of the evaluation, some teachers – between 11.2% and 25%,

²² IP IO2: Increased number of teachers demonstrating inclusive teaching practices while teaching literacy and numeracy in class.

depending on the specific question – expressed frustrations linked to inability to communicate, understand, or include children with disabilities in the classroom.

Case study primary research highlighted some positive changes in the classroom, such as the use of quizzes, remedial classes and interactive methods as being effective in accommodating and including children with disabilities in learning activities. It was also highlighted in the case study interviews that classroom observations to specifically assess children with disabilities' participation indicated that this has improved. Despite this, there were also numerous case study primary research participants who shared that the training covered too much content, and that it was not possible for teachers to successfully integrate all new concepts in the classroom (see [Section 4.3](#)). As shared by a project staff member:

“The content was beneficial, but the primary issue was the lack of time, which negatively impacted the children’s ability to learn literacy, numeracy and the overall quality of teaching”. (KII with project staff)

3.4. FM IO5: Safer learning environments²³

FM Indicator: Learning environments are safer and support girls’ wellbeing, improved sexual and reproductive health and rights, reduced domestic violence.

Main activities: Development of inclusive infrastructure; advocacy with government officials, especially with Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, and Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES); training of School Management Committees and school leadership on inclusive education; capacity building for parents on management of disability.

Key findings: The project made considerable investments in school infrastructure to promote a more inclusive learning environment and support CWD’s regular attendance to school. Inclusive infrastructure, together with awareness raising and capacity building at both household and policymaker level, was found to encourage girls’ attendance and participation. Despite this, continued challenges were reported in school infrastructure, especially linked to maintenance of facilities, which mean there are still barriers to participation in practice.

According to the Midline Scorecard (2020), at midline all 10 target schools had **adapted facilities to make them more inclusive**. The same document also reported that schools received adapted teaching and learning materials, but their use in the classroom continued to be low (only 11% of teachers, an increase from the baseline level of 3%). Among the 58 sampled schools, the Midline Scorecard found that two of the schools had Special Needs Education (SNE) teachers.

Despite improvements, the endline found that there remained some hindering factors for children with disabilities, including non-inclusive school physical infrastructure, as well as long distances to school. Some of the schools visited as part of the study were physically inaccessible; for instance, they lacked ramps. **Ultimately, a non-supportive and non-accommodating school environment reportedly leads to poor attendance and learning for children with disabilities.**

The case study primary data also highlighted the importance of inclusive and safe environment for children with disabilities, and changes resulting from the project. A lot of important changes were mentioned on the overarching school environment compared to before the project began; for example, as highlighted by a respondent:

“We also learnt how to include them in society, to care for them, when Cheshire came in, ramps became a standard to support children with difficulty walking. So, whenever they came to school, they would ask us that “Where are the ramps?”, “how have you catered for the children with difficulty walking?”, “how have you catered for those who cannot climb the stairs?” And so, it became a criterion that when we were putting up buildings, we had to include provisions (ramps) for persons with disabilities. Regarding toilets since some of them were just crawling, touching even where it was not safe for them, toilets to accommodate the children had to be constructed. I understand that I am mentioning changes that are not part of numeracy and reading, but if the environment doesn’t make the child to feel safe, even if she goes to class, she doesn’t get the comfort she’s supposed to. So, we gave them that comfort. That’s my understanding of the changes that came from that programme.” (KII with community stakeholder)

Continued difficulties in accessing the school environment due to infrastructural issues were also mentioned by case study primary research respondents, especially linked to limited maintenance or insufficient infrastructure (see [Section 4](#)). Research participants also pointed to other issues with girls’ safety, especially linked to bullying as well as

²³ IP IO5: Inclusive environment (school, household, policy, system) maintained to support the needs of girls with disabilities.

mentions of lack of safety on the way to school, as further explored in [Section 4.3](#). There were some mentions of corporal punishment, although this was reported to have improved overall, alongside teachers' general attitudes.

3.5. FM IO6: Empowering girls²⁴

FM Indicator: Changes in girls' self-esteem, self-efficacy, confidence, and a sense of agency and empowered to make good choices for herself.

Main activities: Life skills training at school; career guidance and counselling; learning and mentoring camps for girls in secondary school; learning quiz awards; reproductive health support to girls.

Key findings: The project led to improvements in girls' self-esteem and self-perception, as highlighted especially strongly by case study primary research participants. Changes in girls' self-esteem were reported by all primary research respondent types, but most strongly by girls. Improvements in self-esteem and a greater belief in the abilities of GWD were described as linked to improvements in attendance, participation, motivation to study, aspirations, and, ultimately, learning.

While project reports and evaluations paint a mixed picture of changes in girls' self-esteem, the case study primary research suggests that there were considerable improvements in girls' self-esteem, assertiveness and perception of themselves and the rights of children with disabilities.

At Midline 1, the evaluation found a **decrease** in self-esteem metrics, compared to baseline, but the reason for this is not explored in the report. At Midline 2, caregivers and teachers both reported improvements in girls' self-esteem, including linked to life skills interventions. Importantly, the report also points out that less than half of the girls sampled had taken part in any life skills interventions in the past three years. According to the Midline Scorecard, **girls reported having increased confidence to assert themselves, speak in front of others, and meet new people, since baseline.** More girls reported being treated with kindness by their peers in class. At the same time, only about a quarter of girls linked the improvements in their confidence levels to CSU interventions.

Case study primary research with girls found that the project had a direct impact on girls' self-esteem, aspirations, and self-perceptions. This was made possible by several targeted interventions, such as coaching, remedial classes, and learning camps, as further explained in [Section 4.2](#), as well as by general improvements in the learning environment and inclusivity of schools. Changes of girls' perception within the family and their community were also reported, though to a lesser extent.

Due to girls' health needs (depending on their type and severity of disability) as well as their families' poverty levels, provision of **medical support and devices that would have otherwise been unaffordable** had a strong link with girls' wellbeing and ability to participate in school. More broadly, case study primary data pointed out that the needs of girls with disabilities were often not prioritised, particularly in large families. For example, the endline report had found that in-kind provision – for example, of sanitary pads – supported girls' participation in school and increased their confidence levels. It was reported that girls with disabilities' needs during their menstruation tended to not be provided for by parents; and therefore, they missed school more frequently than their peers. Coupled with SRHR education, assistive devices and a more inclusive learning environment, this type of support contributed to creating a school environment where girls with disabilities felt more comfortable and at ease, which in turn improved their self-perceptions.

Both at endline and in the case study primary research, broader positive effects on girls' self-esteem were reported by research respondents. These were linked to the awareness raising sessions delivered by the project, where girls learned that girls with disabilities have a right to education. girls with disabilities also reported receiving support and SRHR education, leading to more awareness about early pregnancy. The majority of girls who took part in FGDs as part of case study primary research shared that project activities increased their self-confidence, which **in turn supported them to participate in school as well as stand up for themselves.** Some girls also mentioned that, coupled with the academic and practical skills girls gained, increased confidence also supported them as they transitioned to employment. As mentioned by an FGD participant:

"What I can say is that going to camps helped us build our confidence. Even if you go to ask for a job, you can stand alone and explain your skills. I can add that without the support for our school fees, we wouldn't have learned what we learned. We stayed in school because of their help. The skills we gained helped us get jobs."
(FGD with IS girls over 18).

²⁴ IP IO3: Girls with disabilities have improved self-esteem and agency to make informed decisions about aspects of their lives.

3.6. FM IO7: Attendance²⁵

FM Indicator: Changes in girls' attendance at opportunities for learning made available to them.

Main activities: Tuition fees and transport; distribution of materials (uniform, school materials); medical treatment.

Key findings: Project reporting and the case study primary research present a mixed picture of attendance, including issues with the quality of data provided by schools. Case study primary research suggests there were improvements in attendance – at least in the short-term – mostly due to the reduced cost of schooling. Several respondents highlighted that being in school enabled girls to learn; however, teaching quality remained an issue and girls' learning results were overall poor. Any attendance improvements appear to have been short-lived: a large increase in drop-out was reported after the end of CSU's financial support.

Project reports and evaluations suggest that there were some improvements in attendance, although gains have been uneven across sub-groups reached. The CSU Midline Scorecard found that the **average attendance rate among treatment girls was 72%**, an increase from 67.6% at baseline. Attendance for girls with difficulty communicating and girls with multiple difficulties decreased in the same period, potentially indicating challenges in supporting girls with more severe disabilities. According to the Midline Scorecard, girls, caregivers, and teachers all agreed that the project helped increase attendance. The observed changes were linked to payment of school fees, as well as provision of learning materials and assistive devices to help girls move around school.

The Midline 2 report also found improvements in student and teacher attendance from baseline, but with varying trends depending on the girls' grades. For girls in P3 – P4, there was an overall decrease in the percentage of students missing classes in a week compared to Midline 1 (from 51.6% to 22.2%); but for P5 – P6, there was an increase in the same period, with the percentage going back almost to the baseline value of 46.2%. For students in P7 – S4 and vocational training, while there was a decrease from the baseline value (43% to 20%), the percentage of students missing classes in a given week was higher at Midline 2 than Midline 1, which had a value of 17.1. Girls most frequently reported that this was due **to illness and /or lack of transportation to school** – transport was one of the interventions highlighted as most helpful in the project package of interventions by case study primary research respondents (see [Section 4.2](#)). Perhaps helping to explain the better performance among older students, the Midline 2 report finds that the main factor supporting attendance and learning among secondary school girls is **transitioning to boarding school**: this is because this gives girls the time to focus on their schooling without worrying about having to go back home after school. This was outside of the project package of interventions.

Project evaluations report on a decrease in absences among teachers across all grades, with secondary and vocational training teachers continuing to have higher absenteeism at Midline 2 (10.3%) compared to lower grades (0% at lower primary and 7.7% at upper primary). A factor that might explain this improvement is headteachers' use of registers to track attendance. At Midline 2, almost 95% of headteachers requested that teachers sign a daily sign-in sheet – a sharp increase since baseline. Most (78.6%) would also speak directly to teachers to understand the causes of their absence. This indicates a more pro-active approach to tracking and responding to teacher absenteeism on the part of school leadership.

According to teachers and caregivers interviewed as part of the Midline 1 evaluation, project interventions **contributed to school attendance of girls with disabilities**. Caregivers highlighted the importance of financial support (payment of fees, provision of school materials), while teachers pointed to guidance and counselling for girls with disabilities, changes in teaching techniques, and children being in the boarding section of schools as contributing to attendance. girls with disabilities also highlighted the provision of fees and materials, as well as medical treatment, as increasing their attendance. Similar trends emerged from the case study primary data. Being in the boarding section was highlighted by girls as allowing them to stay in school, as secondary schools tend to be located further away from their homes, and daily travel presents important costs. Being in the boarding section was also reported to support girls with disabilities, who would have otherwise faced bullying and discrimination from the community, discouraging them from going to school (see [Section 4.2](#)).

In the End of Project Review (Okuni, 2024), some issues in attending school were also mentioned; particularly linked to the distance from school and expensive transportation to reach school. Coupled with poverty, these were important barriers for several girls. As pointed out in [Section 4.3](#), the Midline 1 report had already described the interventions supporting attendance as likely to lack sustainability, with the expectation that once parents would have to increase

²⁵ IP IO 1: Improved attendance rates of girls with disabilities in project schools.

their contributions to schooling, attendance of girls with disabilities would decrease. IE case study research confirmed this hypothesis, with increases in drop-out and irregular attendance reported linked, mainly, to the cost of schooling.

Overall, the data presents a mixed picture, and it's important to also take into consideration limitations when it comes to attendance data available. As pointed out in the Midline 1 report:

“Importantly, dropout and transfer information was provided anecdotally from schools at midline 1 for all sampled students, as we did not have access to school enrolment records or official records which documented which students had transferred or dropped out between baseline and midline 1. Instead, we learned about supposed dropouts and transfers from the teachers” (Midline 1 Report, pp. 177) (Montrose Africa, 2010).

4. What worked well / less well and why?

4.1. Overall project performance

The CSU project overall faced numerous design, implementation and contextual issues that affected its performance. CSU targeted an extremely vulnerable group, and while it was able to support some change in terms of access to education and girls' self-esteem, improving quality of learning within an already challenging environment proved difficult for the project to achieve. The CSU team also faced capacity constraints that affected their ability to deliver the project's results. In response to high risks in safeguarding, gender and social inclusion, and financial management, the project developed a Minimum Standards Action Plan (MSAP) in September 2022. The CSU team received extra capacity support from the FM, in response to concerns with internal capacities. Overall, project interventions which focused on improving the school environment, reducing the cost of education (at least in the short-term) and building self-esteem of girls with disabilities were relatively more successful (see [Section 4.2](#)). Interventions that aimed to support employment or income generation for girls and their families proved challenging, and the level of support provided was insufficient. Despite a focus on awareness raising at the school level and among caregivers, negative attitudes persisted, with reports of continued stigma against girls with disabilities who took part in the project (see [Section 4.3](#)). The Covid-19 pandemic, with the prolonged school closures and economic crisis that followed, took a huge toll on girls and their families. Overall, it appears the project was not able to keep girls engaged and learning during lengthy school closures (see [Section 4.5](#)). The project was able to work with government to increase interest in and support for inclusive education, particularly at the local level. Nonetheless, the interventions needed for the effective inclusion of children with disabilities into education, particularly the most marginalised, have not been integrated in government budgets to date (see [Section 4.6](#)).

4.2. What worked well in the CSU Project interventions?

Economic and in-kind support worked well, in the short term, to support regular attendance to school and increase girls' motivation to remain in school and study. The provision of medical support and assistive devices was also effective at supporting girls' attendance and more active participation, but there were issues linked to their maintenance following project implementation.

Life skills improvements were supported by one-to-one follow-ups, coaching sessions, and learning camps, and were seen as important to develop girls' self-esteem and aspirations. The role of project coordinators and role models with disabilities as part of these sessions had positive effects on girls' motivation and self-esteem. While the project reportedly made some improvements in teaching quality and in supporting girls' transition outcomes, both areas presented a lot of challenges even after project activities had completed.

4.2.1 Economic support, including for school fees

According to the End of Project Review (2024), factors that have been particularly effective at enabling girls to stay in school are **payment of school fees**²⁶, **transportation and provision of school supplies** (especially sanitary pads and school uniforms). Due to high levels of household poverty in target communities, this type of support enabled girls to remain in school and attend more regularly. Project reports and evaluations identify a direct link between the payment of school fees by the project, and girls' ability to study. Prior to the project, girls would be sent away when their fees were not paid and reported feeling high levels of stress and distress as a result. Being in an environment where they did not need to worry about fee payment enabled them to focus further on their studies, as well as directly supporting their attendance. The End of Project Review highlighted that the payment of school fees allowed girls to improve their learning: attending school more consistently gave them opportunities to improve their reading. Two other forms of economic support were also described as effective: **provision of materials and transportation**. The latter addressed safety concerns, physical issues, as well as costs linked to making the journey to school.

Payment of school fees emerged strongly from the case study primary research as allowing girls to attend school regularly. Several girls reported that prior to receiving project support they would miss several months of schooling due to lack of payment of fees. Despite sustainability challenges (see [Section 4.6](#)), this type of support worked well, in the short term, to support girls' education. According to one FGD participant (case study primary research), payment of school fees was also linked with teachers paying more attention to girls in the classroom –

²⁶ The project provided payment of school fees directly; in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, economic support was modified to include a direct cash transfer for participating households.

which in turn, helped improve their reading skills. Providing **transportation to girls** was also described by case study primary research respondents as supporting attendance by decreasing the cost of school, increasing girls' safety, and reducing lateness to school. Transport provision strongly supported girls who had mobility issues. The provision of economic and in-kind support, often of different types, was praised extensively by different research respondents, but especially parents. For example:

"I loved [the support with] school fees, and I also received some money during Covid-19 which helped in buying food for the family during that period. I am grateful for everything that the project did. The provision of scholastic materials and school fees because I knew my daughter is going to report on the first day at school even when I don't have money. Secondly, the loan scheme also helped me a lot because I was able to start up a business to sustain me and my daughter as we were on lockdown and most of the jobs were being laid off. She also received medical treatment as a result of the project." (FGD with parents)

Importantly, provision of fees and materials was described by IE case study research respondents as not just allowing children to be in school without fear of being chased away, but as having increased **their motivation to stay in and participate in school**. As reported by a school stakeholder:

"The assurance that the school fees is sorted makes them become confident and focused on studying. Furthermore, it makes them obliged to perform through their oral submissions that they fear failure to disappoint the organisation which is their only hope. This ignites their resolve to become more hard working, even when someone came when dull, first quarter failed exams they strive to have a better report to show with good results. So, they strive to embrace success and at the end of it they become meaningful and shift from the initial mindset when they felt they cannot do anything to evidently embrace that disability is not inability and awareness they can be useful somewhere. From the project I think mostly is the provision of what they need and the requirements while at school." (KII with teacher/ headteacher)

In terms of longer-term change, some parents mentioned changes at the school level where they are now **able to pay in instalments due to CSU's advocacy efforts**. This has reportedly led to **improvements in girls' attendance to school**. Despite this, as further highlighted below, a major weakness of the programme was **over-reliance on the project for economic support**, which mostly did not lead to sustainable change at household or community levels. The Midline 1 report also found that **economic empowerment of parents and caregivers** supported transition outcomes. However, there were many issues flagged with the approach to economic empowerment, especially in terms of **loan provision** (see [Section 4.3](#)). The case study primary research strongly identified challenges in keeping girls in school following the end of the project, with high levels of drop-out reported as a direct result of project activities ending.

4.2.2 Assistive devices and medical treatment

A second area of support identified as particularly effective was the **provision of medical treatment and assistive devices** to girls with disabilities. According to the Midline 1 Report, girls who had received assistive devices experienced more successful transition outcomes, compared to those who did not. Some of the devices mentioned include glasses, hearing aids, crutches, and medicine. The case study primary research confirmed the importance of specialised assistive devices and medical care. For example, project staff highlighted the importance of working with high-quality health facilities to provide tailored support to girls. Caregivers spoke extensively about the vital support provided by CSU through medical treatment, medication, surgeries, and medical bills. FGDs with girls (case study primary research) revealed that, prior to the project, illness and lack of assistive devices were major barriers to going to school. In many cases, the health support provided by CSU (such as medical operations) was reported to have changed girls' life quality considerably – including through access to education as well as, more broadly, their health, wellbeing, and perceptions in the community.

Several case study primary research respondents reported having experienced setbacks, **due to the need for maintenance and continued care**. Some reported that the devices provided, such as hearing aids or glasses, were broken and have not been replaced by girls' families, which questions the sustainability of this type of support. Despite important improvements, health issues are mentioned as **continued barriers to education by several children and caregivers**. **School infrastructure improvements** to support the inclusion of children with disabilities were also discussed by case study primary research respondents. Respondents mentioned that project schools had received specific toilets, as well as ramps. While considered helpful, important issues were reported in their maintenance, and **insufficient infrastructure remained a major challenge** (see [Section 4.5](#)).

4.2.3 Provision of learning materials

The project reduced the cost of education indirectly through the provision of learning materials. According to the Midline 1 Report, CSU partnered with Worldreader to provide 1000 tablets with accessible content for different types of impairments, including visual, hearing, physical, and others. Interestingly, while tablets and computers were mentioned by several case study primary research respondents, they were not highlighted as important as other learning materials: namely, **school uniforms, sanitary pads, shoes, books, and notebooks**. This could potentially reflect the challenges in integrating ICT in the classroom linked to low digital skills of teachers as well as unreliable electricity supply. The provision of shoes and uniforms was described as highly motivational for students, and as addressing economic concerns for families.

Girls who took part in the case study primary research also mentioned having access to libraries as increasing their interest and ability in reading, due to the easy accessibility of books. Several girls reported being able to read at home as a result of having access to learning materials, and as this having improved their skills – including to teach their younger siblings.

During Covid-19, the project distributed **learning packs**, some of which were produced by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and some of which were produced by CSU. These were mentioned by some respondents as having kept girls engaged in their education during school closures; despite this, important educational set-backs due to Covid-19 were also reported (see [Section 4.5](#)).

4.2.4. Life skills and Socio-emotional skills development

Girls interviewed as part of the End of Project Review reported that the project has been beneficial to their lives through the strengthening of their **life/ social and emotional/ soft skills** – much more than academic ones – described as:

“...a major springboard to achieving both the academic and technical/ vocational training types of learning opportunities, and thus improving [girls’] life chances.” (End of Project Review, p. viii)

According to secondary data and case study primary research, the most effective interventions to support girls’ life and soft skills were **life skills training, learning and mentoring camps, and counselling and guidance sessions**. These types of initiatives improved girls’ confidence, self-esteem, and agency. One-to-one follow-up with girls came out strongly from the case study primary research as having supported their continued engagement, motivation, and self-esteem.

Another intervention mentioned by several case study primary research respondents was **individual follow-up and check-ins with girls**. Coordinators from the CSU team would make follow-up visits at the schools to confirm whether girls were attending classes, check on their wellbeing and their performance in school. As explained by one parent:

“What I remember that has helped our children to remain in school is...the lady who was our coordinator was called NAME. She used to spend time advising our children. She instilled in them the belief that regardless of their disabilities, they were capable of achieving something. She encouraged them to stay in school since this is the greatest gift one could receive. This instilled self-belief in the children. This led them to stay in school.” (FGD with parents)

Similarly, both boys and girls interviewed as part of the case study primary research saw **coaching sessions** as particularly helpful to navigate their challenges and improve their skills, for example:

“Teachers always asked at least one Cheshire student a question before leaving class, so we had to pay attention. Cheshire also organised extra coaching sessions after our evening classes, which ended around 4 PM. They would ask which subjects we felt weak in and arrange coaching for those, which was very helpful.” (FGD with 15 girls over 18)

Among these sessions, teachers and headteachers interviewed as part of the case study primary research also highlighted the importance of **life skills sessions** that focused on self-care, self-esteem and the importance of education. For all coaching classes, keeping groups small allowed for individualised attention and one-to-one support through which children could ask questions. Interestingly, the project team expressed that there were **many issues with catch-up classes in practice**, including linked to teachers’ and schools’ schedules, which meant that they had to incorporate coaching activities within existing large classes (of up to 200 students). This is likely to have limited the effectiveness of these activities, as classroom size is a major hindering contextual factor to education quality (see [Section 4.5](#)).

Learning camps were described by project staff interviewed as part of the case study primary research as having improved girls' confidence and leadership abilities, especially due to co-curricular activities such as debates. Several girls spoke about the importance of role models who took part in learning camp activities. These were usually people with disabilities who were included as motivational speakers.

4.2.5. Change in parental attitudes

Raising awareness and reducing stigma towards children with disabilities (especially girls) was a major component of the project. The Midline Scorecard reported that changes in attitudes took place as a result of the project. Girls, caregivers, and teachers all reported that the project had changed attitudes in their community, which led to increased access to education for children with disabilities. The percentage of girls reporting changes is lower than that of caregivers and teachers: 62%, compared to 88% and 93%, respectively. **Caregivers reported increased awareness that girls with disabilities are able to perform like any other child**, as a result of awareness raising by the project. The End of Project Review found evidence of some positive changes through parents' own initiatives to encourage girls with disabilities' interactions with other community members. In turn, this was reported to improve girls' self-esteem, making them feel more accepted in their communities (see below),

The case study primary research confirmed the importance of awareness raising activities, in the context of strong negative social norms and limited focus on disability in other education initiatives. As shared by one respondent, for example:

"There are other projects being implemented in my community, but their objectives are different, they are not focusing on encouraging children with disabilities to go to school. So, the Cheshire project was an eye opener to some parents that whether you have a child with disabilities or not, they must go to school." (KII with community stakeholder)

In this context, the CSU project can be considered to have achieved important results in social norm change, especially among caregivers, at least in the short run. However, the strong reliance on economic support from the project (see below), has meant that many of these changes were short-lived in practice.

According to interviews with IP staff members (October 2024), the project led to important shifts in how caregivers perceived children with disabilities and their engagement in learning. This led to improvements in their inclusion, including in schools. IP staff members reported that, before the intervention, it was common for children to be locked up at home by their parents, who would keep them hidden because of a fear of ridicule in the community. Parents also saw it as too expensive to send children with disabilities to school due to their (perceived) limited academic and employment prospects. CSU set out to change these types of attitudes, encouraging caregivers to support girls with disabilities and understand the benefit to their education.

4.3. What worked less well in the CSU Project interventions?

Bullying, discrimination, and stigma against GWD continue to be prevalent issues in project communities and schools, which emerged strongly from the case study primary research. Even where caregiver attitudes have improved, families face pronounced practical constraints to girls' education, including factors associated with the direct and indirect costs of education.

Teacher training and support, including coaching and follow-ups, were insufficient to improve teaching quality, or support truly inclusive classroom environments. A greater focus was needed on monitoring teachers, providing feedback and providing the required materials, such as teaching manuals that could be referred to on an ongoing basis.

The provision of business support to parents and girls, beyond cash transfers and school fees, proved challenging. Due to high levels of marginalisation, girls would have required more hands-on support, such as start-up capital and tailored training, to successfully transition into paid employment.

Overall, the CSU project faced challenges in reaching particularly marginalised girls, especially those who had severe or multiple disabilities.

4.3.1. Changing community attitudes

Despite improvements in parental support (see [Section 4.2.5](#)), **the project needed a greater focus on community awareness raising beyond girls' families.** The End of Project Review highlighted that communities targeted by the project continued to show negative attitudes towards people with disabilities, and that more direct activities to target

community members could have further supported project objectives. Project reports reflect on numerous continued challenges at community level. **More community sensitisation activities, beyond girls' direct families**, could have been helpful to support social norm change and inclusion at the community level.

Shifting attitudes proved challenging, according to the End of Project Review. While some teachers were reported to have more positive attitudes towards disability, the same report reflects that this was linked to a patronising attitude rather than genuine respect for girls with disabilities. Therefore, it seems that the project faced challenges in promoting a view of girls with disabilities as being equal to their peers. At the community level, the report reflected on continuing prevalent negative attitudes, with girls with disabilities feeling more excluded in communities than in schools.

Mistreatment in school by both teachers and other students was described, at Midline 1, as one of the reasons why girls with disabilities would not attend school. **Issues of discrimination at school and community level** also emerged strongly from the case study primary research, continuing to pose barriers to education and broader social inclusion for girls with disabilities. Several case study primary research respondents highlighted that discrimination is more prevalent at the family level when girls are not living with their biological parents. Aside from the general discrimination and bullying reported by different research respondents, especially girls, the primary data also showed that **negative attitudes and economic factors** continue to interact in limiting girls' prospects for education. As highlighted in an interview with a CSU staff member:

"Engaging with parents was also important as some still held the belief that girls shouldn't go to school. They would question why they should pay for their child's education, asking things like, 'Why are you wasting money on this child with a disability? What is she going to do?'. However, when we engaged with these parents, they often changed their attitudes. In the end, many were surprised by the results, as the girls performed better than those they considered 'normal.'" (KII with project staff)

Teachers, community leaders, project staff, girls and parents taking part in primary research all report that girls continue to be bullied and discriminated against in relation to their disability, including **because they took part in the project**; for example, due to assistance with school fees or transportation. Several girls said that they continued to go to school despite being bullied, and that their confidence to face discrimination had increased. For example:

"Yes, whenever Cheshire provided us with school supplies, they would comment, 'The poor have stepped out.' They used hurtful words that hurt us. Their comments implied that we did not deserve to be in school, they believed that only those from rich families had that right. My self-esteem was impacted, but I learned to 'let the barking dogs bark.' If I had focused on their negative remarks, even with Cheshire covering my school fees, I wouldn't have been able to stay in school." (FGD with IS girls under 18)

Even where attitudes improved, parents who took part in the case study primary research reflected that they continue to face practical and financial constraints to their daughters' education.

4.3.2. Teacher training and follow-up support

There were numerous challenges linked to teacher training and teaching quality. For one, **non-inclusive teaching practices continued**. According to the End of Project Review, this mostly affected untrained or inadequately trained teachers, indicating limitations in the training activities implemented by the project. The case study primary research identified several issues with the support provided to teachers. **Teacher training was considered insufficient**, with teachers requiring continuous follow-up to support the implementation of new methods. A lack of follow-up reportedly decreased teacher morale. It was reported that there were issues with government supervision structures, which were insufficient to provide support to teachers. As reported by a project staff member:

"The KCCA people would come in to monitor, but not all the time [...] because maybe there is also the involvement of the headteachers who may be busy [...] You find at the end of the day, they are delegating, and the people they are delegating to are not good explaining something as it has been taught during the training. Then you end up in some schools where the headteachers' involvement is kind of low." (KII with project staff)

The project team interviewed as part of the case study primary research highlighted that **teacher manuals were not provided during training**: as a result, each teacher taught based on their own understanding, which caused a lack of consistency. Teachers also reported that they did not receive materials, which limited the impact of the training and the level of interest of participants.

It should, however, be noted that some improvements in **pedagogy** were mentioned by case study primary research respondents, such as a more practical, hands-on and engaging teaching style. Some girls who took part in FGDs mentioned accommodations made in students' exams that improved their school performance; for example, larger font sizes or more time provided, as well as more inclusive behaviours from teachers in the classroom. For example:

“In primary seven, I initially struggled because I sat in the back, making it hard to learn. A representative from Cheshire noticed this during a visit and suggested that I should be moved closer to the front. After the teachers acted on this recommendation, I began to understand the lessons better and stayed more attentive. This change significantly impacted on my learning, as I could now clearly see the blackboard and hear the teacher.” (FGD with girls over 18)

Overall, while there are positive examples of more inclusive practices, improving education quality has been a substantial challenge for the project, due to implementation factors and to challenging school and classroom conditions (see [Section 4.5](#)).

4.3.3. Transition into employment

Transition into employment was another area where the project faced important limitations.

The lack of work experience and of start-up capital limited girls with disabilities’ absorption into the job market. The End of Project Review reflects that further focus on hands-on practical skills training **coupled with access to start-up finance to start their own enterprises** would have increased the effectiveness and sustainability of the supportive environment at family level. Girls and caregivers who took part in the endline study reported that the project **could have done more to support girls to gain economic independence**, particularly for those who struggled academically due to their disability or those who were not motivated to stay in school. For these girls, it was considered that transitioning into secondary, followed by tertiary education, and eventually employment would have been much more difficult, and would have required both practical vocational training and start-up capital for their micro-businesses.

The case study primary research confirmed that more assistance could have been provided to support successful transition into self-employment or paid employment. For example, a community stakeholder **shared that they thought CSU would support girls to attain vocational certification and provide start-up capital**, something the project did not deliver. Another respondent, a school stakeholder, similarly highlighted that a project weakness was not providing follow-up support to students who completed vocational training courses.

Project reports and the case study primary research points to challenges in supporting family incomes beyond the payment of school fees and cash transfers. In terms of **parental engagement in savings groups**, the Midline 1 Report found a decrease from baseline in the share of parents who reported being part of CSU-led savings and loans groups. The case study primary research found that the access to loans activities did not work well – so much so that it led to disappointment and discouragement at the community level about the project. As shared by one respondent:

“The parents were encouraged to form groups and approach opportunity bank and access loans but training about financial literacy was never organised. Some parents borrowed money, and it was used for other things instead of investing in businesses, and as a result they were unable to pay back the loan. Other members in the group were affected because they couldn’t access loans because of the failure of one of their members to pay the loan. And Cheshire was blamed for this. Yes, the false hope they gave to the parents about start-up capital, it was challenging because the parents would ask me to go and talk to the Cheshire people, they thought other parents got so Cheshire needed someone to follow up for the parents to get the money they promised. I would defend the organization while protecting myself. Some parents said, “next time if you bring any project, we will not get involved because those guys have disappointed us, so we won’t waste our time anymore with you and your things”. (KII with community stakeholder)

4.3.4. Support for highly marginalised learners

The project faced challenges reaching particularly marginalised children and had higher than anticipated rates of drop-out. It was suggested by project reports and in the case study primary research that **learners with multiple disabilities** faced more challenges and did not receive sufficient support from the project. The project reports found that most of the girls who did not transition into secondary school had multiple disabilities. Also, while some schools introduced merit-based scholarships for girls with disabilities, these were not **deemed sufficiently inclusive of the most vulnerable girls**, according to case study research respondents. Children with difficult family backgrounds, orphans, or those who for other reasons did not live with their biological parents, would have also required more support from the project due to the type and extent of marginalisation faced by their families.

Finally, several case study primary research respondents pointed out that girls would have needed more support as they progressed in their education. A lack of tracking of learners who continued into secondary education was linked to drop-out later on. The project team reflected that it was challenging to track girls over time, especially if households had migrated. CSU staff reflected on the importance of considering intersectionality to provide tailored support:

“So, it is important to consider the other factors surrounding a child. Maybe this child is a refugee, this child is a teenage mother. The question should be as you are implementing the project how are you going to consider all those factors affecting this vulnerable person because they are worsening the vulnerability and the disability that is already there. Then, there are also other factors surrounding a child, he is a refugee, he is an orphan, he is a street child, he lives with elderly parents. [...] As you design it is important to consider how you are going to support children that have extra marginalisation on top of the disability.” (KII with project staff)

4.3.5. School management and education policy

Changes at the school management level did not emerge strongly from the case study primary research or project reports. As reported at Midline 1, only **one headteacher in the sample schools had a budget ringfenced to support children with disabilities**, and only one school's management committee set up financial plans within existing budgets to use resources to benefit children with disabilities. The Midline 1 Report pointed to some challenges in the running of PTAs, linked to low participation from parents; and the case study primary research did not point to many changes arising in – or as a result of – school governance. Changes in national and local policy and involvement of the authorities emerged more clearly from both project reports and the case study primary research. Evaluation reports from Midline 1 and 2, and the End of Project Review highlighted that the project supported the establishment of an Inclusive Education Officer at the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) Directorate of Education, supporting the institutionalisation of inclusive education across the division. This was confirmed by the case study primary research, including interviews with different government stakeholders. The Inclusive Education Officer supports inclusive education through the collection of data on children with disabilities and descriptions of challenges from different schools, including where CSU was not active. According to interviews with the IP (October 2024), an important success of the project is that **this role has been taken up by the Kampala authorities, is currently paid by the government and is a permanent role**.

The End of Project Review found that, according to CSU project staff and government partners, the project's advocacy efforts led to increased enrolment of girls with disabilities even in schools not directly supported by the project. This suggests there were some system-level changes. In the same study, it was also reported by local government that *“no other local government across the entire country was implementing inclusive education to the level of KCCA”*. The report also found that the MoES benchmarked the CSU project implementation framework to inform the formulation and development of its draft inclusive education policy. **Nonetheless, financial limitations and negative attitudes towards disability at government level were reported to be continuing barriers**. Interviews with government confirmed these shifts in their focus areas and ways of working. At the same time, they also highlighted **persistent practical challenges**, especially budgetary constraints, and limited prioritisation at the national level.

4.4. What were the unexpected or unintended results from the CSU Project?

A few positive spillover effects were mentioned by project staff who took part in the case study primary research, linked to an increase interest in inclusive education among non-target children, teachers, and schools. For example, there were reports of non-project schools making changes to foster a more inclusive learning environment.

Unintended results came out more strongly from the case study primary research. There were perceptions of unfairness in the project's selection of participants, including its focus on girls. Some girls experienced bullying linked to being part of the CSU project, due to both their disability and poverty. Finally, caregivers' dependency on the provision of economic and medical support to CWD can have led to a worsening in girls' education and wellbeing outcomes after the end of the project.

4.4.1 Positive unintended effects

Unintended or unexpected effects did not emerge from project reports but were mentioned by several case study primary research respondents. Some of the positive unexpected effects mentioned relate to having **better than anticipated results** in certain areas. For example, project staff highlighted overall **positive interactions of CWD with other learners**, as well as children with disabilities taking on positions of leadership within their schools. This type of change was linked with improvements in girls' self-esteem and self-efficacy. In terms of attitudinal change, the project team also reported **higher than anticipated improvements in attitudes** among family members and among teachers.

In addition, some spillover effects were mentioned by project staff members and partners. There were reports of overall improvements at the school level: for example, one government respondent shared that training activities took place in school halls, allowing other teachers to benefit from inclusive education training.

There were reports that the project unexpectedly led to enrolment of other children with disabilities outside of direct project beneficiaries. Similarly, non-project schools reportedly **developed an interest in inclusive education**. As mentioned by a project staff member:

“We had schools coming for guidance, like private schools seeking support on how to put a toilet or a ramp in their school so that if they have a child with a disability, they are comfortable. They finally did it after learning it from the training, which I think is amazing.” (KII with project stakeholder)

It was also reported that some schools continued carrying out activities to support inclusive education, independently of the CSU project. An IP respondent mentioned that schools **built ramps in their schools with their own budget, improved classrooms, and toilets to accommodate children with disabilities**. Project staff members also reported that some schools reduced their school fees, enabling children to continue their education.

Finally, CSU received an award in recognition of its work on disability, and subsequently set up a relationship with MoES and the Ministry of Gender. This close relationship with government supported the formulation of the government's disability policy and inclusive education policy (see [Section 4.6](#)). Project staff saw this positive collaboration with government as being an indirect result of the positive work carried out as part of the GEC-supported intervention, and the reputational gains that resulted.

4.4.2 Negative unintended effects

As above, some negative unintended effects emerged from the case study primary research. Respondents reflected on some **perceptions of unfairness in project targeting and implementation**. There were several reports from community stakeholders that the selection of participants was either unclear, not transparent, or unfair. For example, as mentioned by respondents:

“During the Covid-19 pandemic, parents were supported financially however there was no uniform amount given. Parents received between 100,000 UGX to 500,000 UGX, it was hard to tell why some parents got more money than others. I also heard that people received food, but in my community, no one received I don't know why. I feel there was discrimination.” (KII with community stakeholder)

“[...] Sometimes if you compare some learners who were not under the project with another who is already in the programme, the one who is not in the programme appears to be more in need of help compared. So, I would include a criterion that enrolment depends on the level of disability, learners with severe disabilities are considered first because they need more attention. Now concerning enrolment process, some officials considered their friends first, someone may be recruited just because of friendly relationship even though they had a minor disability.” (KII with community stakeholder)

Perceived unfairness was linked to the project's **focus on girls**. Even though a smaller number of boys was supported, respondents mentioned the exclusionary language of the project, and boys were described as having been ‘an afterthought’. More generally, the **distribution of learning materials** was seen as being unequal and, at times, unfair, with reports of families that had more than one child with disabilities not receiving more than those with only one child. Perceived unfairness in selection and distribution of materials could be linked to **the high levels of demand from communities to enrol their children in the project** – which went beyond the project target and could not always be met. Several parents who took part in the case study primary research highlighted that their other children without disability would have also required support, due to high poverty levels. Importantly, the research highlighted perceptions that **CSU promised support it was not able to deliver**. For example, one community stakeholder pointed specifically to the case of start-up capital promised, but not delivered, by the project. A girl who took part in a FGD also said:

“They used to call the parents and tell them they would send them money. Most of my friends on the programme said they got the money. Unfortunately, for us we never received”. (FGD with IS girls under 18)

Stigma and discrimination not only continued to take place, but were, in some cases, **linked to being supported by the project**. Some children preferred to walk rather than take the project's school bus due to bullying from other children. Some girls reported that this type of discrimination was also carried out by teachers:

“There was segregation against us because we were supported by Cheshire. Teachers claimed that only students whose parents paid for their school fees could understand the material.” (FGD with IS girls over 18)

“Personally, when I told the teachers that my eyes were hurting, they would say I was pretending and just wanted to take free money from Cheshire. [...] They used to tell us that we were pretending and just wanted to take money from Cheshire for free. They claimed we didn’t have any disabilities. [...]. The teachers. Some of them would tell me, “You are lying. You’ve never been sick at all. You’re just throwing tantrums for no reason and trying to get money for free.” (FGD with IS girls under 18)

Finally, an over-reliance on the project at the household level was reported by the majority of IE case study respondents. **This not only led to sustainability issues, but it could have led to increased risks for some children.** As mentioned by one respondent:

“Cost sharing with the parents should have been implemented from the start of the project so that when the project closes, they are contented, responsible and able to support their children in education. We informed the parents about the project closure, and they were crying, they used to say, “that is a Cheshire child” and they would not provide any school requirement for the child because they knew the project was taking care of them. The parents had no responsibility, even when a child was unwell for example they have malaria, they would call the project staff. They started seeing their children as burdens and needed Cheshire to care for all the needs and this affected the sustainability of the project. In the 10 years of implementation, the parents would have saved some money because they knew that the project was running for a specific period of time.” (KII with IP)

4.5. To what extent and how did external contextual factors influence the CSU Project’s performance?

The project operated in a very challenging context, which affected its performance and ability to effectively reach the most marginalised. Persistent negative attitudes, high levels of poverty and limited economic prospects, negative gender norms, including high rates of early pregnancy, limitations in teacher availability and in training, and issues linked with transportation all continued to affect the project target areas during and after implementation. Importantly, many of these contextual barriers worsened during Covid-19, with long-lasting effects on girls and their families. While government policy on inclusive education exists, there are important budget gaps, especially when it comes to inclusive infrastructure, which is expensive and requires maintenance.

4.5.1. Supportive factors

Very few supportive contextual factors emerged from project reports or the case study primary research. For example, despite challenges in government policy and the prioritisation of disability (see [Section 4.6](#)), the Midline 1 Report paints a more supportive environment for inclusive education; for example, due to initiatives delivered by Kyambogo University and other GEC-T projects. The case study research respondents also mentioned other projects that support girls’ education in government schools; for example, the ‘Girls-Up Initiative’, which provides school materials, sanitary pads, and counselling. Another mentioned initiative was the UNICEF Girls Empowering Girls Project, which focused on fee payment. This type of initiative can be taken to signify a more positive environment in which to focus on inclusive education. Government respondents who took part in the case study primary research highlighted that CSU supported them in their efforts for inclusive education, showcasing alignment at least in focus areas.

4.5.2. Hindering factors

Negative attitudes and discrimination

The End of Project Review and case study primary research highlighted negative attitudes and beliefs around disability at all levels of society in Uganda, coupled with a lack of understanding of inclusive education and its value. **Wide-spread societal stigma** against girls with disabilities, including parental abandonment (usually from fathers) and cases of bullying emerged from the case study primary research. Girls especially spoke at length about being bullied by their peers, both before, and to some extent, during and after the project. Some also reported having experienced bullying and stigmatisation from their teachers. Similar issues and broader community discrimination were reported in FGDs with parents, as stigma surrounding children with disabilities also directly affected caregivers. While there were some reports of improvements in project schools – **with more encouraging and supportive teachers, and in some cases, students helping each other to improve learning** – overall, negative attitudes continued to be a barrier after the end of the project.

Covid-19

As highlighted in the End of Project Review, Uganda had **the longest school closures in the world due to Covid-19**, with long-lasting effects on education outcomes. Aside from its direct effect on school closures, Covid-19 also led to a worsening in several of the barriers presented below. The FM's RAAG and Risk rating document²⁷ for the project mentions an Ebola outbreak and school closures in 2022, though these did not emerge from the case study primary research.

The case study research found that, because the project was targeting families with high vulnerability, their situation worsened considerably during and after Covid-19. There were reports that many in the project communities moved during the pandemic, including both students (who the project tried to follow-up with) and teachers – some of whom did not return. This heightened an already existing phenomenon whereby parents generally **tended to move frequently**, usually to find places with more affordable accommodation or better work opportunities; and as a result, their children would change schools. CSU staff reported that the project had to support an increasing number of schools – up to 300 schools by the end of the project; however, this figure could not be verified in the data.

In response to school closures, it was reported by case study research respondents that CSU provided learning materials, including learning guides, and carried out small-group activities with girls. Importantly, other community stakeholders reported that there was no support of this type. This inconsistency in reporting could indicate that the project's Covid-19 response varied across locations or that not all participants were aware of it. Some case study primary research participants also pointed out that the interventions implemented during Covid-19 did not work well. In particular, a lot of children dropped out, including due to pregnancy (see below), with some respondents stating that CSU did not do enough to keep in touch with children during this period.

Poverty and economic context

The project targeted girls from low-income families and was implemented in a context of high poverty and challenging economic conditions, including a worsening economic climate and cost of living increases as a result Covid-19. High poverty in project areas was mentioned by primary respondents across the board. There were several reports that parents also requested support for their children without disabilities, as poverty also limited their ability to go to school.

Within this challenging context, the project faced challenges to **sustainably support** girls and their families to improve their economic prospects. According to the End of Project Review, girls' transition into employment was limited by inability to absorb them into the job market due to their young age, lack of work experience, lack of start-up capital, and unsupportive parents. According to the Midline 1 Report, at both baseline and midline, higher rates of successful transition were observed among learners with disabilities **who were relatively better off**, and not from extremely poor families. This suggests that economic support activities were more successful with families above a certain income level and were insufficient for girls from households experiencing extreme poverty.

Gender norms

There were some mentions of gender norms affecting girls' education from reports and primary data. While the Midline 1 Report found that girls with a heavier chore burden experienced lower transition rates, housework did not come out strongly from the case study primary research with caregivers or children.

Other social norms affecting girls were mentioned by numerous case study research respondents, especially girls. Early pregnancy and marriage were the most frequently mentioned. Some also spoke about girls being tempted to have older boyfriends who would support them financially and losing their interest in school as a result. According to UNICEF (2022), Uganda has the 14th highest rate of child marriage globally; with 34% of girls getting married before the age of 18. The same report highlighted that having a disability increases the likelihood of child marriage or early pregnancy.²⁸ In project areas, pregnancy rates reportedly worsened after Covid-19, leading to drop-out among girls. As a response, the project carried out sensitisation on safeguarding and social inclusion, but the barrier appears to have persisted. For boys, drug use was mentioned by case study research participants as linked to being out of school (both as a cause and a result). Other behavioural issues were mentioned, including criminal activities and general lack of motivation, direction, and guidance.

School factors

School characteristics posed several challenges to successful project implementation. Numerous issues relating to teacher availability and teaching quality were highlighted by both project reports and in the case study primary research. These are due to teacher absenteeism, strikes and transfers, and linked to low teacher salaries. Linked to this, there is very limited **pre-existing capacity at the school level to support children with disabilities**, while

²⁷ CSU Q22 RAAG and Risk Rating.

²⁸ For further information, see:

<https://www.unicef.org/uganda/media/13666/file/National%20Strategy%20to%20end%20Child%20marriage%20and%20Teenage%20Pregnancy%202022-2027.pdf>

teachers have low knowledge of inclusive education. This was found to be a particularly strong challenge in the case of teacher turn-over. Loss of institutional memory as teachers left project schools was reportedly a challenge, according to both project reports and case study research respondents. For example, as mentioned by a project staff member:

“Teacher training is really important, and as the government trains teachers at the institutes, they should include disability aspects in the curriculum, we wouldn’t have so many children struggling. When a child is in class with a trained teacher, we expect them to progress to another class with someone similarly trained. But often, when they transfer, the new teacher has either been changed or isn’t familiar with the curriculum.” (KII with project staff)

Large classroom size is also as a huge contextual barrier, hindering the ability of teachers to implement inclusive education practices (End of Project Review). The Midline 1 Report had suggested that mainstream schools are only equipped to handle learners with low or moderate disabilities, rather than those with more severe ones. This assessment was confirmed in the case study primary research; for example:

“The teaching quality is good, but the only challenge is that there is always a high number of students in each class, for example, 100 students, which makes their handling difficult. Children with disabilities always require a lot of attention from teachers in order to understand what is being taught, which is not applicable to a class of 100 students. It doesn’t stop them from coming to school, but it leaves a gap in their understanding level.” (FGD with parents)

School infrastructure was mentioned extensively in case study primary research, and non-inclusive infrastructure was seen as a key barrier to girls with disabilities’ attendance in school. Some issues with maintenance of facilities were mentioned by respondents, as well as water availability in schools, that led to the toilets provided by the project not being used. Other school stakeholders mentioned that there are remaining unmet infrastructure needs in the schools, particularly as the number of learners has increased and government support is very limited.

Transportation to school

Long distances to school and a lack of money for transportation were mentioned frequently in the case study research as continuing to affect children’s education. Even though the project provided support with transportation, research participants frequently reported that children prefer **boarding schools** – rather than day schools – to avoid security issues, long commutes, and traffic. Overall, the inability to **afford the cost of transportation to school** was mentioned by numerous respondents, particularly caregivers, as a reason for children’s drop-out from school after the end of the project (see [Section 4.6](#) for some considerations on sustainability).

Policy support for children with disabilities

Project reports and the case study research point to remaining gaps in inclusive education policies, including most importantly in government budgets to implement activities. According to the Midline Scorecard, SNE budgets at the national level experienced a decrease over the years. The Midline 1 Report found that almost no schools had funds allocated to SNE teachers: all interviewees except one headteacher said the government allocated a lump sum to learners rather than allocating money to the SNE teacher. As pointed out in the Midline 1 Report, government support is focused on specialised schools, which means that as children progress in their education, the number of children with disabilities in mainstream schools decreases. Another limitation in the Ugandan context is the MoES **only provides Teaching and Learning Materials (TLM) to specialised schools**. More generally, the Midline 1 Report reflected on low prioritisation of inclusive education at the government level.

Concerns about government budgets for inclusive education, despite policy improvements, were raised by primary research participants. In particular, initiatives to improve infrastructure were described as very costly and as requiring continued external support. A project staff member also highlighted that the **government’s school syllabus** does not accommodate for the needs of learners with disability who, for instance, might need more time on a given subject.

4.6. What were the implementation factors behind the CSU Project's success or lack of success?

The project was able to establish positive working relationships and partnerships with government, particularly the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) and the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). These supported implementation through technical expertise and helped raise the profile of CSU as an organisation and their mission.

The project faced considerable implementation challenges due to capacity constraints. According to IE case study interviews with the project team, support from the FM helped bridge some of these, particularly in financial and technical areas, but low capacity ultimately continued to affect implementation. Despite having already flagged issues during implementation, the project faced challenges in its close-out and sustainability planning. As a result, sustainability considerations were reported by case study primary research respondents as having taken place since the end of the project.

4.6.1 Supportive factors

Project partnerships

Implementation factors – supportive and hindering – did not emerge strongly from project reports. Several mechanisms were however highlighted in IE case study research.

Despite some challenges (see [Section 4.5](#)), the project was able **to engage positively with government**. CSU reported improvements in local and national education policy, with increased efforts for inclusive education and successful engagements with the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), as well as the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). At the same time, the project also reflected that **funding limitations** at the government level, as well as continuing negative attitudes towards inclusive education risked limiting the sustainability of these efforts.

More specifically, establishing an MoU with KCCA led to successful collaborations in several activities, including teacher training, supervision, and accessibility improvements, which also included Kyambogo University and Coordinating Centre Tutors. KCCA also provided technical experts to support the project. It was reported that working with government led to recognition and more interest towards project activities on the part of parents and schools. While most IE case study respondents from the project team and government institutions spoke positively about joint monitoring, some shared that it was irregular and, according to one government representative, could have further engaged government partners to incentivise teachers. More specifically:

“When they go alone, some teachers may not take issues seriously, because for them [Cheshire] could not take any administrative sanctions against the teachers who misbehave. So, I would suggest that in future for any field visit, we would work together in the field”. (KII with government official)

The project faced initial challenges in understanding KCCA's goals in inclusive education. This reportedly improved throughout implementation. KCCA's appointment of an Education Officer focused on disability was described as a major 'win' for the CSU project by case study primary research respondents, indicating increased relevance of inclusive education within local government. At the same time, respondents, including government partners, recognised that further lobbying for funding for children with disabilities was needed, as allocated funds for inclusive education are limited.

Other partnerships mentioned, though to a lesser extent, include collaboration with other NGOs and participation in government events, as well as connecting children with other organisations that could support their transition.

Organisational strengthening

The CSU team faced important capacity challenges, and support from the FM was described by case study primary research respondents as important to strengthening the organisation's capacity. Areas of support mentioned were financial and technical support, which were seen as leading to professional development among CSU staff. This included an increased capacity of CSU staff members to support and provide counselling to children, including through training in sign language. Capacity development was mentioned in the context of the project's Covid-19 response, where staff members took part in sessions focusing on disaster preparedness, safeguarding, child protection, teamwork, team building and conflict resolution. The CSU team also reached out to the FM for support in

planning for activities supporting transition, as mentioned in the FM's RAAG and Risk reporting.²⁹ The project team reported that the M&E support and the time spent in person to strengthen the team's capacity in both delivery and MEL was very helpful for implementation.

Linked to this, staff members who took part in the case study primary research shared that CSU benefited from **reputational strengthening** due to FCDO funding, which enhanced their credibility as an organisation, as well as their internal capacity, enabling them to collaborate with other donors.

4.6.2 Hindering factors

Lack of sustainability planning

Some potential sustainability concerns were already highlighted in the Midline Scorecard and End of Project Review, especially linked to the payment of fees and the risk of drop-out following the end of project support. These concerns were confirmed in the case study primary research as highlighted by a Country Office (CO) staff member:

"I can confidently say that the sustainability plan for Cheshire did not work, that is why even after two years, we may not have made much progress despite our efforts. I'm not sure if they even remember us a year after implementation. [...] Regarding the parents' grants, there was no sustainability plan. The money sat in the bank, and many issues remained unaddressed during implementation. Staff, including myself, struggled to convince others about initiatives we didn't fully understand. When faced with questions, I often had to consult superiors, who responded defensively rather than providing solutions. Ultimately, everything went wrong due to the absence of a clear sustainability strategy." (KII with project staff)

The case study primary research with school stakeholders, parents, and children all confirmed that there have been high levels of drop-out following the end of the project. Respondents directly linked this to issues in payment of school fees.

Additional sustainability concerns were also highlighted by the data. While the project can be considered successful at improving infrastructure for children with disabilities in schools, the Midline 1 Report found that school capacity to improve infrastructure to foster inclusion of children with disabilities is extremely limited without outside support. The sustainability of this type of effort was considered questionable. This was confirmed in the case study research, with reports of equipment having broken down and a lack of maintenance at the school level. For example, as mentioned by a government stakeholder, there was a need to renew and maintain ICT infrastructure, including through a budget for new software and hardware:

"But I think those schools don't have such provisions and of course the attitude of our people, 'this was donated by Cheshire so it should be Cheshire to maintain it', that is very wrong. So, in my opinion we had very little commitment. These schools should make a provision in their annual budget for some funds to be allocated to the sustainability of the ICT infrastructure that was established by Cheshire." (KII with government official)

Budgetary constraints

The case study primary research highlighted that there were some challenges linked to project budgets, including due to changes in the cost of school fees as girls progressed to secondary school. These changes informed revisions of project activities during review and adaptation meetings, carried out every six months.

Importantly, the project was hindered by budget cuts, likely linked to overall FCDO budget reductions. As highlighted in the End of Project Review, the project budget was reduced in the final year of implementation, while the number of reached girls remained the same. One case study research respondent reported that staff salaries were reduced as a result of these budget reductions. Some issues in the arrangements to receive funds were also mentioned, including the need to **return unspent funds**. It was reported that the arrangements to receive funds changed during implementation: in the first phase of the programme, CSU would receive an advance, and in the second phase they would request reimbursements. This was seen as hindering implementation, as the team sometimes had to wait months for reimbursement.

Other implementation issues

FM RAAG reports included mention of several issues in relation to **safeguarding, gender and social inclusion**, and financial management. The report also mentions a school fire incident in the period, and points to the need to improve

²⁹ CSU Q22 RAAG and Risk Rating

fire safety in schools. It was unclear from the case study primary data the extent to which these issues affected project implementation, and what actions were taken as a result.

Project reports and the case study primary research point to practical issues in scheduling activities, which could reflect changing plans or insufficient planning. For example, according to the Midline Scorecard, some girls reported that learning camps were scheduled at short notice, which made it difficult for them to attend. In relation to teacher training, it was mentioned that as this was organised during teaching time, students would not be taught on days in which teachers were being trained.

4.7. Key lessons learned

Improving enrolment, attendance and learning for girls with disabilities requires high levels of support for girls and their families. Working with such a challenging target group is inevitably cost-intensive, and unlikely to be sustainable without clear close-out plans, support from government and income generating strategies.

Integrating children with disabilities in mainstream education, particularly where schools face important contextual and infrastructural challenges, is both difficult and very costly. The issue is particularly pronounced for girls with severe or multiple disabilities. Implementation at scale of this type of intervention requires strong technical expertise and prior planning for sustainability and close-out of activities. Setting up partnerships with organisations specialised in inclusive education methodologies, collaborating and raising awareness among government authorities to ensure support from the get-go, and integrating sustainability planning into project design can all support interventions working with such vulnerable groups. Developing and integrating cost-sharing mechanisms and a stronger focus on income-generation at the household level can help reduce families' dependency on external project support, particularly where payment of school fees or cash transfers are provided.

Transition to employment is particularly difficult for girls with disabilities, especially in a challenging economic environment.

Transition into employment can be a helpful pathway for girls who struggle academically or who, for other reasons, are unable to continue their education. Despite its potential, this type of activity is complex to implement in practice. girls with disabilities face multiple intersecting barriers to employment, due to gender, age, limited experience, and disabilities of various types. For this reason, they require hands-on support, mentorship, and follow-up support to be able to navigate the challenging economic environment, their personal challenges linked to their health, limited familial support, and widespread societal stigma. More hands-on approaches for income-generation could be supported by partnerships with other initiatives and organisations focusing on livelihoods generation but would likely be cost-intensive and therefore be able to reach a smaller number of girls. Providing financial support – including through loans, financial education training and frequent follow-ups – could also be beneficial to girls with disabilities.

Inclusion in school and provision of role models can support girls' self-esteem, although this does not necessarily translate into learning.

While it is particularly challenging to support learning and transition outcomes for girls with disabilities, especially where they have recently entered school and have low pre-existing levels of education, their integration in the classroom and in the community has important results beyond learning outcomes. This type of engagement has the potential to reduce social stigma, support girls' self-esteem and strengthen their life skills, allow for interactions with their peers and improve relationships within families and in communities. Such outcomes can be considered valuable in themselves, in that they can support social norm change, reduction in stigma and overall, more inclusive societies. Research on changes in wellbeing, self-esteem and social norm change resulting from education interventions could help further understand the broader impact of these types of interventions on girls with disabilities.

Engaging with government at the local level can be helpful to raise awareness on disability and prioritisation of inclusive education, but financial constraints within national-level budgets are likely to affect advocacy efforts.

Engaging with local authorities can raise awareness and lead to greater commitments at the local level towards inclusive education. In contexts where inclusive education is not a priority, and where schools face infrastructural challenges linked to low budgets, more targeted efforts are needed to lead to concrete changes in education policy. These include prioritising advocacy efforts around inclusive infrastructure and integration of inclusive education within the teacher training curriculum. While complex and time-consuming, focusing advocacy efforts on budget allocation at national level can support investment in expensive, but potentially highly impactful, changes at the school level.

5. Conclusions

Improvements in attendance and wellbeing in the short-term

Through its GEC-supported intervention, CSU aimed to support access to education and learning for extremely marginalised girls with disabilities in informal settlements in and around Kampala. It did so through a holistic intervention that included direct support in the form of school fees, adaptive materials, inclusive infrastructure, and transportation, as well as awareness raising and advocacy among communities, families, and local government.

The project's hands-on support to girls with disabilities and their families was able to increase attendance, improve self-esteem and lead to some improvements in the learning environment. Economic support in the form of cash transfers and fee payment supported regular attendance, increased motivation among girls and their prioritisation within the family. Working with local government to increase interest in and support for inclusive education led to some changes in local policy, but budget constraints and high cost of infrastructural support remain a challenge.

Challenges in delivering improved learning

CSU targeted an extremely vulnerable group, and improving quality of learning within an already challenging education environment proved difficult to achieve. More specialised, technical support would have been needed, especially considering girls' low starting points due to prior exclusion from education. While CSU was able to support improved attendance to school, this did not necessarily translate into improved learning. Challenges with teaching quality and limited inclusive education practices meant that girls with disabilities were not always included in classroom activities and did not receive the hands-on support they would have needed to improve their learning. Low levels of pre-existing knowledge and understanding of inclusive education meant that teachers would have needed more support, including through coaching and follow-ups, to more effectively include children with disabilities. The challenging school environment, coupled with persistent negative attitudes towards disability, including in schools, also constrained project achievements in terms of learning. The high levels of stigma surrounding disability meant that, despite awareness raising interventions, issues of discrimination and bullying persisted.

Internal capacity constraints hindered results

The complex nature of the intervention and target group, coupled with internal capacity and budget constraints, meant that the CSU project faced important implementation challenges. Internal capacity constraints affected the CSU team's ability to deliver results. Some budget constraints linked to the increasing cost of education as girls progress in the school system, as well as budget reductions in the final year of implementation, also constrained the team, especially during project close-out. In recognition of internal capacity constraints, as well as high risks in safeguarding and gender and social inclusion, the CSU team worked with the FM to develop a Minimum Standards Action Plan and received extra capacity support. This type of support and the high visibility of the GEC project led to reputational gains for CSU, but implementation challenges persisted and ultimately affected project results.

Methodological limitations in the evaluation make it hard to assess impact

The inclusion of girls without disabilities as a comparison group has made it difficult to assess the project's results in terms of girls' learning. The intervention was able, at least in the short run, to support the attendance of girls with disabilities (and a smaller number of boys); many of whom would previously miss several months of school at a time due to non-payment of school fees. While it is not clear how girls with disabilities would have fared without CSU's support, observed results in literacy in numeracy did not meet project targets; and repetition of grades was frequent among girls reached by the project. However, it is hard to say whether such targets were realistic and how the girls would have fared in the absence of the project, or with different types of support. For transition rates, while there was a decrease between baseline and midline, the treatment group fared slightly better than the comparison group. By endline, there were positive signs, particularly in comparison to national averages for secondary school transitions. These findings are difficult to interpret and suggest that the evaluation design may not have captured the full picture of project results.

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Annex I: Case Study Report: ActionAid (Kenya), Education for Life

Project Case Study Report: *Education for Life*, ActionAid (Kenya)

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of the Education for Life project

This report summarises the key findings, lessons learned and conclusions from the IE Team's case study primary research of the **LNGB project Education for Life (EfL) implemented by ActionAid in Kenya**. Primary case study data collection took place in July/ August 2024. The purpose of all six project case studies is to provide an in-depth examination of the reported results (i.e., outcomes and Intermediate Outcomes); how and to what extent project interventions worked well or less well, why, for which types of beneficiaries; and the influences of contextual factors and Implementing Partners' (IPs) delivery capacities on project delivery. This project was selected as a case study because it did not meet its targets, as determined by the Fund Manager. The structure of this report aligns with the evaluation sub-questions to enable the synthesis of the findings across the six case studies. The report structure also aligns with the structure of the main report to ensure the findings from the case study research complement and enrich the findings from the portfolio assessments of the GEC-T and LNGB Windows.

1.2. Project background

EfL was implemented between September 2018 and March 2023 in five rural counties in Kenya by ActionAid, in partnership with Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) and Leonard Cheshire. The project provided out-of-school girls with opportunities to access quality formal education, entrepreneurship, apprenticeship, and vocational training. It worked to improve their literacy, numeracy and life skills through accelerated learning and transition into different pathways, supporting the most marginalised girls in the counties of Isiolo, Garissa, Migori, Kisumu and Kilifi. The project supplied learning and hygiene kits and assistive devices. To facilitate their transition to the different pathways, entrepreneurial and financial literacy skills, training, start-up kits and capital for small enterprises were also provided.

As shown in [Table 1](#), EfL reached 5,701 girls and 571 boys aged 10 to 19, of which 70% had never enrolled in school, 30% had some experience with the formal school system but dropped out and 30% had at least one form of disability. Some of the girls had experienced violence in the community and /or at school and some were pregnant or young mothers. Many of the girls came from pastoralist communities and/or were heads of their families, orphans or extremely vulnerable. Some had survived situations of conflict and insecurity, such as episodes of cattle rustling and tribal clashes in Isiolo and Garissa.

Table 1: Project summary

Dimension	Project characteristics
Project name:	Education for Life
Implementing Partner:	ActionAid
Funding window:	Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB)
GEC Phase I:	N/A
Budget:	£7.9 million
Project start/ end dates (duration):	September 2018 – March 2023 (4.5 years)
Geographical focus:	Kenya <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural communities • Kisumu • Migori • Kilifi • Isiolo • Garissa
Beneficiary groups:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out-of-school girls aged 10-19

Dimension	Project characteristics
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out-of-school boys aged 10-19
Number of direct learning beneficiaries (girls):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5,701 10–19-year-old girls • 571 10–19-year-old boys
Number of direct transition beneficiaries:	5,701 10–19-year-old girls
Other beneficiaries:	862 teachers trained
Marginalisation focus:	Girls and boys with disabilities, have experienced violence, conflict or insecurity, are child labourers, are young mothers/pregnant, orphans and/or are in geographical isolation
Type of interventions:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Economic interventions</i> 	In-kind resources (uniforms, transport, back-to-school kits, menstrual supplies) Income-generating activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Infrastructure and resources</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New classrooms or learning centres, classroom or learning centre improvements or refurbishments. • Toilets and wash facilities (including menstrual management) • Textbooks and learning materials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Teacher training and support</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills training for teachers/educators in participatory approaches to T&L for adolescent girls • Gender Responsive Pedagogy • Accelerated Learning • Targeted focus on Literacy • Targeted Focus on Numeracy • Training in the use of formative assessment • Teacher peer support, training and mentoring • Reintegration to formal school • Inclusive classroom strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Community Based Awareness, Attitudes and Behaviour</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community meetings • Working with men and boys • Working with faith-based groups and traditional leaders • Household level visits & support • Activities involving women's groups, parents' groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Extra-Curricular Activity</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life skills training (including SRHR) • Vocational training/ girls' economic empowerment and IGA for girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>School Management and Governance</i> 	Working with head teachers or other school management members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Empowerment, self-esteem, and life skills</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls' clubs • Safe spaces • Activities that promote girls' voices and participation • Role models (older girls, community members, female teachers)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Safeguarding and Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community awareness • Harmful traditional practices including child marriage & FGM/C • Psychosocial support • Response and referrals (including working with service providers, village child protection committees etc)
Total number of separate cohorts (LNGB only):	3

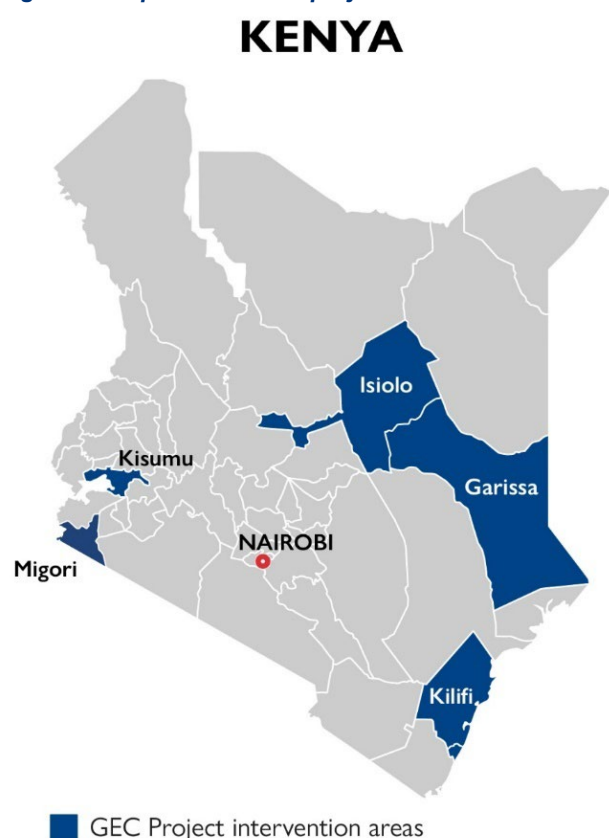
Dimension	Project characteristics
Baseline data collection (report) dates:	Cohort 1: September 2019 (November 2019) Cohort 2: N/A Cohort 3: June-July 2021
Endline data collection (report) dates:	Cohort 1: June-July 2021 (November 2022) Cohort 2: N/A Cohort 3: September 2022 (November 2022)

Where the project worked

The project was implemented in the following rural counties in Kenya (see also [Figure 1](#)):

- Kisumu
- Migori
- Kilifi
- Isiolo
- Garissa

Figure 1: Map of ActionAid project intervention areas



External Evaluation: cohort-based baseline-endline

ActionAid Kenya implemented this project targeting three consecutive cohorts, each scheduled to participate in catch-up centres at staggered intervals from 2019 to 2022. Cohort 1 (C1) was expected to join the catch-up centres in 2019 and complete the programme in 2020; followed by Cohort 2 (C2) in 2020-2021 and Cohort 3 (C3) in 2021-2022.

To evaluate the project's effectiveness, the initial evaluation plan included baseline and endline evaluations conducted one year later for C1 and C2 to measure progress and impact. However, the disruptions caused by the

Covid-19 pandemic, marked by school closures from March to October 2020 and restrictions on in-person activities, prevented C1 evaluation and the collection of baseline data for C2, originally planned for September 2020.

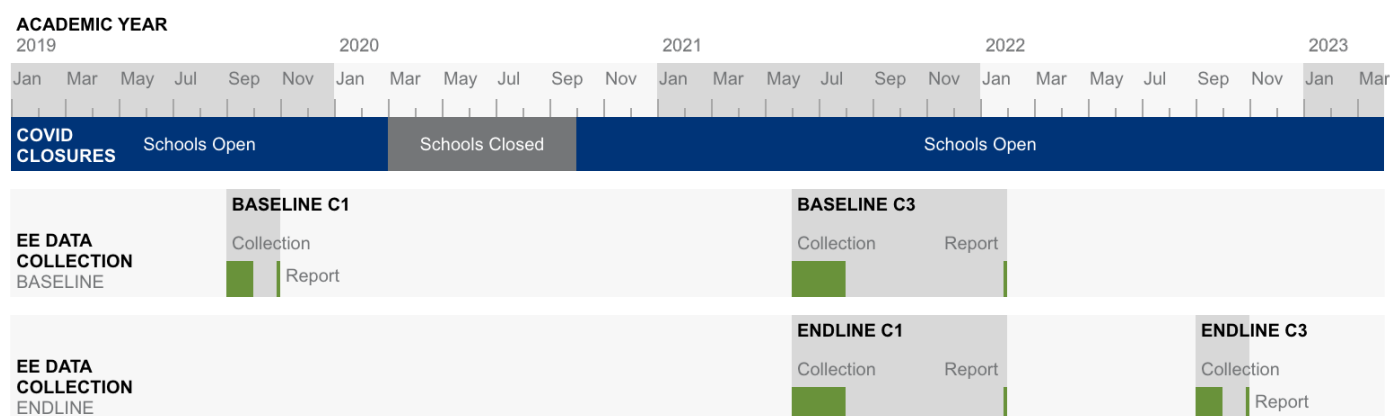
In response, ActionAid revised its evaluation plans, shifting its focus from C2 to C3, which joined the programme in 2021. The updated evaluation schedule included baseline data for Cohort 1, collected in September 2019, with endline data gathered in July 2021 (10 months later than originally planned); and for Cohort 3, baseline data collected in July 2021 and endline data in September 2022.

These adjustments allowed ActionAid to maintain the integrity of the evaluation by tracking two cohorts over time, despite pandemic-related disruptions. C3's baseline evaluation started after most Covid-related restrictions were lifted, allowing for uninterrupted data collection, though additional external factors such as inflation and drought affected attendance and engagement. [Table 2](#) summarises the information on each cohort's evaluation conducted and [Figure 2](#) shows the timelines.

Table 2: Overview of Externally Evaluated Project Cohorts

Cohort	Region	Externally Evaluated	Baseline Conducted	Endline Conducted
C1	Five intervention counties	Yes	Yes	Yes
C2	Five intervention counties	No	No (due to Covid)	No (due to Covid)
C3	Five intervention counties	Yes	Yes (due to Covid-19 but not planned by design)	Yes (due to Covid-19 but not planned by design)

Figure 2: EfL project and evaluation timeline



Note: the whole frame indicates project start and end dates (September 2018 to March 2023).

2. What outcomes did the project deliver?

2.1. Review of changes to Logframe outcome indicators

To evaluate the project's effectiveness, the initial plan included assessing two cohorts, C1 and C2. However, disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and extended school closures led to all catch-up centres being closed from March 2020 to August 2020. As a result, C2 was excluded and C3, which joined the programme after the effects of the pandemic had subsided, was included instead.

Between baselines and endlines, a mixed-methods approach was employed within a longitudinal framework. To measure each of the outcomes, data were collected from a recontacted¹ sample of girls. Due to ethical reasons, no comparison groups were included in the evaluation. Instead, the project focused on comparing baseline and endline data to capture the direct effects of interventions on girls' education outcomes. As a result, a longitudinal before-and-after methodology was used to assess the project's impact on the girls.

The project unfolded in a challenging environment, with the Covid-19 pandemic affecting C1 and severe drought affecting C3. These crises worsened the socio-economic status of the girls and their families, limiting their ability to attend the catch-up centres, hindering learning. Economic challenges also increased the likelihood of girls using their start-up kits for household needs rather than for entrepreneurial activities. To address these challenges, the project took proactive steps, such as engaging families (parents, guardians, and partners) to ensure their commitment to supporting the girls' transition pathways; conducting regular spot checks to monitor the use and progress of the girls' enterprises; and offering booster capital² to counter inflation and economic difficulties. Additionally, childcare support was provided to girls attending vocational training to ensure their continued participation.

2.1.1. Review of changes to the Learning Outcome indicator

Girls were selected for the programme through a mapping process. As part of this, all girls underwent functional English and Kiswahili literacy and numeracy placement assessments to determine their eligibility for the catch-up centres. Only out-of-school (OOS) girls aged 10 to 19 and who failed to reach a certain threshold were included in the programme. Girls' literacy ranged from those not being able to read any four out of five letter sounds to those making more than four mistakes on the story provided. Girls' numeracy skills ranged from those who could not pair at least four numbers to girls who could not answer any of the two questions provided on ethno-math which assesses basic numeracy skills, including everyday maths applications like shopping scenarios. These criteria are highlighted to contextualise differences found between cohorts due to targeting challenges during the initial selection process.

In the external evaluation, learning outcomes were assessed using the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) for Kiswahili and English literacy, and the Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) for numeracy.

The Kiswahili literacy test comprised three subtasks: (1) syllable-making words, (2) oral passage reading, and (3) comprehension, each designed to assess reading fluency and understanding in the language. The English literacy test was split into a written and an oral section. The written section evaluated grammar and composition skills, including the use of articles, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, verb identification, and creative writing. The oral section, on the other hand, tested reading and listening comprehension through word and passage reading tasks. In numeracy, the test included eight subtasks: number identification, missing numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and word problems, which collectively aimed to assess basic numeracy skills.

These assessments were conducted for both C1 and C3 to measure progress from baseline to endline. The learning tests were applied to all girls, regardless of age, except those with severe disability. Literacy test instructions could be given in Kiswahili or English, but responses were restricted to the language of the test.

OOS girls attended learning sessions at catch-up centres for six to nine months before transitioning to different pathways. Once girls reached the comprehension level, meaning they could read, understand, and apply information, they were considered ready to transition. This flexible setup allowed for varying programme lengths, as some girls progressed more quickly and transitioned sooner than others. As explicitly mentioned in the endline evaluation report, for example, "a girl who dropped out of school at the comprehension level may have fallen back just because she is out of school but may catch up and get back to the comprehension level within just two months of exposure to

¹ In instances where recontacting sufficient participants proved challenging, new girls were included in these data collection phases to maintain the integrity of the evaluations.

² The project doubled the amount of start-up capital provided to the girls to try to make up economic shortfalls and reflect the reality of the financial situations many girls found themselves in.

learning in the catch-up centre.” Girls are encouraged to value reaching the comprehension level, as it equips the girls for a better quality of life beyond the catch-up centres. Table X summarises changes in the measurement to learning outcomes.

Table 3: Summary of changes in measurement to learning outcomes

Parameters	Literacy		Numeracy	
Evaluation round	BL	EL	BL	EL
Instrument	EGRA	EGRA	EGMA	EGMA
Language assessed	English and Kiswahili	English and Kiswahili	—	—
Cohorts	C1, C3	C1, C3	C1, C3	C1, C3
Comparison group	No	No	No	No
Sample of girls	OOS	OOS	OOS	OOS
Sample size	C1:454 C3: 528	C1:454 ¹ C3: 522 ²	C1:454 C3: 528	C1:454 ¹ C3: 522 ²
Planned dates for data collection	C1: August–September 2019 C2: August–September 2020	C1: August–September 2020 C2: January-March 2022	C1: August–September 2019 C2: August–September 2020	C1: August–September 2020 C2: January-March 2022
Actual data collection dates	C1: September 2019 C3: June- July 2021	C1: June- July 2021 C3: September 2022	C1: September 2019 C3: June- July 2021	C1: June- July 2021 C3: September 2022

¹ Attrition rate in C1 was 37%.² Attrition rate in C3 was 18%.

According to the endline evaluation report, learning outcomes were measured analysing changes in mean scores over time, from baseline to endline, for both literacy and numeracy across C1 and C3 cohorts. This approach employs a before-and-after (B&A) estimation methodology to determine the project's effectiveness. Review of changes to the Transition Outcome indicator

The project established two distinct transition pathways based on age³: (1) a formal education pathway for girls aged 10–14 aimed to facilitate enrolment into primary school; and (2) a non-formal pathway for those aged 15–19 providing options for vocational training, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurship for older girls.

Successful transition in the formal pathway was defined as completion of primary school. In the non-formal pathway, it was defined as achieving one of the following outcomes: (1) the completion of one Vocational Training Institute (VTI) course, (2) securing an internship or apprenticeship with an employer and completing it, or (3) establishing or starting a small business. It is important to note that the definition of successful transition is based on completing the pathway, not on the success or stability of employment or business outcomes afterward.

Conversely, unsuccessful transition in the formal pathway occurred when girls failed to enrol into primary school or dropped out before primary level completion. In the informal pathway, it included: (1) failing to complete or graduate from the VTI course, or (2) dropping out of the apprenticeship, or not starting a business.

Transition outcomes in the endline evaluations were measured through a combination of: (1) secondary analysis of the project's monitoring data, which tracked the progression of all girls (C1, C2, and C3) through their chosen transition pathway; and (2) surveys conducted by the external evaluator, which focused on the status of C1 and C3 girls' progression through their respective pathway. Transition rates were reported for each cohort at endline,⁴ with the C3 endline report summarising transition rates for both C1 and C3.⁵

The report presents information on two key transition points: (1) the transition into a pathway after successfully completing the catch-up centres, and (2) successful transitions, which are defined as the graduation from the selected transition pathway. For entrepreneurship pathways in particular, a successful transition is characterised as the establishment of a business.

³ As discussed above, transition is contingent on their achievement of the required functional literacy and numeracy levels outlined in the catch-up centre curriculum.

⁴ Transition rates were not measured at baseline as in other evaluations. At baseline, a transition target of 50% was established for C1, though this is not referred to at endline.

⁵ These replicate transitions rates found at C1 endline report.

From catch-up centres to the pathway of preference

Endline evaluations for both cohorts presented data on the transition pathways selected by girls, indicating the percentage of girls who transitioned into specific pathways based on survey data. The specific pathways selected by girls were then contrasted with monitoring data from the project.

Successful transition: Graduation from the chosen pathway

Successful transition was only reported for Cohort 3 in the external evaluation and was exclusively based on monitoring data from the project. Since many girls in Cohort 3 were still engaged in their pathways at the time of measurement, the report presents the results as "status of their transition". [Table 4](#) summarises changes in measurement to transition outcomes.

Table 4: Summary of changes in measurement to transition outcomes

Parameters	Transition rates	
Evaluation round	BL	EL
Instrument	Survey data	Monitoring Data (project data) and Survey data
Comparison group	No	No
Sample of girls	OOS	OOS
Sample size	Survey: C1: 454 C3: 528 ¹	Survey: C1: 426 C3: 508 Monitoring: C1: 646 C2: 2,327 C3: 2,728
Planned data collection	C1: August–September 2019 C2: August–September 2020	C1: August–September 2020 C2: January–March 2022
Actual data collection	C1: September 2019 C3: June– July 2021	C1: June– July 2021 C3: September 2022
Publication date of the evaluation report	C1: November 2019 C3: February 2022	C1: February 2022 C3: November 2023

Notes: ¹At endline, the report indicates that the sample size for C3 was 528. However, the baseline report for C3 mentions a sample size of 508.

The EFL project was included as a project case study as part of the IE's Study 5: Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling ([Rose et al., 2023](#)), which provided a comprehensive analysis of the transition pathways followed by girls, from their enrolment in catch-up centres to their graduation and post-graduation outcomes. Girls from the three cohorts were monitored throughout the programme until 2023, with the most recent tracking exercise conducted one to two years after the endline reports were completed.

This tracking data, re-analysed for Study 5, offered valuable insights into: (1) the transition from catch-up centres to pathways of preference of girls, (2) successful transitions, defined as graduation from their pathways of choice, and (3) post-graduation status, including continuation in employment and entrepreneurship for non-formal pathways and entry grades in the formal education pathway, making it the most up-to-date and relevant information available. The insights from Step 3 represent an additional layer of analysis beyond previous external evaluations, offering the most current and relevant information about the girls' educational and vocational trajectories.

2.2. Outcome results delivered

2.2.1. Learning Outcomes

The evaluation conducted three sets of assessments to measure the learning levels of the girls participating in the EFL project: EGRA in Kiswahili and English, and EGMA for Mathematics.

Baseline results (as per endline report)

At baseline, assessments conducted by the programme evaluated the functional literacy and numeracy levels of girls entering the catch-up centres in C1 and C3.

In **Kiswahili**, C1 girls showed limited proficiency in literacy, with most able to read at the word level (this means read some basic words) with some successfully reading at paragraph and story level. However, none of the girls taken into the project were at the comprehension level needed for functional literacy. They reached a mean score of 17.6 in the test consisting of three subtasks. In contrast, C3 girls achieved a higher mean score of 37.2 in Kiswahili, suggesting that, despite most C3 girls being below proficient literacy levels during initial mapping, they entered the programme with stronger foundational skills in Kiswahili compared to C1.

In **English**, C1 girls recorded the lowest literacy levels with a baseline mean score of 13.1, reflecting a limited ability to comprehend and respond accurately to text. Similarly to Kiswahili baseline results, C3 girls scored significantly higher in English, with a mean of 35.3, before the intervention started.

The same pattern emerged in **numeracy**. C1 girls demonstrated basic abilities in number recognition, counting, simple addition and subtraction, but struggled with more complex operations like multiplication or division, resulting in a mean score of 21.4. C3, however, entered the programme with a baseline numeracy mean score of 39.6, showing stronger skills across a broader range of mathematical tasks.

Considering that girls underwent placement assessments to determine their eligibility for the programme, these differences in the learning levels between C1 and C3 are noteworthy. The evaluation highlights them and further found that while targeting for C1 appeared appropriate, there may have been selection loopholes for Cohort 3 in Kilifi, Kisumu, and Migori. In these counties, about 63% of girls' baseline scores were relatively high despite being classified as non-readers at recruitment. The report hypothesises that some girls may have "perhaps deliberately failed so that they are eligible for recruitment" (p. 54 of endline report). While a closer look at baseline characteristics shows notable differences between C1 and C3 characteristics, the evaluation does not attribute the observed patterns to these⁶.

Baseline to endline results

At endline, assessments showed that both C1 and C3 girls improved in all three sets of assessments (Kiswahili literacy, English literacy, and numeracy). [Table 5](#) summarises these results, highlighting the varying patterns and degrees of progress between the cohorts.

In **Kiswahili**, C3 girls demonstrated a 7% improvement from baseline (37.2) to endline (44.5), while C1 girls saw a larger 15% increase, achieving a higher relative gain starting from a lower baseline. Both increases were statistically significant. C3 maintained a higher average score than C1 across both evaluations, indicating solid foundational skills but slower progress overall. Nevertheless, both cohorts demonstrated significant growth in reading and comprehension.

In **English**, C3 girls' endline score of 37.8% represented a modest, and not statistically significant gain of 2.4% from baseline, in contrast to C1's substantially significant 15% improvement. Although C1 girls showed more rapid progress, C3 girls consistently maintained a higher average score throughout the evaluation. Improvement across key subtasks for both cohorts suggest increased language proficiency, especially in areas such as reading comprehension and written skills.

Numeracy scores showed the strongest and most significant improvements for both cohorts, outperforming the gains observed in Kiswahili and English. C3 girls improved by 8.3%, while C1 recorded a 16% increase. Notably, C3 girls excelled in specific areas such as number recognition, multiplication, and missing numbers but showed lower scores in division and fractions subtasks. These results indicate that while C3 maintained an overall higher performance, both cohorts benefited from numeracy-focused interventions, enhancing their mathematical problem-solving abilities by endline.

In summary, the endline results show that while C1 had more pronounced gains, C3 maintained higher average scores across all three subject areas.

⁶ For instance, 33.5% of girls in C1 presented at least one difficulty at baseline, compared to only 16.9% in C3. Among these difficulties, some of them showed substantial differences, such as learning difficulties, which affected 16% of C1 girls at baseline but only 2.1% in C3. C1 then experienced a 37% attrition rate by endline, and the replacement sample did not fully align with the original baseline characteristics - this shift led to a 15.8 percentage point reduction in the presence of girls with at least one difficulty — particularly in learning, memory, and other challenges. As a result, the endline sample for C1 showed fewer difficulties than at baseline. .

Table 5: Learning scores at baseline and endline in treatment groups

Parameter		English Literacy		Kiswahili Literacy		Numeracy	
Evaluation round		BL	EL	BL	EL	BL	EL
Cohort 1	Instrument	EGRA	EGRA	EGRA	EGRA	EGMA	EGMA
	Treatment (%) C1	13.05%	28.33%	17.61%	32.14%	21.98%	38.34%
	Results B&A	—	+15.28%	—	+14.53%	—	+16.36%
Cohort 3	Treatment (%) C3	35.34%	37.75%	37.23%	44.48%	39.58%	47.89%
	Results B&A	—	+2.41%	—	+7.25%	—	+8.31%

Conclusions on Learning

The endline results indicate that both C1 and C3 showed improvements over time for both literacy and numeracy. Significant gains were observed in Kiswahili literacy and numeracy for both cohorts, while English literacy improvements were significant only for C1. Overall, while C1 demonstrated larger relative gains compared to C3; their endline learning levels were still lower than C3's baseline levels.

This highlights a potential inconsistency in the programme's design and targeting strategy. According to the evaluation reports, the project allowed girls to transition to other pathways at different times based on achieving specific literacy and numeracy thresholds, leading to varying intervention dose or programme duration for each individual girl.

If girls are expected to transition only after reaching a specified literacy threshold, and C1 participants did transition, this implies that the levels achieved by C1 at endline were deemed sufficient for transition. However, the programme also enrolled C3 girls who started with higher baseline learning levels than those achieved by C1 at endline. This then suggests C3 girls already had the skills necessary for transition at the time of their enrolment, raising questions about the consistency of the use of the threshold criteria at targeting and graduation. In fact, the evaluation mentioned selection loopholes in the targeting of C3 girls in three counties, where about 63% of girls' baseline scores were relatively high despite being classified as non-readers at recruitment.

Comparability between cohorts is challenging due to sample differences in terms of learning levels described above but also key characteristics described at baseline. For example, we observed differences in the percentage of girls with disabilities across the cohorts, with C1 having a considerably higher proportion of disabled girls compared to C3.

In terms of effectiveness, this project demonstrated statistically significant gains. For C3, evidence suggests results at baseline are indicative of girls' performance at the start of the project and C3's learning gains likely reflect the programme's impact. On the other hand, C1 experienced high attrition rates (37%), which complicates the interpretation of learning achievement. A portion of the learning gains may be explained by the inclusion of replacements girls, who introduced a notable reduction in the prevalence of girls with at least one difficulty — particularly in learning, memory, and other challenges. Given this, it is challenging to attribute C1's learning gains solely to the programme impact, as some improvement may be attributed to the attrition of girls with greater learning difficulties.

2.2.2. Transition outcomes

The EfL project measured transition as the percentage of girls who completed the catch-up centre and moved on to a pathway. Additionally, it measured successful transition, which refers to the graduation from a specific pathway (for entrepreneurship in particular, this means successfully setting up a business). At baseline level, only **pathway preferences** were recorded.

Baseline results

For C1, the majority of older girls expressed a preference for learning a skill (63%) that would enable them to become entrepreneurs (32%) rather than seeking employment (11%). This highlights the need for a sub-component in the TVET pathway to support the goal of "setting up a small business," aligning with the aspirations of these girls. In C3, the most preferred pathways were apprenticeships (61%) and entrepreneurship (61%), reflecting similar ambitions for self-sufficiency and skill development.

Endline results

From catch-up centres to the pathway of preference

At endline, pathway preferences were measured using survey data and compared with monitoring data for both cohorts. Survey results indicated that 85% of girls in C1 and 97% in C3 successfully completed the catch-up centres and transitioned into one of the pathways.

The report notes that the evaluation for C3 was conducted after the learning phase at the catch-up centres had ended, with girls either having already transitioned or being in the process of transitioning. So, most of the girls mobilised for evaluation included those who had transitioned or were in the process of transitioning. This contributed to the high transition rate observed for this cohort. To provide a more comprehensive assessment, the transition rate for C3 was also measured using project monitoring data, which reported that 89% of girls transitioned to a pathway.

Monitoring data across all three cohorts showed that the most common transition pathways were apprenticeships and entrepreneurship. While vocational training increased across cohorts, the proportion of girls choosing formal education remained consistent at around 10%. These findings underscore the varied preferences and needs of the girls transitioning through the EfL programme. Additionally, the programme measured "attrition to learning," which remained steady at around 10% across all cohorts. Among those who were categorised as having attrition to learning, 46% were single pregnant girls, 26% were married girls, and a smaller proportion, 4.8%, were girls with disabilities.

Successful transition: Graduation from the chosen pathway

Successful transition was only measured for Cohort 3 and was based on monitoring data. The report indicates that many girls were still engaged in their pathways at the time of evaluation, so their current status was mentioned.

Transition rates were not provided for the total cohort but were broken down by pathway. For the formal education pathway, 91.9% of girls were still in primary school, while 3.2% had graduated. In the VTI pathway, 71.7% were still participating, and 23.9% had successfully graduated; however, nearly all graduates remained unemployed (19.6% out of 23.9%). In the apprenticeship pathway, 48.3% of girls were still in training, while 50.1% had successfully graduated, of whom 21.7% were unemployed. In the entrepreneurship pathway, successful transition was defined as setting up a business, which 91% of girls achieved, though 38.8% of these were classified as having unstable businesses. [Table 6](#) presents the proportion of girls who transitioned to each of the pathways supported by the project.

Table 6: Proportion of girls who transitioned to each of the project pathways

Parameters		Transition rate
		EL
Cohort 1	Instrument	Girls survey
	Treatment group	85%
Cohort 3	Instrument	Monitoring Data and girls survey
	Treatment group	97% survey 89% monitoring data
	Successful transition by pathway	
	Formal Education	3.2%
	Vocational training	23.9%
	Apprenticeship	50.1%
	Entrepreneurship	91%

Insights from IE Study 5: Education for Marginalised Girls Beyond Formal Schooling

Study 5, conducted by the GEC II IE, titled Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling ([Rose et al., 2023](#)) examined three projects: Strategic Approaches to Girls' Education (STAGE), implemented by World Education in Ghana; Education for Life, implemented by Action Aid International Kenya; and Accelerating Life Skills Literacy and Numeracy of Out of School Adolescent Girls (Aarambha), implemented by People in Need in Nepal.

The background work for the *EfL* project case study provided a comprehensive analysis of the transition pathways girls followed, from their enrolment in catch-up centres to their graduation and post-graduation outcomes. The key findings are summarised as follows.

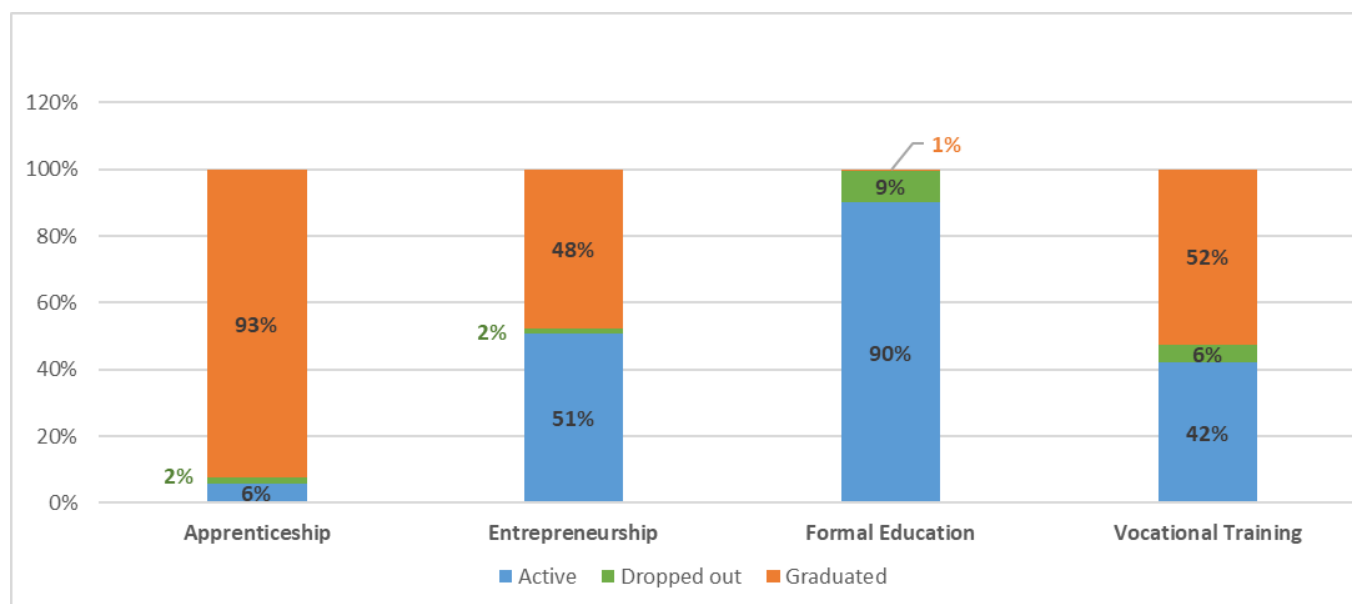
From catch-up centres to the pathway of preference

Of the 5,658 girls who began the project's activities, 521 (9%) dropped out during the accelerated learning courses.⁷ The project was designed such that younger girls (aged 10–14) would primarily transition to the formal education pathway, while older girls (15 and above) would pursue non-formal pathways such as apprenticeships, entrepreneurship, or vocational training. However, data revealed some deviations: 49% of younger girls (aged 10–14) pursued non-formal pathways, and 2% of older girls chose formal education. 80% of the older girls opted for apprenticeships or entrepreneurship.

Successful transition: Graduation from the chosen pathway

Out of the 5,176 girls who entered transition pathways, not all had graduated at the time of data collection, as reflected in the monitoring data undertaken by the project. The varying durations of the pathways impacted graduation rates. Non-formal pathways typically lasted 3-9 months, while the formal education track continued until the girls graduated from primary school. Within the non-formal pathways, graduation timelines also varied. The graduation rates at the time of the data collection are set out in [Figure 3](#) below.

Figure 3: Graduation rates

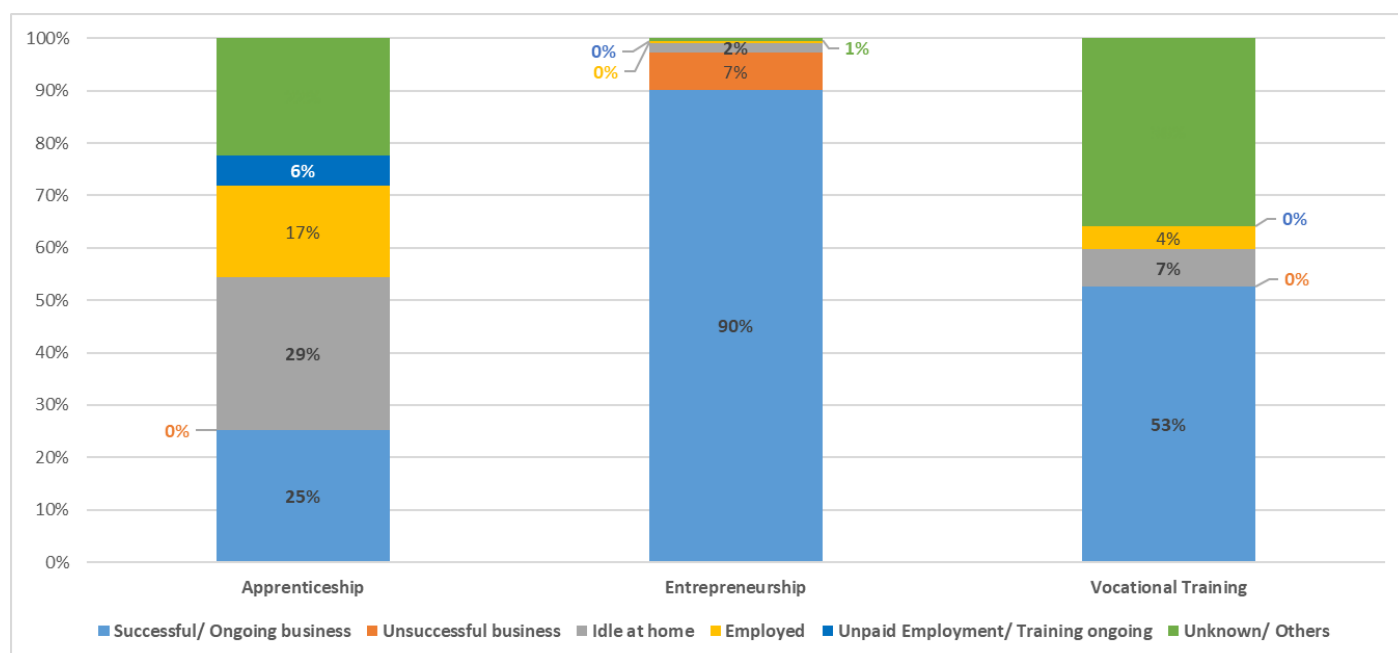


Post-graduation Status

The most recent tracking of *EfL* girls in 2023, based on monitoring data, provided insights into the activities of girls after completing the programme. For girls in the entrepreneurship pathway, 97% maintained their businesses after graduation, with 90% reporting success or ongoing growth, while only 7% described their businesses as unsuccessful. This highlights the programme's effectiveness in promoting entrepreneurship.

Among Apprenticeship graduates, 25% started businesses, and 17% secured employment. However, 29% of these girls remained idle at home, indicating challenges in connecting girls with job opportunities. For girls in the Vocational Training pathway, over half had a successful or ongoing business, while 7% were idle at home. [Figure 4](#) below summarises the post-graduation status for girls who follow the non-formal pathways.

⁷ This is consistent with the findings from the external evaluation referred to as "attrition to learning".

Figure 4: Post-graduation status

Conclusions on Transition

The EfL project demonstrated **strong transition outcomes** across its three cohorts, achieving high success rates in transitioning girls from catch-up centres into pathways such as entrepreneurship, apprenticeships, and formal education. At endline, Cohort 1 achieved an 85% transition rate, while Cohort 3 reached 97% based on survey data. However, as C3 survey data is biased towards girls who did not drop out, the more accurate transition rate for Cohort 3 is 89%, based on monitoring data.

However, findings from the 2023 secondary analysis of monitoring data (Study 5) indicate that the project faced challenges in aligning girls' choices with the proposed pathway tracks. Notably, 49% of younger girls opted for non-formal pathways, such as apprenticeships or entrepreneurship, instead of re-enrolling in formal education as intended. Apprenticeships and entrepreneurship emerged as the most commonly selected pathways, reflecting a divergence from the initial goals of re-integrating younger girls into school.

Successful transition, measured as graduation rates from the selected pathways, were particularly high for the entrepreneurship pathway.⁸ Successful and ongoing business remained high, at 90%, in a tracking exercise conducted one to two years after the endline reports were completed, highlighting the programme's effectiveness in promoting entrepreneurship.

The proportion of participants struggling to secure stable employment or remaining idle post-graduation were very low for vocational training, but significantly higher for apprenticeships (29%), suggesting that the apprenticeship pathway was the least successful in terms of post-graduation outcomes.

Overall, the EfL project created meaningful opportunities for marginalised girls, equipping them with critical skills for sustainable livelihoods. This is one of the study cases that measured transition outcomes a year or two after the endlines (unlike many other projects), which indicated sustained transition outcomes, particularly in entrepreneurship and vocational training. Addressing challenges in vocational training reducing post-graduation inactivity and improving linkages to stable employment opportunities, particularly for apprenticeships, are key areas that needed strengthening for maximising the project's long-term impact.

⁸ At this data point, we considered this measure to be flawed, as the definition of successful transition, based solely on pathway graduation, did not account for post-graduation outcomes, meaning unemployed girls or those with unstable businesses were also considered to have successfully transitioned from the selected pathways. If successful transition were defined to include ongoing businesses and employment, estimates based on the number of girls who were successfully tracked indicate the proportion of girls achieving this outcome would have been 47.7% in entrepreneurship, 89.1% in vocational training, and 90% in employment.

3. What intermediate outcomes did the project deliver?

3.1. Overall project performance

The EFL project reported progress against its Intermediate Outcome (IO) at endline, and the case study interviews pointed to results in various IO areas. The reported results, and degree of change, varied by IO area, with strong results reported in some areas, in relation to Safer Learning Environments (IO5) and Empowering Girls (IO6) particularly, while some challenges remained in the areas of Improved Teaching (IO3) and Attendance (IO7). This section provides a brief overview of the main reported changes according to the project's evaluation reports and the case study primary research.

3.2. FM IO1: Changing community attitudes and norms – Changes in attitudes and perceptions towards girls and girls' education among male and female family and community members, educators, boys, and government officials

Secondary endline evaluation reports demonstrate notable changes in attitudes towards girls' education, especially among male caregivers and community members. Positive shifts were observed in the perception of the value of educating out-of-school girls (OOSGs), including married girls and girls with disabilities. Evaluation reports found that caregivers with some education (compared with those with no education) showed more improvement in supporting the education of young mothers. In addition, secondary sources observed a decrease in communities viewing marital status as a barrier to education.

Communities, particularly in Garissa, Isiolo, and Kisumu, displayed supportive behaviour towards OOSGs by participating in sensitisation efforts, mobilising financial support, and advocating for girls' return to school. Male champions played a pivotal role in encouraging attendance, and even previously resistant male community members have become more supportive. However, conservative views on issues like sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) persist, particularly in Isiolo and Garissa. Stigma around early pregnancy and FGM remains a challenge in some areas, such as Migori, where cultural practices continue to discourage support for OOSGs.

This is corroborated by the case study primary research, with community members showing a shift in their perceptions about the value of girls' education. Initially met with resistance, especially towards female-only projects, community attitudes gradually improved as the success of the project became evident. Families that had once mocked or opposed girls attending the Catch-up Centres (CuCs) later regretted not enrolling their daughters, recognising the benefits of education. Additionally, there was greater acceptance of delaying marriage until after education, with some families becoming advocates for girls' education, promoting gender equality, and reducing pressure for early marriage. These changes reflect a broader cultural shift, where girls are increasingly seen as valuable members of the community.

"When I look at how the world is changing, people's perception of girls is changing. They have seen what a young girl who is properly educated looks like, and they would not like their daughters to get into early marriage. Personally, my daughter should not get into marriage before properly getting educated and then later decide when they want to get married." (Beneficiary girl FGD)

3.3. FM IO3: Improved teaching – Improvements in the quality and effectiveness of teaching, facilitation, and support to learning

Secondary research states that the quality of teaching improved across the project sites, with a substantial increase in the proportion of caregivers rating teaching as "very good." Educator facilitators received training, which they found relevant, although there was a need for further development, particularly in using technology and supporting girls with disabilities. Teacher-student interactions were generally positive, with girls reporting that teachers were responsive and made lessons engaging. However, issues like teacher absenteeism persisted in some areas. Despite these challenges, efforts to integrate life skills, literacy, and vocational training were appreciated by the girls, who cited improvements in their confidence and practical skills.

This was echoed by the sentiments of the girls interviewed for the case study primary research, who cited the CuCs as helping to foster a supportive and interactive learning environment, which was crucial for improving educational outcomes. Respondents were also positive about the level of teaching, saying that teachers were well-trained to address the needs of all learners, including those with disabilities, and employed engaging teaching methods that made learning enjoyable.

"The girls were frequenting the learning spaces as often as possible. It was accommodative. It was interactive. It was a family place where the girls felt free and accommodated. So, they were yearning to learn more."
(Community member KII)

3.4. FM IO5: Safer learning environments – Learning environments are safer and support girls' wellbeing, improved sexual and reproductive health and rights, reduced domestic violence

Overall, evaluation reports stated that tangible security improvements were made, particularly in relation to travel to and from school, largely due to collaboration with local authorities and community leaders helping to enforce safety protocols. The case study primary research corroborated this, with most girls saying that they felt an increased level of safety when traveling to and from the CuCs, with community efforts, such as enlisting boda boda⁹ drivers as advocates, contributing to this. Cultural leaders also played a role in encouraging safe practices, such as returning home early to protect girls from risks. This is not to say, however, that insecurity was eradicated as an issue due to the efforts of the project, with some caregivers in particular highlighting how harassment by local men and other boda boda drivers remained a concern for them, if not the girls themselves.

Case study primary research respondents emphasised that collaborations with organisations such as Support for Tropical Initiatives in Poverty Alleviation (STIPA)¹⁰ played a pivotal role in reducing gender-based violence (GBV), creating safer environments that encouraged regular attendance. The project also provided safeguarding training for educators, childminders, and mentors, enhancing the sense of safety and comfort for the girls. Awareness initiatives and improved economic status, which led to greater independence and autonomy over life decisions among girls contributed to a decline in reported GBV cases, with participants empowered to report incidents and seek support.

"So, they [EfL and STIPA] partnered and taught girls more about gender-based violence. They taught the girl to speak out about any form of violence. So, the girls were empowered on gender-based violence, types of gender-based violence and on how to report it." (Community member KII)

3.5. FM IO6: Empowering girls – Changes in girls' self-esteem, self-efficacy, confidence, and a sense of agency and empowered to make good choices for herself

Evaluation reports found substantial improvements in self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of agency was evident. Girls reported feeling more assertive, especially in household decision-making, and were better able to express themselves in their communities. Training in life skills, literacy, and vocational skills enabled girls to become more financially independent and socially active. They gained the confidence to speak in public, take leadership positions, and engage in community discussions. Nonetheless, the project faced difficulties in addressing SRHR issues, with many girls still viewing contraception as a women's issue. While perceptions around SRHR improved slightly from baseline to endline, cultural barriers continued to impede open discussions on the topic.

Case study primary research respondents' perspectives aligned with this, reporting that the project empowered girls by improving their self-confidence, self-esteem, and decision-making skills. Girls learned to express themselves in public, engage in community leadership, and make independent decisions about their future careers. Vocational training and literacy skills boosted their self-worth, with many becoming role models within their communities. Improved communication skills also led to better dynamics within families, especially in marriages, where mutual respect and cooperation were fostered.

"I used to be disrespectful to everyone, in the project we learned to respect our elders and leadership. Education, respecting her parents, and socialising with her peers. You can report a man following you trying to

⁹ Motorbike taxis

¹⁰ Support for Tropical Initiatives in Poverty Alleviation (STIPA) aim to empower communities to help eradicate poverty, overcome injustices, and promote social transformation among vulnerable rural and urban communities in Western Kenya.

start a relationship you can tell them you don't want. When I was home, I didn't know what was happening in school but after joining the project I now have self-confidence. In school and at home." (Beneficiary girl FGD)

3.6. FM IO7: Attendance – Changes in girls' attendance at opportunities for learning made available to them

Secondary data from evaluations shows that attendance rates at CuCs were generally high, averaging 85%, with the highest rates in Kilifi and Isiolo. Factors driving attendance included support from caregivers and husbands, provision of child-minders, and flexibility in class schedules. Girls reported feeling motivated to attend due to the practical nature of the courses offered, such as business skills and vocational training. Some persistent barriers affected attendance however, including family obligations, poverty, and relocation due to marriage or employment. Despite these challenges, efforts made by community members and male champions ensured follow-up with girls to encourage regular attendance.

Case study primary research respondents put the relatively high attendance across the project down to several factors, including the provision of essential supplies (e.g., sanitary towels), childcare support, and flexible class schedules. They reported that these provisions were critical in reducing absenteeism, particularly among young mothers. In addition, the impact of collaborations with community organisations were important, ensuring that issues such as GBV were addressed to some extent, which helped to create a supportive environment that encouraged regular participation. Families, including husbands and parents, also played a crucial role in supporting attendance by assisting with transportation and household chores.

"What improved their attendance is the motivation that I talked about. When they came, they were given milk to give the children, and some were coming with the children. Some had 2 to 3. We accommodated from 0 to 2 years. So, you find that some had two kids, and the childminders could also take care of them when they were in classes. That is the children were being taken care of outside the classroom. This could give them time to attend the classes properly." (Transition support staff KII)

4. What worked well/ less well and why?

4.1. Overall project performance

The EFL project delivered significant achievements, enabling high transition rates into entrepreneurship, vocational training, and apprenticeships, which enhanced family financial stability and local economic resilience. Girls developed life skills, confidence, and communication abilities, developing independence and empowering them to challenge harmful practices. Community engagement and accessible CuCs contributed to increased enrolment and acceptance of girls' education. However, challenges such as high dropout rates, resource gaps, limited formal education access, and barriers for girls with disabilities constrained the project's impact.

4.2. What worked well in the EFL Project interventions?

The project successfully boosted community support and enthusiasm for girls' education, with CuCs providing engaging and accessible learning environments. Community sensitisation led to greater acceptance of girls' education in regions like Garissa and Isiolo, while improved security and flexible attendance options facilitated participation. Enhanced literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills empowered girls to establish businesses, fostering financial independence and family stability. Life skills training boosted confidence, decision-making, and communication, while careful consideration of how to include girls and boys with disabilities into such training also helped improve perceptions. Family and community backing, alongside mentoring by local leaders, reduced stigma, and reinforced positive attitudes toward girls' education. Health and family planning training also strengthened family bonds, while economic independence enabled girls to participate in household decisions, reducing early marriage pressures. Overall, the project's adaptive approach ensured high engagement, creating cultural change and economic resilience.

4.2.1. Successful transition to pathways

Evaluation reports show that the project achieved a high transition rate (85-89%) for Cohorts 1 and 3, with many girls progressing into entrepreneurship, apprenticeships, and vocational skills training. Apprenticeship pathways were particularly popular as they aligned with local market needs, and the provision of start-up kits and financial packages further facilitated girls' entry into these careers. Vocational training in fields like tailoring, hairdressing, and entrepreneurship enabled participants to launch small businesses, contributing to family financial stability. The provision of essential business equipment (e.g., sewing machines) supported immediate income-generating activities, helping participants sustain their livelihoods and bolster the local economy. Many primary respondents reported that they opened tailoring or hairdressing businesses, which greatly enhanced their families' economic resilience.

"My daughter learned how to count and budget her money. If she gets 1,000 KES from her tailoring shop, she will spend five hundred shillings to buy her personal items and the other five hundred shillings she will bring home to support the family if we require anything." (Beneficiary parent FGD)

4.2.2. Improvements in communication and life skills

Secondary research outlines how the project equipped girls with communication skills in both Kiswahili and English, helping to increase perceived independence and enabling them to manage tasks such as business transactions and phone use. These skills were particularly valuable for girls transitioning into entrepreneurship, as they could now interact confidently with customers and manage simple business processes. Primary case study research respondents also emphasised how life skills training, covering problem-solving and critical thinking, further helped them make informed decisions and navigate daily challenges.

"Yes, they've [taken on board] the knowledge. A lot. Some requested the language of their phone be changed to Swahili, for them to practice themselves without asking for help from other people. By now some of them know how to vote, they know the names [written in Swahili on the ballot papers] of who they want to vote for." (Project staff KII)

4.2.3. Support for girls with disabilities

Evaluation reports show that although there was inconsistent achievement across project sites, a degree of inclusivity was attained by providing specialised resources and medical support for girls with disabilities, allowing them to participate alongside their peers. Tailored attention from trainers helped these girls continue their education, improving their quality of life and supporting their educational aspirations. Despite challenges in teaching methods for those with disabilities, some of which remained unresolved (as explained in further detail in [Sections 4.2.2., 4.2.3. & 4.5.2.](#)), case study primary research respondents stated their inclusion in the project represented a positive step and highlighted the importance of the ongoing development of tailored approaches to support diverse needs.

"The teachers told us to love others as we love ourselves because those who are disabled would require our assistance sometimes." (Beneficiary girl FGD)

4.2.4. Positive behavioural and psychological outcomes

The case study primary research demonstrated that the project enhanced self-esteem, confidence, and agency among women and girls. Women reported improvements in their quality of life, gained household respect, and developed decision-making and problem-solving skills, fostering greater autonomy. Enhanced literacy and numeracy enabled women to take on leadership roles, such as treasurers or secretaries in local organisations, breaking past exclusion from these responsibilities. This marked a cultural shift toward gender-inclusive community leadership.

In addition, the project bolstered skills in public speaking and community engagement. Training in life skills provided self-awareness and assertiveness, allowing girls, particularly in conservative regions like Garissa and Isiolo, to engage in family and community discussions and, in some cases, become mentors. Beneficiaries described how increased awareness of their rights empowered them to resist harmful practices, including child labour and discrimination. Evaluation reports also cite improved reproductive health knowledge supporting healthier practices, which was crucial in conservative areas like Isiolo.

"Before, we did not know our rights and the only thing we were told was to fear and obey our husbands. But now, we are courageous enough to fight for our rights." (Beneficiary parent FGD)

4.2.5. Community and social impact

Secondary research shows that the project's awareness-raising efforts led to increased school enrolment for girls, challenging gender biases in education and encouraging male family members to support women's learning, especially as they saw economic benefits. Community and family support also played a crucial role, with parents, spouses, and relatives providing child-minding, housing, and encouragement, bolstering participants' confidence and commitment to their education. The project also successfully enlisted male champions, local leaders and boda boda drivers as mentors. They promoted girls' education and established a sustainable support network, helping to improving safety in areas like Kilifi and Garissa and creating secure travel conditions for girls.

The case study primary research demonstrated that the project generated a high level of enthusiasm among girls attending CuCs, as they saw opportunities for a brighter future, with competent educators and mentors playing a vital role in enhancing engagement and performance. Evaluation reports note that community sensitisation efforts around the importance of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) were effective, leading to increased acceptance of girls' education and vocational training. Communities in regions such as Garissa and Isiolo embraced the project, and improved security positively influenced attendance and participation.

Case study respondents also described how training in health, nutrition, and family planning fostered healthier family dynamics, strengthening family bonds, improving spousal respect, and enhancing overall well-being. Evaluation reports state that many graduates became mentors themselves, generating a ripple effect and maintaining community enthusiasm for the project's ongoing impact. Finally, girls described how the project empowered them to exercise agency in their households, contributing to balanced relationships and reduced pressure for early marriage. Economic independence enabled girls to participate in family decision-making, creating more equitable and respectful dynamics within marriages.

"Our relationship with the community and the parents [was important], encouraging them to leave alone traditions and customs. Because the message that we got back from the community was: "Leave them, they are just girls, their work is just to get married". Traditionally, a girl child must get married, but we educated them, and they accepted." (Male Champion FGD)

4.2.6. Flexible and accessible learning structures

Secondary research describes how Catch-up Centres (CuCs) were strategically located for accessibility, with flexible schedules allowing girls to manage both family duties and education. The project's adaptive approach to attendance requirements and diverse learning pathways encouraged high engagement and reduced dropout rates. Providing child-minders at CuCs¹¹ was particularly beneficial for young mothers, allowing them to attend classes without the burden of childcare responsibilities.

4.3. What worked less well in the EFL project interventions?

The project had a mixed level of success in their attempts to address challenges affecting retention and completion rates, particularly in regions like Kilifi where high dropout rates were driven by factors like marriage, relocation, and financial constraints. Short project durations and delayed start-up resources hindered girls' progress in vocational training, while the absence of childminders in vocational centres limited young mothers' ability to participate fully. Girls with disabilities struggled with inadequately adapted teaching methods, and long distances to catch-up centres deterred attendance, especially for those with family obligations, suggesting additional support was required. In conservative areas, the project struggled to address restrictive cultural norms, which limited the impact of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) education, with persisting community scepticism towards girls' education further decreasing morale and attendance. Despite the best efforts of the project, the impact of Covid-19 compounded these issues, reducing teacher engagement and requiring girls to study independently, which affected learning outcomes. These impact and extent of these challenges suggest that the project needed to do more to improve community engagement, provide bespoke support for diverse needs, and improve resource distribution to sustain girls' educational participation.

4.3.1. High drop-out rates and incomplete transitions

Evaluation reports describe how despite the project's efforts, dropout rates remained a challenge, particularly in Kilifi County where up to 61% of girls exited the catch-up centres post-admission. A large portion of these dropouts were attributed to barriers such as marriage, relocation, and financial constraints. For some girls, the lack of a solid support structure when transitioning to institutions far from the CuCs led to higher dropout rates.

These findings are corroborated and expanded on in the IE Study 5 ([Rose et al., 2023](#)), which found that girls expressed a need for the project to continue supporting them in their post-transition journeys. One apprenticeship trainer who taught tailoring and hairdressing in Garissa indicated that the lack of premises for girls to operate out of was a major challenge affecting girls' livelihoods once they completed their apprenticeships. Other girls had expectations that the project would continue to support and fund them in their desire to switch transition pathways or vocation specialisations. This supports one of the conclusions noted in the EFL endline report that the majority of girls required continued support from the project post-transition, meaning that many did not reach the threshold where they could independently run their own business.

4.3.2. Inadequate duration and resources for vocational training

Both the case study primary research and secondary research demonstrates that for girls in vocational pathways, the duration of the project often proved insufficient for mastering essential skills, such as accurate measurement in tailoring. Delays in distributing start-up kits and the lack of provision of the identification documents necessary for securing funding further disrupted transitions into self-employment, prompting some girls to take up casual work instead of pursuing their intended vocational goals.

4.3.3. Limited access to formal education pathways

Secondary sources state that the project struggled to facilitate transitions to formal education, especially for older girls and those with disabilities, due to the scarcity of suitable institutions. Costs associated with materials and the absence of boarding options prevented access to formal schooling for some girls, suggesting the need for additional financial support. For girls with disabilities, inadequate facilities in mainstream schools posed additional barriers to their education.

¹¹ Independent Evaluation of the Girls' Education Challenge Phase II – Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling: Aggregate impact of GEC-T projects between baseline and midline found that 69% of CuCs had childcare facilities and 72% made a childminder available.

4.3.4. Lack of childminders in vocational training centres (VTCs)

While childcare support was consistently available during initial training sessions and at schools, it was not provided in vocational training centres (VTCs) at the beginning of the project (this was later changed), creating a barrier for young mothers. Case study primary research respondents described how without childminders, young mothers struggled to balance their learning with childcare responsibilities, impacting their ability to focus and limiting their attendance and ability to absorb the content of the course.

"Young mothers went with their children [to the VTCs], and they did not have childminders. The teacher was teaching them (girls with children), and you find that the child would crawl into the class here and another one is playing with another child over there. They may start fighting and one starts crying. So, the mother fails to concentrate. So, the lack of childminders in those VTCs was not good." (Male Champion FGD)

4.3.5. Challenges in supporting participants with disabilities

Although girls with disabilities were included in the project, the teaching methods were not fully adapted to meet their needs. This lack of tailored approaches limited these participants' ability to learn effectively, with project leaders recognising the necessity for more adaptive and inclusive teaching methods to support these participants better.

4.3.6. Inconsistent support for SRHR and life skills

While the project raised awareness on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), cultural restrictions in conservative areas like Isiolo and Garissa and policies restricting SRHR discussion in educational settings limited its impact, suggesting the need for greater community sensitisation around this topic. Evaluation reports describe how girls often felt hesitant about contraceptive use and discussing SRHR due to societal norms, with resistance from some religious leaders further complicating the project's SRHR education efforts. This limited the effectiveness of life skills education within these regions.

4.3.7. Persisting negative community attitudes

Secondary sources show that some community members remained sceptical about older girls' education, particularly in regions like Isiolo, where girls reported facing public ridicule and stigma for attending school. Insults and social stigma, especially around basic literacy education for adult women, discouraged attendance and diminished morale for some participants. While resistance decreased over time as the benefits became more apparent to the community, the initial scepticism toward the project's female-only focus remained, reflecting ongoing cultural biases. The case study primary research supported this finding, with respondents describing how some parents and wider community members were reluctant to support the project, revealing a need for early and ongoing advocacy to promote gender-equal values and increase community acceptance of women-focused educational interventions.

"So, this is something that did not go well. "Why are you taking my wife to school?" At times, it will bring conflicts at home. So, it had to take the engagement of the women's rights network to engage the community, because, at times, the husband would not be willing to let the wife go. So, I would say that those are some of the things that are really a hindrance to the activities of the project and of the girls and that will discourage a girl to feel like. "I want to go." And also, it will be like, "Why should my wife go? She is already my wife, I am providing. So why should I even allow her to go back to school?" (EFL Project Staff KII)

4.3.8. Impact of Covid-19 on educator engagement and student support

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the case study primary research and secondary sources showed that girls experienced inconsistent support from educators, with some case study respondents reporting limited engagement and feeling unsupported in their studies. While girls in counties like Garissa and Isiolo received periodic home visits, many others had to rely on independent study, which affected their academic progress and continuity.

4.3.9. Inaccessibility of catch-up centres

Evaluation reports found that long distances to CuCs were a substantial barrier for many participants, particularly for those with additional family responsibilities. The case study primary research showed that girls frequently requested more accessible centres to improve attendance feasibility, as geographic distance limited participation for those who could not travel easily.

"One thing is the distance particularly to the vocational training centres [VTC]. Not every village has a VTC, so that meant some girls might have to walk longer distances to the vocational training centres, they would have

to get money for transport so that contributed to some of them not completing the entire sessions they were intended to." (EFL Project Staff KII)

For girls with disabilities, the distance to CuCs posed additional barriers, severely limiting regular participation. In addition, as found in IE Study 5 ([Rose et al., 2023](#)), only 4% of all EFL learning centres had facilities to accommodate girls with disabilities. This challenge highlighted the need for more accessible educational locations to support the consistent engagement of girls with disabilities.

4.4. What were the unexpected or unintended results from the EFL Project?

The project yielded positive unintended outcomes, including girls pursuing non-traditional vocational paths, such as carpentry and welding, which challenged gender norms and inspired others. Additionally, cross-community collaboration improved relations in historically tense regions, fostering peace during critical periods like elections. However, unintended negative effects included dependency on external aid, with some students dropping out in hopes of future project benefits, and gender tensions in households as women's empowerment disrupted traditional dynamics. These outcomes underline the importance of comprehensive community engagement and strategies for developing self-reliance.

4.4.1. Positive unintended effects

Vocational training leading to economic independence

Case study primary research respondents described how an unexpectedly large proportion of girls who transitioned chose to join the polytechnic skill training pathway, with 43% of one 1000 girl group selecting it ahead of primary school, business, or an apprenticeship. In some cases, this led to broader community benefits, with girls becoming local role models and mentors. Some participants even ventured into non-traditional fields like plumbing, welding, mechanics, or carpentry, which were previously dominated by men, challenging gender norms.

"When we were recruiting the girls, most of the time we did feel that most welders and carpenters were men. We do imagine that welders are men, but suddenly because we had people on the ground [in those professions] come to do a session with these girls, it happened that these girls were attracted to these jobs, and they felt that they could do what men could do. So, we found that these girls, some of them wanted to be carpenters and some of them wanted to be welders. In fact, to us, it was a surprise because those girls who went to do carpentry did it very well. We did not expect it because we thought they were going to be tailors and hairdressers." (Project Staff KII)

Cross-community collaboration and conflict resolution

The case study primary research demonstrated that an unexpected outcome was the fostering of peace and collaboration between communities. For instance, in regions with historical tensions, the shared benefits of the project led to increased cooperation. This positive shift was particularly noted in areas where different ethnic communities engaged in joint projects, leading to improved relations and reducing conflicts during sensitive times, such as elections.

"That's why I advocate for the EFL project to come back ... there was peaceful cohesion between the Luo¹² and the Kipsigis¹³. Mostly during elections, us Luo that live on the border, we usually flee our homes [because of anticipated unrest and risk], but because of EFL project, the Kipsigis said that we are brothers and sisters. [They said] 'Look at what you did for our girls. You made our girls learn. We can see the sewing machines.' And there was no conflict between the Luo and the Kipsigis in the 2022 elections. Every time elections happen, there is a fight, but because of the EFL program, there was no fight. The EFL program brought peaceful cohesion between these two communities." (Community Dialogue Member KII)

¹² The Luo of Kenya and Tanzania are a Nilotic ethnic group native to western Kenya and the Mara Region of northern Tanzania in East Africa. The Luo are the fourth-largest ethnic group in Kenya, after the Kikuyu, the Luhya and the Kalenjin.

¹³ The Kipsigis are a Nilotic ethnic group inhabiting Kenya. They are the most populous sub-group of the Kalenjin.

4.4.2. Negative unintended effects

Dependency and unrealistic expectations

Secondary endline evaluation reports state the project's success in providing vocational training and start-up resources inadvertently led to some dependency. There were instances where girls who had not been selected for the project chose to drop out of school in the hope of being included in future initiatives, expecting to receive similar benefits. This revealed an underlying issue of dependency on external aid, as opposed to self-sustained motivation for continued education.

Challenges in gender dynamics

While the project promoted female empowerment, this sometimes led to unintended strains on traditional gender roles. For example, increased independence and income among the women created tensions in households, with some husbands feeling undermined. In a few cases, this even resulted in domestic conflicts, as women's empowerment disrupted existing family dynamics. Evaluation reports highlighted the need for broader community engagement to address these gender-related tensions comprehensively.

4.5. To what extent and how did external contextual factors influence the Efl project's performance?

Contextual factors significantly shaped the project's outcomes. Supportive adaptations during Covid-19, such as remote learning, local safety initiatives, and civil society engagement, sustained progress and promoted girls' education amidst challenges. However, barriers including economic hardships, entrenched cultural norms, geographic isolation, and weak enforcement of laws like child marriage restrictions hindered participation and retention. Environmental challenges limited digital access, and scarce employment opportunities further constrained outcomes, demonstrating the need for sustainable economic linkages, cultural advocacy, and infrastructural improvements to enhance project performance.

4.5.1. Supportive factors

Adaptations during Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic had a profound effect on the project, necessitating several adaptations to maintain continuity in education and community engagement. Evaluation reports describe how, in order to reduce transmission risks, local graduates were trained as enumerators to collect data, improving community acceptance and mitigating health concerns associated with external visitors. The project also distributed essential learning materials, hygiene kits, masks, and sanitisers, allowing girls to continue their studies safely from home. In addition, creative communication strategies like SMS platforms, radio forums, and controlled community meetings allowed for continuous sensitisation around the importance of girls' education during the pandemic.

Secondary research also shows that to address the interruption of in-person classes, educator facilitators in some counties provided phone lessons, home visits, and engaged community health volunteers, maintaining educational engagement and supporting learning outcomes in regions with active distance-learning initiatives. These adaptations demonstrated the flexibility required to sustain educational initiatives in challenging conditions, effectively minimising dropout rates and sustaining progress despite Covid-19 restrictions.

Community initiatives and safety interventions

Evaluation reports state that community-driven safety interventions were crucial in reducing barriers related to insecurity, a common issue in various project areas. Local involvement, including support from parents, relatives, and community leaders, provided girls with safer travel to school through community-led security measures, such as community watches and collaboration with local police and chiefs. This collective approach to safety fostered a secure environment, reducing attendance barriers tied to security concerns.

Civil society engagement in girls' education

Secondary research shows that civil society organisations provided a facilitatory backdrop to the project's performance by spearheading initiatives to improve transition rates and academic performance for vulnerable girls.

Projects like Wasichana Wetu Wafaulu¹⁴ achieved notable success in increasing literacy, numeracy, and community support for girls' education, particularly in regions where cultural resistance had initially been high. Collaborations with international partners introduced technology and STEM education, equipping girls in rural Kenya with essential digital skills that prepared them for modern workforce demands, thereby expanding educational and career prospects.

Teacher training and standards of education

Enhanced teacher qualifications and training standards, introduced through national reforms, were instrumental in creating a supportive and high-quality learning environment, as many of the teachers had had at least some exposure to these improved standards. With a focus on the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and learner-centred, digitally literate classrooms, teachers were better equipped to support girls' educational needs, particularly in CuCs where interactive and practical teaching methods proved beneficial. The Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards (DQAS) further reinforced educational standards by conducting regular school inspections, ensuring compliance with safety and curriculum requirements, which helped to foster a secure learning environment for students.

4.5.2. Hindering factors

Economic barriers

Both case study primary research and secondary data sources emphasise how poverty and economic pressures severely impacted performance, with many families in project regions prioritising income-generating activities over girls' education. Household responsibilities, particularly for girls in low-income households or those with limited parental support, often took precedence over studies. Additionally, the costs of uniforms, transportation, and sanitary products remained prohibitive for many families; approximately 39% of households identified these expenses as barriers, particularly in counties like Kilifi where the financial strain on families limited educational access. Economic challenges also forced many girls to engage in work or intensive household chores, which detracted from study time and led to high dropout rates, especially in single-parent and low-income households where educational costs remained burdensome despite free education initiatives.

Cultural and community-based barriers

Case study primary research and secondary data demonstrated that cultural attitudes that prioritise boys' education over girls' education persisted across communities, particularly where gender biases relegated girls to roles supporting household income or early marriage. Girls were often excluded from decisions about their education, with families encouraging marriage or domestic responsibilities over schooling, as traditional gender roles continued to limit aspirations for formal or higher education.

Stigma against returning students, particularly young mothers, further exacerbated attendance challenges, as community members frequently ridiculed or discouraged their efforts to resume schooling. This social stigma, along with societal resistance to women-focused educational initiatives, underlined the ongoing need for cultural engagement to shift attitudes toward the value of girls' education. Some husbands and family members also resisted girls' schooling, fearing that education might disrupt family dynamics, and in extreme cases, even resorted to actions like destroying school materials to deter attendance.

Case study respondents and evaluation reports both stressed that cultural practices, including early marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), further limited educational opportunities for girls in certain communities, where these practices were still seen as part of a girl's transition into adulthood. Communities that viewed girls as economic assets often promoted early marriage, particularly following FGM, which led to school dropouts and low participation in the project.

Geographical and environmental challenges

Evaluation reports and case study respondents cited various geographical barriers, including remote and mountainous areas and limited access to schools, especially for girls in rural regions and informal settlements with inadequate infrastructure. Environmental factors, such as drought and extreme weather negatively impacted attendance rates, particularly in pastoralist communities, such as those in Isiolo and Garissa, where migration due to drought forced families to relocate, disrupting girls' education and resulting in high dropout rates. In areas with limited

¹⁴ This programme was delivered by the Education Development Trust, which effectively served over 160,000 girls in eight different Kenyan counties. The project centred on regions with arid, semi-arid lands and urban slums. Its accomplishments were remarkable, increasing rates of transition from primary to secondary school from 74% to 96%, boosting literacy and numeracy scores by 11% and 12% respectively, and providing gender-responsive pedagogy training to over 6,000 teachers and 520 headteachers: <https://www.edt.org/research-and-insights/adolescent-girls-education-in-kenya-a-case-study/>

transport options, girls faced additional obstacles reaching school or vocational centres, often resulting in reduced attendance or dropout.

Covid-19 Challenges

Secondary research showed that the Covid-19 pandemic had a severe negative impact on project implementation, despite the project successfully putting in place some mitigation and adaptation measures. To attempt to maintain transitional momentum, the project held meetings with parents and spouses to drive continued commitment to supporting girls' transition pathways. Spot checks were also conducted to track the use and progress of girls' enterprises. In addition, the project doubled the amount of money given to the girls as start-up capital and employed methods to try to engage girls at home through technology and household visits. Interventions were also differentiated by subgroup, with girls with disabilities having more household visits while the other girls had telephone discussions with facilitators. Girls also received additional dignity kits that had household items sufficient for the whole family to cushion them from the adverse effects of the pandemic.

Among the most damaging effects were an exacerbation of access challenges, with the closure of all CuCs and discontinuation of face-to-face learning disrupting education and leaving girls with limited resources and minimal engagement at home. Remote learning efforts varied in their effectiveness based on home environments, and logistical adjustments to maintain smaller class sizes created additional challenges in delivering consistent education. Case study primary research respondents reported that the lack of access to digital tools for remote learning compounded the difficulty of maintaining academic continuity during the pandemic. Evaluation reports also found that girls who had chosen the entrepreneurship pathway were unlikely to use the economic support provided by the project for their small enterprises, but rather to ease household economic pressures, despite the project's best efforts.

Legislative and enforcement gaps

Secondary research suggests that legislative gaps also influenced project performance, particularly regarding inconsistent enforcement of education laws and child marriage restrictions. Although laws prohibiting child marriage and corporal punishment exist, enforcement is weak in some remote regions. Informal judicial systems sometimes allow early marriages due to traditional customs conflicting with national law¹⁵, limiting the effectiveness of legal protections for girls. These gaps hindered efforts to prevent early marriage and secure a safe learning environment, emphasising the need for improved public education on legal rights and more consistent law enforcement across communities.

Limited employment and economic opportunities

Case study primary research respondents stressed that even when girls completed education or vocational training, limited job prospects in project regions posed challenges. Many girls faced frustration due to the scarcity of formal employment opportunities, and economic hardship often diverted their focus to immediate work rather than continued education. For those who started small businesses, maintaining these ventures was challenging due to insufficient infrastructure, financial resources, and family interference. These factors underlined the importance of connecting educational projects with sustainable economic pathways and support systems to ensure the long-term benefits of skill development.

4.6. What were the implementation factors behind the EfL project's success or lack of success?

The project's success was driven by its flexible educational pathways, inclusion of girls' voices in planning, and a culturally sensitive approach tailored to regional needs. Adaptations for girls with disabilities and the development of Accelerated Education Guidelines (AEGs) demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity, while efficient monitoring and strong community engagement enhanced performance. However, inadequate disability resources, inconsistent project management, and delays in funding disbursement hindered outcomes. These gaps demonstrated the need for enhanced planning, timely communication, and more inclusive infrastructure to fully support participants.

¹⁵ <https://navakenya.org/2024/01/24/early-marriages-and-the-shadows-of-kangaroo-courts-in-the-kuria-community/>

4.6.1. Supportive factors

Focus on non-formal and flexible pathways

Evaluation reports state that a key factor in the project's success was its focus on flexible educational and vocational pathways tailored to meet the needs of girls with diverse backgrounds and responsibilities. Recognising the unique challenges faced by older girls, married girls, and young mothers, the project offered non-formal pathways such as apprenticeships and entrepreneurship. This flexible approach enabled participants to pursue education on adaptable schedules, giving them control over their learning and career paths. By aligning educational opportunities with the realities of these girls' lives, the project increased engagement and allowed participants to develop skills that supported economic independence.

Recognition of girls' voices in planning

The project prioritised the voices of the girls themselves in the planning process, ensuring that their preferred pathways and aspirations were at the centre of decision-making. Evaluation reports describe that through listening to what girls wanted from their education and careers, the project built trust and engagement, motivating more girls to participate and succeed in both education and vocational training. Empowering "girl champions" to advocate for diverse educational pathways inspired other girls within their communities and strengthened the project's impact.

Adaptations for girls with disabilities

Despite weaknesses and limitations to the project's approach to engage girls with disabilities, evaluation reports highlight a strong commitment to inclusivity, evident through the adaptations made for girls with disabilities. These efforts included home visits, specialised teacher aides, mentors, and accessible physical facilities, such as disability-friendly toilets. The development of Accelerated Education Guidelines¹⁶ (AEGs) further demonstrated the project's dedication to supporting diverse learner needs, attempting to ensure that education remained accessible to all, even during disruptions like the Covid-19 pandemic. These inclusive measures aimed to ensure that girls with disabilities could better participate in educational opportunities, fostering a more equitable learning environment.

Progress on accelerated education guidelines

Evaluation reports stated that the project's rapid progress in implementing AEGs was a notable achievement, aimed at enhancing access for girls in non-traditional learning settings. By contributing to these guidelines, the project positioned itself as a key influencer in educational policy at the national level, reinforcing its commitment to creating sustainable, scalable educational solutions. This progress on AEGs supported a structured approach to educational access, setting a foundation for lasting improvements.

Efficient implementation and monitoring

Secondary research shows how consistent, efficient implementation was achieved in part through regular informal monitoring and budget management. By actively engaging participants, educators, and senior management, the project team maintained a dynamic feedback loop that allowed for quick responses to challenges. This reflective approach enabled continuous improvement and ensured that project activities were responsive to the evolving needs of the girls, ultimately enhancing performance and maintaining high RAAG ratings conducted by the FM.

Inclusion and cultural sensitivity

Case study primary research respondents valued the culturally sensitive approach taken by the project, stating that it was essential in the project's effectiveness. By tailoring its methods to the distinct needs of different regions, such as Somali, Kilifi, and Kisumu, the project maintained relevance across diverse communities. Additionally, calls to expand inclusivity – such as removing age limits and including both genders in some initiatives – demonstrated a forward-thinking approach, further strengthening the project's impact by extending educational benefits across broader segments of the population.

"The project was very much relevant to the people [of the region] because it is a sugarcane planting area. So, you find out that most girls had dropped out maybe because they did not manage to get fees to continue with their schooling because they must do pastoral work. There were schools around and we convinced them to

¹⁶ As part of its efforts towards sustainability, the EFL project developed the Accelerated Education Guidelines. To achieve this, the EFL project adapted the budget to provide for resources towards supporting this process that was undertaken through a Working Group led by the Ministry of Education (relevant departments) in collaboration with other organisations such as RefuSHE, Norwegian Refugee Council, UNHCR, and UNICEF among others.

learn in the school. The project provided them with the few things that they needed to help them come to school. So, it was very relevant for sub-county people." (Project Staff KII)

4.6.2. Hindering factors

Challenges in addressing the needs of girls with disabilities

Evaluation reports pointed out that access to disability-friendly resources and facilities was a major limitation for girls with disabilities, who encountered inadequate infrastructure and a lack of specially trained educators. Schools and CuCs were often ill-equipped to accommodate these students, creating substantial barriers to consistent attendance and participation. Insufficient infrastructure, such as a lack of ramps and accessible toilets, created physical barriers, while high school fees and limited financial support further restricted participation. Social stigma and abuse, particularly in regions like Kisumu and Kilifi, exacerbated these challenges, leading to isolation and exclusion for many girls with disabilities. Case study primary research respondents reported that this issue was exacerbated by teacher absenteeism and a shortage of qualified staff, especially in catch-up centres with shift systems which limited teaching time. Respondents felt that these gaps in staffing and training contributed to irregular attendance and hindered academic performance. These limitations highlighted a need for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to fully support girls with disabilities throughout the project.

"Maybe about the learners with disabilities [could be improved]. Even though they were not in my Catch-up Centre, some disabled learners did not achieve their goals where they were. So, maybe the training for the facilitators with disabled learners should have been more [extensive]. They should have been trained more on how to handle the disabled.... if they [the project staff] ever come back, and there are learners with disabilities, at least they should employ facilitators with special education training. Because for me, if a child is blind and can't see well, they must use Braille. There should be someone equipped with that Braille training to teach them. For me I'll teach orally, and they won't know [the content of what I'm teaching]." (Transition Support Staff KII)

Inconsistencies in project management and communication

Evaluation reports stated that towards the end of the project, inconsistent communication and management practices became apparent. Issues such as non-attendance at key meetings and delays in responding to emails disrupted planning and coordination, particularly concerning the final budget revisions. These lapses in project management indicated a need for stronger communication protocols to ensure continuity and efficient closure. Without clear channels for timely updates, project stakeholders experienced setbacks that affected the smooth transition of responsibilities and resources.

These delays and miscommunications suggested a need for improved financial planning and resource allocation strategies. For instance, primary respondents reported that delays in disbursing funds for teacher salaries and start-up kits led to frustration and, in some cases, participant dropout, undermining the project's retention efforts and overall momentum.

"So, you will find that a girl is transitioning. She has finished the Catch-up Centre; she wants start-up capital. We were supposed to give the start-up capital of KES 12,000. This one wants to go to this level for review. That review is done. The second level of approval takes another two weeks. The third approval takes another two weeks. The final approval takes another two weeks. So, you will find that a girl has finished, and you have not supported her for a month. What does that mean to that girl?" (Project Staff KII)

4.7. Key lessons learned

1) Sustained community engagement enhances educational outcomes

Building strong community support is essential for sustained educational success, particularly in conservative and resource-constrained areas. Engaging family members, local leaders, and community role models fosters acceptance of girls' education and vocational training. The involvement of male champions, local safety initiatives, and accessible catch-up centres contributed to higher attendance and improved security, demonstrating that educational interventions benefit from embedded community engagement strategies. Future projects can replicate this model by investing early in community sensitisation, aligning educational goals with local values, and continuously reinforcing the social benefits of girls' education.

2) Flexible, non-formal educational pathways address diverse needs

Broadening non-formal education options and supporting entrepreneurship pathways in future projects can further enhance inclusivity, ensuring education remains accessible for various life stages and personal responsibilities. Non-formal, flexible learning pathways (e.g., apprenticeships, catch-up centres, vocational training) effectively support girls with caregiving responsibilities, young mothers, and older participants who may face constraints in attending traditional education provision. The success of flexible schedules and accessible locations reduced dropout rates and increased participation, particularly among young mothers and girls balancing work or family obligations.

3) Inclusive design for girls with disabilities requires comprehensive strategies that meet diverse needs

Projects should adopt an integrated approach to disability inclusion by prioritising accessible infrastructure (ramps, disability-friendly facilities) and training for educators to meet diverse learning needs. Cross-project learning could help to strengthen these practices, thereby supporting a wider range of learners with disabilities. Inclusive education is most effective when paired with tailored resources, accessible facilities, and specific support systems for girls with disabilities. Despite positive steps in providing specialised resources, gaps in teaching adaptations and facility accessibility limited these students' engagement and outcomes. Comprehensive strategies addressing physical infrastructure, teacher training, and financial assistance can bridge this gap.

4) Adaptability to contextual challenges is key to project continuity

Embedding adaptability into project design allows for smoother continuity during external challenges. Projects should prepare for potential disruptions by training local resources and developing scalable communication and distance-learning mechanisms. Flexibility in response to disruptions, such as Covid-19 and environmental hardships, is vital for maintaining educational continuity. While remote learning via phone, home visits, and community health support helped keep girls engaged during the pandemic to an extent, a greater capacity to quickly implement such measures would've led to better outcomes in this regard. Local adaptations, such as distributing resources and leveraging local graduates, were however examples of effective pivoting to new strategies to minimise educational losses.

5) Effective project management and transparent communication are essential for sustainability

Establishing regular updates, scheduled reviews, and clear financial transparency protocols can improve project outcomes and facilitate smoother transitions. Effective communication ensures timely engagement, maintaining momentum for long-term impacts. Consistent project management and transparent communication with all stakeholders are fundamental to a project's success and sustainability. Challenges towards the project's end, such as inconsistent communication and budget delays, underscored the need for strong protocols.

6) Enhanced safeguarding and support for social inclusion

Expanding safeguarding policies and addressing cultural stigma in conservative areas can create a safer and more supportive environment for education. Engaging community leaders and stakeholders to advocate for inclusivity can foster broader acceptance and protect vulnerable participants. Effective safeguarding measures and targeted social inclusion practices, especially for girls with disabilities and those from marginalised backgrounds, are crucial to creating an equitable educational environment. Persisting challenges in stigmatised settings showed that inclusive education goes beyond resources to encompass robust safeguarding and social support.

5. To what extent and how did the Efl Project reach and benefit the most marginalised?

5.1. Summary of key findings

The project achieved success in promoting female empowerment, vocational training, and school reintegration for out-of-school girls. Through a community-led approach, it reached marginalised girls, providing them with skills and opportunities for economic independence. Several challenges affected the full achievement of its goals, however. Key barriers included inadequate support for learners with disabilities, unequal resource distribution, and logistical delays, which limited participation and overall impact. Additional unintended consequences, such as dependency on aid and gender tensions within households, highlighted the need for more sustainable, community-focused strategies. While many girls benefited, issues such as limited vocational training duration and insufficient follow-up support posed challenges to the long-term success and sustainability of the project's impact.

5.2. How were the most marginalised defined and identified?

The project identified the most marginalised girls based on educational, socio-economic, and physical factors:

- **Educational Status:** The project targeted out-of-school girls, including those who had dropped out, never attended school, or were forced to leave due to pregnancy, early marriage, or financial constraints.
- **Disability:** Girls with physical, mental, or sensory disabilities were prioritised, with a 30% inclusion goal. Despite cultural stigmas, the project collaborated with health institutions and disability networks to support these girls.
- **Socio-Economic Factors:** Marginalised girls included those from extremely poor backgrounds, orphans, teenage mothers, and child brides.

Identification was achieved through a community-led approach, involving local leaders, village elders, and community health volunteers (CHVs) in conducting vulnerability assessments. The project's outreach included door-to-door visits, public meetings, and collaboration with disability networks, ensuring that even isolated girls could be identified and supported.

"First you go to the chief and explain what we want to do, because communities have their own means and stereotypes. The first question you will be asked is, why girls only? Which kind of project is this? Why only girls who've dropped out of school, and some of them are married and they are underage. People are sensitive, they are worried about whether you want to arrest them [for underage marriage]. You explain these things to the chief, even if it means going there five times, and explain and explain, and even take that chief, and introduce him to another chief in an area where they have embraced it [the project initiatives] and it is working, so that they can see it and go, it is working. Once the chief, leadership and religious leaders agree it is working, you then ask them to organise a larger community gathering." (Efl Project Staff KII)

5.3. How and to what extent were the most marginalised reached?

The project used a multi-faceted approach to reach marginalised girls effectively:

- **Community-based recruitment:** Local leaders and CHVs were instrumental in identifying and recruiting eligible girls, ensuring that those often hidden due to stigma could participate.
- **Establishment of Catch-Up Centres:** Centres were strategically located in accessible areas, such as schools and churches, and provided necessary materials, dignity kits, and childcare services to facilitate attendance.
- **Inclusive strategies and accommodations:** A 30% target for girls with disabilities led to provisions like transport, assistive devices, and mainstream school integration. Trained mentors supported participants' specific needs, with regular assessments to ensure consistent engagement.
- **Holistic community engagement:** Sensitisation campaigns addressed cultural biases, stigma, and misconceptions, targeting not only the girls but also their families and communities.
- **Mentorship and follow-up:** Mentors provided support, followed up on absenteeism, and engaged with community members to overcome resistance.

Despite these efforts, the project faced severe challenges in fully supporting girls with disabilities. Both the case study primary research and secondary research highlighted that inadequate teacher training, limited learning materials, and infrastructure gaps prevented the full participation of pupils with diverse educational needs. Unequal resource distribution, such as shared equipment, also created feelings of inequality, while logistical delays in disbursing teacher salaries and business kits led to participant dropouts. This assessment is supported by findings from the IE Study 5 ([Rose et al., 2023](#)), which described how the IP stated that their physical and human resources, combined with the remote contexts in which the project was operating, meant that they did not have the capacity to support girls with severe disabilities¹⁷.

An additional finding in the IE Study 5 ([Rose et al., 2023](#)) was that of the number of girls who were enrolled, there were a low proportion who had never been to school before (15%), despite the project's aims (70%). The IP cited poor availability and accuracy of data as a factor in this, stating that this was compounded by girls misleading the project about their age and educational status in the hope of increasing their chances of enrolment in the project.

5.4. Benefits realised by the most marginalised

The project delivered numerous benefits to the marginalised girls it reached:

- **Learning and transition achievements:** Successful literacy and numeracy initiatives helped the most marginalised girls develop their reading, writing and maths. Combined with the vocational skills taught by the project, many of these girls also managed to transition onto further education and take the first steps towards work and economic empowerment.
- **Improved self-esteem and social inclusion:** Life skills training helped build confidence, equipping girls with decision-making abilities and fostering self-advocacy. The project also facilitated social acceptance for stigmatised girls, such as teenage mothers and those with disabilities.
- **Support for girls with disabilities:** Inclusive strategies provided necessary resources, including mobility aids and referrals to specialists. Families were educated on care practices, reducing stigma, and promoting community inclusion.
- **Cultural shifts:** Sensitisation efforts encouraged communities to value female education, and training provided to parents on gender inclusivity helped shift traditional perceptions, leading to increased support for girls' education.
- **Educational and skill development:** Girls gained vocational skills in fields like hairdressing and sewing, which enabled them to start small businesses and perform everyday tasks.
- **Economic empowerment:** Start-up kits, including items like sewing machines, allowed participants to initiate income-generating activities, supporting their families and enhancing their financial independence.

However, the long-term sustainability of these benefits was undermined by several factors, including insufficient start-up capital, socio-economic pressures, and limited follow-up support, which sometimes led to business failures or school dropouts.

5.5. Key lessons learned

1) Inadequate support for learners with disabilities

Future projects should include comprehensive disability strategies to support all learners effectively. While there were positive steps towards inclusivity, there remain substantial gaps in supporting girls with disabilities. Teachers lacked adequate training to cater to special needs, and the absence of adapted learning materials and infrastructure hindered full participation.

2) Importance of community-led participatory approaches

Strengthening community relationships can enhance local support and improve project outcomes. The project's community-led model was fundamental to its success in reaching marginalised girls. However, continuous engagement is vital to overcoming resistance, particularly for girls with disabilities, if engagement is to be sustained.

¹⁷ Study 5 found that against the target of 30% of participants having disabilities, the figure was found to be only 8%.

3) Psychosocial support is crucial for marginalised girls

When targeting highly marginalised girls, integrating psychosocial support into educational interventions is essential. Regular psychosocial support was vital for many beneficiaries, especially those who had survived violence or faced severe socio-cultural pressures. This component was critical to building resilience, improving self-esteem, and fostering a sense of community.

6. Conclusions

The EFL project achieved improvements in foundational literacy and numeracy skills across its two cohorts evaluated, with statistically significant gains recorded in Kiswahili literacy and numeracy for both C1 and C3. English literacy improvements were significant only for C1. Participants displayed considerable gains in these areas, driven by regular attendance at CuCs, effective teacher training, and a curriculum designed to meet the practical needs of learners. The emphasis on participatory approaches and flexible class schedules, particularly for young mothers and girls with other domestic responsibilities, ensured that learning opportunities were accessible and impactful. The provision of essential resources, including hygiene kits and teaching aids, further supported these outcomes.

However, despite the C1 cohort achieving much higher relative gains, their endline learning levels remained below the C3 cohort's baseline levels. The evidence indicates selection challenges may have influenced the observed outcomes, particularly in C3, where some girls entered the project with baseline scores above the specified thresholds. This discrepancy raises questions about the consistency of eligibility criteria across cohorts. Furthermore, high attrition rates and the inclusion of replacement girls in C1 with a lower prevalence of disabilities – particularly in learning and memory tasks – may have contributed to the observed gains.

Overall, while the EFL project demonstrated effectiveness in improving literacy and numeracy skills, the evaluation highlights critical design considerations.

Discrepancy between Fund Manager ratings and literacy/ numeracy outcomes

Although the FM rated the project as not achieving its targets, the reported learning and transition outcomes suggest a more positive story. This discrepancy likely arises from differing interpretations of success. While the project may have fallen short on certain systemic or aggregate indicators, such as broader transition outcomes or formal certifications, the literacy and numeracy improvements represent substantial progress for participants who had previously been excluded from formal education. These gains underscore the importance of using nuanced and contextualised evaluation frameworks that recognise incremental successes and their transformative impact on individuals.

The EFL project achieved substantial success in facilitating transitions for marginalised girls from CuCs into diverse pathways, including formal education, vocational training, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurship. Transition rates were notably high, with Cohort 1 achieving 85% and Cohort 3 reaching 97% based on survey data (89% based on monitoring data). These results demonstrate the project's effectiveness in enabling girls to progress along pathways suited to their needs and aspirations. However, younger girls often diverged from the intended re-enrolment in formal education, with nearly half opting for non-formal pathways, such as apprenticeships and entrepreneurship.

Graduation from pathways, or "successful transition," was particularly strong for entrepreneurship, with 91% of girls establishing businesses, 90% of which were sustained or experienced growth one to two years after graduation. Vocational training pathways also led to high rates of sustainable livelihoods, while apprenticeships were less successful, with 29% of graduates remaining idle at home. Inconsistent distribution of resources further compounded the issue; delays in providing essential tools such as sewing machines undermined participants' ability to apply their skills and achieve economic independence. Additionally, the lack of formal certifications left participants unable to secure stable employment or gain community recognition for their newly acquired skills. These limitations highlight the need for more robust systems to support sustained transitions, including decentralised training opportunities, timely provision of resources, and partnerships to provide recognised qualifications.

Overall, the project provided meaningful and sustainable opportunities for marginalised girls, equipping them with the skills needed to achieve economic independence and improved life prospects. Future interventions should prioritise strengthening linkages to employment, particularly for apprenticeship graduates.

Inter-relationship and reinforcement of successful aspects

The successes of the project lay in the interconnectedness of its various elements, each of which strengthened and amplified the others. Community outreach efforts were instrumental in fostering trust with families and local stakeholders, particularly in regions where cultural resistance to girls' education was deeply entrenched. By engaging male champions, religious leaders, and community elders, the project was able to change perceptions about the value of educating girls, including those who were married, had disabilities, or were out of school due to economic or social barriers.

This trust-building encouraged families to enrol their daughters, leading to high attendance rates in the CuCs. Once engaged, girls benefitted from safe, interactive, and supportive learning environments where they developed essential literacy and numeracy skills alongside vocational and life skills training. These educational achievements greatly boosted the confidence and self-esteem of participants, enabling them to take on leadership roles within their families and communities. Such transformations not only improved the standing of individual girls but also demonstrated to their communities the tangible benefits of education, challenging long-held biases. This in turn motivated other families to enrol their daughters, creating a positive feedback loop where success reinforced further engagement.

Project adaptiveness was key to its success

The project's ability to adapt to varying socio-cultural and geographical contexts was central to its success. Recognising the diverse needs of participants across different counties, the project employed flexible and context-sensitive approaches to ensure broad engagement. For instance, flexible class schedules allowed girls from pastoralist communities to attend sessions when they were able, accommodating their unique lifestyles and responsibilities. Community-driven safety measures, such as enlisting boda boda drivers as advocates, ensured that girls could travel to learning centres without fear of harassment. This adaptability extended to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, where the project implemented innovative solutions to maintain engagement. Measures such as home visits, phone-based lessons, and distribution of learning materials allowed education to continue despite disruptions.

Impact of early closure of catch-up centres

The early closure of CuCs, driven by budgetary constraints and implementation challenges, had a substantial impact on the project's effectiveness. For many participants, CuCs were more than just educational hubs; they served as safe spaces where girls could learn free from harassment and stigma. The premature termination of these centres disrupted the progress of participants, many of whom relied on these spaces not only for education but also for personal development and social support.

The closures led to a loss of trust between the project and its stakeholders, as families and communities who had begun to see the tangible benefits of education were left feeling abandoned. Girls who had made strides in literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills were unable to sustain their progress, with some reverting to traditional roles or disengaging from educational pathways entirely. This disruption undermined the autonomy and confidence that many participants had gained, highlighting the importance of sustained funding and long-term planning to maintain the momentum and impact of educational initiatives. Future projects must prioritise continuity and reliability to preserve trust and ensure lasting benefits.

Disability inclusion challenges

While the project had an explicit focus on supporting boys and girls with disabilities, it underestimated the extent of the specialised provisions required to achieve full inclusion. Challenges included insufficiently adapted teaching methods, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of tailored resources, all of which limited the participation and progress of disabled learners. For example, many catch-up centres lacked disability-friendly facilities such as ramps or accessible toilets, and educators were not consistently trained to meet the diverse needs of learners with disabilities.

These gaps hindered the full realisation of the project's inclusivity goals. Participants with disabilities often faced additional barriers, such as stigma and isolation, which further limited their engagement. To fully support disabled learners, future projects must adopt a comprehensive strategy that includes specialised training for educators, accessible infrastructure, and targeted resources to address the diverse needs of participants. Only by addressing these systemic challenges can projects ensure equitable outcomes for all learners.

Annex J: Case Study Report: ACTED (Pakistan), Closing the Gap: Educating marginalised girls in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Project Case Study Report: *Closing the Gap: Educating marginalised girls in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, ACTED (Pakistan)*

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of the Closing the Gap project

This report summarises the key findings, lessons learned and conclusions from the IE Team's case study research of the **LNGB project Closing the Gap implemented by ACTED in Pakistan**. Primary case study data collection took place in November 2024. The purpose of all six project case studies is to provide an in-depth examination of the reported results (i.e., outcomes and Intermediate Outcomes); how and to what extent project interventions worked well or less well, why, for which types of beneficiaries; and the influences of contextual factors and Implementing Partners' (IPs) delivery capacities on project delivery. The structure of this report aligns with the evaluation sub-questions to enable the synthesis of the findings across the six case studies. The report structure also aligns with the structure of the main report to ensure the findings from the case study research complement and enrich the findings from the portfolio assessments of the GEC-T and LNGB Windows.

1.2. Project background

The primary focus of the project was to improve girls' education by supporting highly marginalised out-of-school girls aged 10-19 years in two districts of Sindh (Jacobabad and Kashmore) and one district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Lakki Marwat), between December 2018 and May 2023 (see [Table 1](#)). The project targeted girls who have never been to school, those who have dropped out, and those who are married, orphaned, from minority backgrounds, or have disabilities. The project aimed to ensure that these girls had better learning outcomes, transitioned to formal schooling wherever necessary and appropriate, and acquired market-relevant livelihood and life skills. The project was divided into two pillars: (1) Literacy and Numeracy (L&N); and (2) the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP):

- The 33-month long ALP (reduced to 22-month due to Covid-19) supported one cohort of 1100 girls (10-13 years old) enrolled in 39 learning centres¹.
- The 4.5-year L&N skills course educated 4400 girls (14-19 years old) enrolled in 129 learning centres delivered through four cohorts (each receiving 8-month interventions).

The project recognised the multiple barriers to education that the most marginalised girls face in Pakistan. These included financial barriers, lack of qualified female teachers, insecurity and acceptance of girls' education. It also recognised the need for innovative thinking around access to education, such as mobile libraries and home learning, if current and future generations of girls are to realise their full potential.

Table 1: Project summary

Dimension	Project characteristics
Project name:	Closing the Gap: Educating marginalised girls in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
Implementing Partner:	Agency for Technical Cooperation Development (ACTED)
Funding window:	Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB)
GEC Phase I:	N/A
Budget:	£4.1 million
Project start / end dates (duration):	December 2018 – May 2023 (4.5 years)
Geographical focus:	Pakistan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural communities • Sindh – Jacobabad, Kashmore • Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) – Lakki Marwat
Beneficiary groups:	Out-of-school girls aged 10-13 Out-of-school girls aged 14-19

¹ The learning centres were established from September 2019.

Dimension	Project characteristics
Number of direct learning beneficiaries (girls)	4,828 14-19-year-olds in the literacy and numeracy (L&N) classes
Number of direct transition beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1,594 16-19-year-olds who received TVET and financial literacy training 1,100 10-13-year-olds in the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP)
Other beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 250 teachers trained and provided with learning supplies 82 coaches who completed Closing the Gap training 18,436 parents reached through parent/teacher meetings
Marginalisation focus:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls who have never been to school or have dropped out Married or orphaned girls, girls from ethnic minority groups and girls with disabilities
Type of interventions:	
<i>Education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided literacy and numeracy training to girls aged 14-19 years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> During Covid-19, digital learning was conducted using WhatsApp To mitigate against learning loss during the pandemic and flooding, courses were extended by four months and catch-up classes were provided
<i>Economic</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offered financial support through competitive business start-up grants and internships to graduates of skills/vocational training
<i>Infrastructure and resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided needs-based childcare support Provided mobile libraries, opportunities for learning at home and rehabilitated community spaces for learning and TVET Provided learning and TVET supplies to girls
<i>Empowerment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified and trained coaches Coaches conducted mentorship/life skills activities with girls and mothers
<i>Teacher training and support</i>	<p>Trained and supported female teachers by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helping to improve and adapt learning modules and methodologies Creating a teacher network and facilitating exchange visits Providing additional learning supplies
<i>Community Based Awareness, Attitudes and Behaviour</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ran community mobilisation campaigns Conducted advocacy and outreach activities During Covid-19, boys and men were engaged and sensitised to the importance of girls' education
<i>Extra-Curricular Activity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivered a 30-month Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) for girls aged 10-13 years Prepared girls who graduated from the ALP for formal school entrance examinations so that they can continue their education Supported girls through the provision of additional catch-up classes Vocational and financial literacy training for those aged 16-19 years to support their transition to employment Facilitated connections between girls and markets and internships
<i>Safeguarding, health, and wellbeing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During and following Covid-19 and the severe flooding in 2022, safeguarding mechanisms were implemented to identify instances of excessive disciplinary techniques by teachers Training and counselling for teachers was provided to children, families and teachers following Covid-19 and the flooding GESI assessments were done to assess the level of support families were providing to girls during Covid-19 and the flooding Conducted health screenings and provided related assistance During Covid-19 resource packs and health and hygiene information was distributed
<i>School Management and Governance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitated regular meetings between teachers and parents Formed and trained school management committees During Covid-19 phone calls were held with the SMCs to support them.
Total number of separate cohorts (LNGB only)	4
Baseline data collection (report) dates:	<p>ALP: December 2020 (August 2021)</p> <p>Cohort 1: December 2019 - March 2020 (June 2021)</p> <p>Cohort 2: N/A</p> <p>Cohort 3: N/A</p> <p>Cohort 4: July 2021 (February 2022)</p>
Endline data collection (report) dates:	<p>ALP: March 2023 (April 2023)</p> <p>Cohort 1: N/A</p>

Dimension	Project characteristics
	Cohort 2: July 2021 (August 2021)
	Cohort 3: N/A
	Cohort 4: June 2022 (August 2022)

Where the project worked

The project was implemented in the Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces of Pakistan (*Figure 1*), in the rural districts listed below:

- Jacobabad (Sindh)
- Kashmore (Sindh)
- Lakki Marwat (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)

Figure 1: Map of Closing the Gap Project intervention areas



External Evaluation: cohort-based baseline-endline, and post-endline impact study

To evaluate the project's effectiveness, two cohorts were initially selected for external evaluation: Cohort 1 (C1) from the Learning and Nurturing (L&N) Programme, covering both Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) provinces, and C1 of the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP). Baseline data collection for both cohorts was initially scheduled to be collected between December 2019 and March 2020. However, during this period, just prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, baseline data was only collected for girls in the Sindh Province: C1 L&N (Sindh province). Project implementation in KP province and the ALP activities were postponed. As a result, external evaluations were also delayed for these girls.

Covid-19 began affecting educational institutions in Pakistan from February 2020. This disruption led to widespread school closures, impacting approximately 40 million students across the country. Although staggered re-openings began in September 2020, schools faced further closures shortly after, necessitating the implementation of remote learning interventions through TV, radio, and mobile applications. However, access to these resources was limited, with studies indicating that 23% of children could not engage in any form of study during this period.

Due to the challenges posed by the pandemic, the endline evaluation for C1 was cancelled and replaced by the endline evaluation of C2 from the L&N Programme in July 2021. This allowed for a cross-sectional comparative analysis using C1's baseline data to compare against C2's endline results (highlighted in yellow in *Table 2*). Both C1 and C2 were implemented in the same districts in Sindh, targeting similar beneficiaries.

The ALP cohort was evaluated with a longitudinal design, with a baseline in December 2020 and an endline in March 2023. The later start date, compared to C1, was the result of a delay in establishing the ALP learning spaces caused

by the pandemic. The programme's implementation period was also reduced from 30 months to 22 months, impacting the timing and scope of activities.

Similarly, the girls from the original C1 cohort in KP province, whose programme start was delayed were re-assigned to Cohort 4 (C4). C4 followed a longitudinal design with baseline data collected in July 2021 and endline in June 2022.

After the endline evaluation, all the girls who completed the L&N course received six additional days of engagement with the project, consisting of a five-day course on business knowledge, and a one-day session on exploring financial opportunities for establishing businesses. A new evaluation was also conducted for a subsample of L&N girls in the Sindh province. This report was published in May 2023.

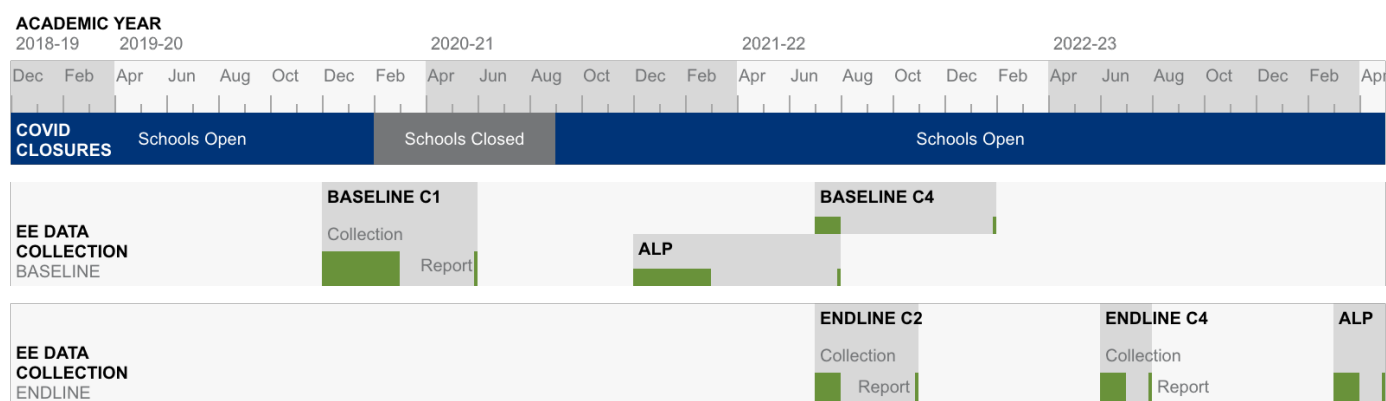
Table 2 summarises the information on each cohort's evaluation conducted.

Table 2: Overview of externally evaluated project cohorts

Cohort	Region	Externally evaluated	Baseline conducted?	Endline conducted?	Impact study conducted?
C1 L&N	Sindh Province	Yes	Yes	No (due to Covid-19)	Yes
C2 L&N	Sindh Province	Yes	No (by design)	Yes (due to Covid-19 but not planned by design)	Yes
C3 L&N	Sindh Province	No	N/A	N/A	Yes
C4 L&N	KP Province (Originally C1 L&N)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
C1 ALP	Sindh Province	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

This case study project was shortlisted because it exceeded its targets. *Figure 2* shows the Closing the Gap Project's timeline and key evaluation dates.

Figure 2: Closing the Gap project and evaluation timeline



Notes: (1) The whole frame indicates project start and end dates (December 2019 to May 2023). (2) C1 baseline is compared against C2 endline.

2. What outcomes did the project deliver?

2.1. Review of changes to Logframe outcome indicators

To evaluate the project's effectiveness, three external endline evaluation reports were produced and an impact study was conducted post-endline. The first endline report compared C1 L&N baseline (collected before the Covid-19 pandemic) to C2 L&N endline (collected in July 2021). The second endline report tracked C4 L&N over a year, with the baseline collected in July 2021 through to endline in July 2022. The third endline report tracked the ALP cohort from December 2020, once the learning spaces were established due to delays attributed to the pandemic, to March 2023.

The outcomes covered in this report focus on learning. While transition is not measured as an outcome as initially planned, transition-related indicators measured for this project are discussed.

The external evaluations used a mixed-method approach. None of these evaluations included a comparison group due to ethical considerations raised by the external evaluator. As a result, a before-and-after comparison methodology was used, capturing the direct effects of the interventions on the targeted cohorts – this followed a cross-sectional approach for the first endline report, comparing C1 to C2, and a longitudinal approach for the other two, focusing on C4 and ALP cohorts.

After the endline evaluations, an impact study in the Sindh province was conducted, including a random sample of girls taken from the L&N and Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET)² cohorts.³ The impact study aimed to assess progress comparing baseline (Cohort 1) and endline (Cohort 2) to results from a post-evaluation period which included Cohort 1, Cohort 2, and Cohort 3. This study employed a mixed-methods approach and a cross-sectional framework, to evaluate learning levels, changes in barriers to education, shifts in community perceptions towards girls' education, and engagement in income-generating activities.

2.1.1. Review of Changes to the Learning Outcome Indicator

Learning outcomes were assessed using the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) administered at baseline, endline and in the impact study. [Table 3](#) below summarises the subtasks conducted for each evaluated cohort for the different evaluation rounds.

Table 3: Subtasks performed by assessment and grade

Subtask	English			Sindhi		Urdu			Numeracy			
	C1-C2	C1, C2, C3	ALP	C1-C2	ALP	C1, C2, C3	C4	ALP	C1-C2	C1, C2, C3	C4	ALP
Evaluation Round	BL-EL	Impact study	BL-EL	BL-EL	BL-EL	Impact study	BL-EL	BL-EL	BL-EL	Impact study	BL-EL	BL-EL
1-Listening comprehension	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
2a-Letter Names Knowledge					X		X	X				
2b-Letter / Syllable Sound Identification	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
3-Familiar words reading	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
4a-Oral Reading Fluency	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
4b-Reading Comprehension	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
5-Writing / Dictation			X		X		X	X				
1-Numbers identification									X	X	X	X
2-Quantity discrimination									X	X	X	X

² All girls included in the TVET cohorts were L&N graduates.

³ Cohort 4 in the KP province was excluded to ensure the safeguarding of GEC girls, who experienced a volatile security situation from the resurgence of militant groups in the region. The ALP cohort was excluded. The endline for this cohort was completed just before the endline study, so no additional information would have been gained from including them.

Subtask	English			Sindhi		Urdu			Numeracy			
	C1-C2	C1, C2, C3	ALP	C1-C2	ALP	C1, C2, C3	C4	ALP	C1-C2	C1, C2, C3	C4	ALP
Evaluation Round	BL-EL	Impact study	BL-EL	BL-EL	BL-EL	Impact study	BL-EL	BL-EL	BL-EL	Impact study	BL-EL	BL-EL
3-Missing numbers									X	X	X	X
4a-Addition Level 1									X	X	X	X
4b-Addition Level 2												X
5a-Subtraction Level 1									X	X	X	X
5b-Subtraction Level 2												X
6-Word Problem									X	X	X	X

These assessments, conducted in various languages depending on the cohort (see [Table 4](#) below for details), aimed to evaluate literacy and numeracy skills among out-of-school girls, tracking their progress from baseline to endline. For the impact study, as the girls were from Sindh province, the EGRA test was administered in Sindhi and English languages alongside the EGMA test for numeracy.

By endline, learning outcomes were measured in three ways: (1) analysing changes in mean scores from baseline to endline; (2) comparing results against predefined benchmarks set at baseline for in-school girls; and (3) estimating the decrease in non-learners over a prior evaluation point. These measures align with three contributory lines of evidence introduced by the FM in 2022 (PwC, 2022), and although this was not explicitly mentioned in the endline, this was confirmed during the interview with the IP for this evaluation.

For the impact study, results align with the first line of evidence albeit not explicitly mentioned, by comparing the outcomes of Cohort 1, Cohort 2, and Cohort 3 in Sindh province against the baseline of Cohort 1 and the endline of Cohort 2.

[Table 4](#) provides an overview of the measurement of learning outcomes.

Table 4: Summary of changes in measurement of learning outcomes

Cohort	Parameters	Literacy			Numeracy		
	Evaluation round	BL	EL	Impact	BL	EL	Impact
Sindh province							
L&N programme	Instrument	EGRA	EGRA	EGRA	EGMA	EGMA	EGMA
	Language assessed	English, Sindhi	English, Sindhi	English, Sindhi	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Cohorts	C1	C2	C1, C2, C3 & TVET	C1	C2	C1, C2, C3 & TVET
	Comparison group	No	No	No	No	No	No
	Sample of girls	OOS	OOS	OOS	OOS	OOS	OOS
	Sample size	230 ¹	230 ²	610 ⁵	230 ¹	230	610 ⁵
	Planned Dates for Data Collection	Dec 2019 - Mar 2020	December 2020	Unknown	Dec 2019 - Mar 2020	December 2020	Unknown
	Actual Data Collection Dates	Dec 2019 - Mar 2020	July 2021	Unknown	Dec 2019 - Mar 2020	July 2021	Unknown
	Instrument	EGRA	EGRA	—	EGMA	EGMA	—

Cohort	Parameters	Literacy			Numeracy		
	Evaluation round	BL	EL	Impact	BL	EL	Impact
Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP)	Language assessed	English, Sindhi, Urdu	English, Sindhi, Urdu	—	—	—	—
	Cohort	ALP	ALP	—	ALP	ALP	—
	Comparison Group	No	No	—	No	No	—
	Sample of Girls	OOS	OOS	—	OOS	OOS	—
	Sample Size	436	335 ⁴	—	436	335 ⁴	—
	Planned Dates for Data Collection	Dec 2019 - Mar 2020	End of 2022	—	Dec 2019 - Mar 2020	End of 2022	—
	Actual Data Collection Dates	Dec 2020	Mar 2023	—	Dec 2020	Mar 2023	—
KP province							
L&N programme	Instrument	EGRA	EGRA	—	EGMA	EGMA	—
	Language assessed	Urdu	Urdu	—	Not applicable	Not applicable	—
	Comparison Group	No	No	—	No	No	—
	Cohort	C4	C4	—	C4	C4	—
	Sample of Girls	OOS	OOS	—	OOS	OOS	—
	Sample Size	206	206 ³	—	206	206 ³	—
	Planned Dates for Data Collection	Dec 2019 - Mar 2020	May 2022	—	Dec 2019 - Mar 2020	May 2022	—
	Actual Data Collection Dates	July 2021	June 2022	—	July 2021	June 2022	—

Note: ¹ The original sample size planned was 436 for C1 and C4 together, but because of Covid they were separated into two cohorts. ² There is not an attrition rate for this study because it is a cross-sectional study. ³ Attrition rate of 61.2%. ⁴ Attrition rate of 23.2%. ⁵ 305 girls from L&N and 305 girls from TVET.

2.1.2. Review of Changes to the Transition Outcome Indicator

Transition outcomes for this project were ultimately not measured. Initially, these outcomes were planned to be measured at endline (as outlined in the Baseline Report) and were later planned to be included in an Impact Study conducted in 2023, after the endline evaluations. All three endline reports highlighted that transition rates would be measured and reported in the Impact Study. However, these indicators were excluded from the Impact Study, without any explanation provided.

The decision to include the transition rates in the Impact Study, rather than in the endline evaluations, stemmed from a need to prioritise data collection on learning outcomes at endline. As explained during interviews with the IP, there was a risk of losing learners moving out of the location or getting married. Therefore, it was agreed to prioritise capturing data on learning immediately after course completion. As a result, endline evaluations occurred shortly after the girls completed their courses.

The targets set at baseline are nevertheless discussed, providing a reference point for comparing related transition indicators captured and reported in the endline evaluations. At baseline, transition targets were set differently for each cohort as follows:

- **C1 (L&N programme):** As explained during interviews with the IP, and similarly reported in the report, transition targets focused on a subset of 200 girls receiving TVET, with an expectation that 20 would successfully transition into internships or business start-ups, supported by business grants.
- **C4 (L&N programme):** Two transition indicators were defined:
 1. Percentage of L&N girls under 18 years enrolled in technical skills institutes (targeting 30%).
 2. Percentage of L&N girls aged 18 years and above connected with relevant institutes for business /employment opportunities (targeting 40%).
- **ALP programme:** The transition indicator was defined as the percentage of ALP graduated girls who would be mainstreamed into any form of formal schooling (targeting 30%).

Additional indicators

External evaluations also captured **girls' intentions to transition** into continuing education/ advanced training or income-generating activities. These were captured at baseline and endline through surveys with C4 and ALP girls exclusively⁴, allowing for a before-and-after estimation to see if girls' intention changed over the course of the intervention. By endline, however, girls had not yet defined specific transition plans for after the course. [Table 5](#) below summarises these details. Other indicators measured exclusively at endline and by cohort are described as follows:

- **C2 endline** measured the percentage of girls who successfully completed the C2 course.
- **C4 endline** assessed participation rates, based on the number of target girls who continued with various programme activities, such as skills-based courses, internships, and connections to financial institutions. By endline, only two activities were still implemented: the provision of Knowledge About Business (KAB) sessions, targeting 500 girls, and participation in sessions on business linkages, targeting 775 girls.
- **ALP endline** tracked the number of girls who received Non-Formal Education (NFE) certificates after their final exams.

Table 5: Summary of intention to transition indicator

Cohort	Parameter	Intention to Transition	
		Baseline	Endline
Cohort 2	Instrument	—	Girl Survey
	Comparison group	—	No
	Sample of Girls	—	OOS
	Sample size	—	230
	Planned Data collection date	Dec 2019 - Mar 2020	December 2020
	Evaluation Data collection date	Dec 2019 - Mar 2020	July 2021
Cohort 4	Instrument	Girl Survey	Girl Survey
	Comparison group	No	No
	Sample of Girls	OOS	OOS
	Sample size	206	206
	Planned Data collection date	Dec 2019 - Mar 2020	May 2022
	Evaluation Data collection date	July 2021	June 2022
Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP)	Instrument	Girl Survey	Girl Survey
	Comparison group	No	No
	Sample of Girls	OOS	OOS
	Sample size	436	335
	Planned Data collection date	Dec 2019 - Mar 2020	End of 2022
	Evaluation Data collection date	Dec 2020	Mar 2023

⁴ C1 BL did not measure intention to transition at baseline.

2.2. Outcomes

2.2.1. Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes between baseline and endline were measured using a before-and-after estimation for the treatment girls in each cohort. Additionally, benchmark comparisons were established for each learning assessment and cohort. Aggregate scores were calculated based on the percentage of correct answers for each subtask of the given language-specific EGRA and EGMA tests, with all subtasks weighted equally.

For a diagnosis of the gaps in literacy and numeracy, the FM set arbitrary subtask score bands¹⁰, categorising learning in four categories: (1) non-learner (0% of items), (2) emergent learner (1%–40%), (3) established learner (41%–80%), and (4) proficient learner (81%–100%).

Baseline to Endline

English literacy assessments were conducted for Cohorts 1-2 and the ALP cohort, showing substantial improvements in both groups. At baseline, nearly 90% of girls in Cohort 1 were categorised as non-learners across all subtasks, while in the ALP cohort, this was true for the three most challenging subtasks. Over the course of the intervention, Cohorts 1–2 achieved a 39.3 percentage point increase in the aggregate English literacy score (increasing from 1.9% at the baseline to 41.2% at the endline). The ALP cohort – benefiting from a longer intervention – recorded a more pronounced improvement of 79.3 percentage points (from 6.5% at the baseline to 85.8% at the endline). Progress was evident across all subtasks, with a remarkable reduction in non-learners. However, some challenges persisted in C2, where more than 25% of girls were still classified as non-learners in three of the five subtasks at endline: 27% in familiar word reading, 47.4% in oral reading fluency, and 57.4% in reading comprehension. By endline, over 70% of learners in Cohorts 2 and 85% in the ALP cohort exceeded the literacy benchmark.

Sindhi literacy assessments were also conducted for Cohorts 1-2 and the ALP cohort, both of which began at higher baselines in Sindhi literacy compared to English. Cohorts 1–2 started at 14.1%, and the ALP cohort at 20.2%, whereas their baselines in English literacy were just 1.9% and 6.5%, respectively. Both cohorts showed marked improvement over the course of the intervention. In Cohorts 1-2, the aggregate Sindhi literacy score increased by 55.1 percentage points (from 14.1% at the baseline to 69.2% at the endline), while the ALP cohort saw a rise of 69.1 percentage points (from 20.2% at the baseline to 89.4% at the endline). Although learners made progress in all subtasks, challenges remained in oral reading fluency and reading comprehension, particularly in C2, where 20% and 26.5% of girls were still non-learners in these subtasks, respectively. By the endline, over 75% of learners in Cohort 2 and 84.5% of ALP learners exceeded the Sindhi literacy benchmark.

Urdu literacy scores also improved substantially in both C4 and the ALP cohort. In C4, the aggregate score increased by 53.2 percentage points (from 34% at the baseline to 87.2% at the endline), while the ALP cohort saw a rise of 70.7 percentage points (from 12.3% at the baseline to 82.9% at the endline). Although progress was made across all subtasks, challenges persisted in writing dictation, where 21.2% of ALP learners still remained non-learners at the endline. Nevertheless, by endline, nearly 90% of learners in C4 and 77% of ALP learners surpassed the literacy benchmark, even though Urdu was only a supplementary subject for ALP learners.

Numeracy outcomes improved significantly across all three cohorts. In Cohorts 1-2, numeracy scores increased by 69.4 percentage points (from 7 at the baseline to 76.4 at the endline), while in C4 they rose by 43.8 points (from 47.5 at the baseline to 91.5 at the endline). Similarly, the ALP cohort showed an increase of 58.9 points (from 27.5% at the baseline to 85.3% at the endline). While significant gains were observed, learners still faced challenges with more advanced tasks, particularly those requiring analytical and conceptual thinking, such as missing numbers and word problems. However, the percentage of non-learners across all numeracy subtasks remained below 9%. By the endline, over 85% of Cohorts 1-2 learners, more than 80% of Cohort 4 learners, and 71% of ALP learners exceeded their numeracy benchmarks.

Baseline to Endline to Impact Study

In English literacy, the Impact Study showed that the overall EGRA English scores for L&N and TVET girls were almost identical (87.9% and 87.1%, respectively), indicating similar performance between the groups. When broken down by cohort, all three L&N cohorts performed comparably: C1 (87.4%), C2 (89.3%), and C3 (87.2%). Significant improvement was observed across all EGRA English subtasks, with the greatest gains noted in oral reading fluency. The report also highlighted substantial growth when comparing these results to Cohort 1's baseline (1.9%) and Cohort 2's endline (41.2%), demonstrating significant progress in English literacy over the course of the project.

Similarly, in Sindhi literacy, the EGRA results showed nearly identical scores for L&N and TVET girls (89.9% and 89.4%, respectively). Cohort-level analysis revealed consistent performance across C1 (88.7%), C2 (90.7%), and C3 (89.7%). Improvement was evident across all subtasks, though a minor decline was noted in listening comprehension, with oral reading fluency showing the highest improvement. A comparison with the baseline (14.1%) and endline (69.2%) from Cohort 1 and Cohort 2, respectively, further demonstrated notable gains in Sindhi literacy throughout the project.

For numeracy, the Impact Study reported an average EGMA score of 90.5% for L&N girls, while TVET girls scored similarly at 89.8%. Trends were consistent across all L&N cohorts, although C3 had the lowest score: C1 (94.5%), C2 (92.4%), and C3 (88.1%). Improvements were seen in all numeracy subtasks, though learners struggled with word problems, as reflected by the lowest subtask score (80%). The comparison with the baseline (7%) and endline (76.4%) results from Cohorts 1 and 2 shows substantial progress in numeracy across the project's three rounds. Table X shows the learning scores for each cohort at the point of the baseline, endline and impact study.

Table 6: Learning scores at baseline, endline and impact study in treatment groups by cohort

Cohort	Parameter	English Literacy			Sindhi Literacy			Urdu Literacy			Numeracy		
		BL	EL	Impact	B L	EL	Impact	BL	EL	Impact	BL	EL	Impact
C1 – C2	Instrument	EGRA	EGRA	—	EGRA	EGRA	—	EGRA	EGRA	—	EGMA	EGMA	—
	Treated (%)	1.91	41.21	—	14.09	69.17	—	—	—	—	6.95	76.35	—
	Benchmark (%)	—	20.26	—	—	44.40	—	—	—	—	—	51.95	—
	Results BL-EL (B&A)	—	39.30***	—	—	55.08***	—	—	—	—	—	69.40***	—
	Results BL-EL (% of girls who reach the benchmark)	—	70	—	—	75	—	—	—	—	—	85	—
L&N and TVET Sindh (C1, C2, C3)	Instrument	—	—	EGRA	—	—	EGRA	—	—	—	—	—	EGMA
	Treated (%)	—	—	87.92 ¹	—	—	89.87 ¹	—	—	—	—	—	90.49
	Results BL-Impact (B&A)	—	—	86.01 (own estimation)	—	—	75.78 (own estimation)	—	—	—	—	—	83.54 (own estimation)
	Results - EL- impact (B&A)	—	—	46.71 (own estimation)	—	—	20.7 (own estimation)	—	—	—	—	—	14.14 (own estimation)
C4	Instrument	EGRA	EGRA	—	EGRA	EGRA	—	EGRA	EGRA	—	EGMA	EGMA	—
	Treated (%)	—	—	—	—	—	—	33.98	87.16	—	47.78	91.52	—
	Benchmark (%)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	70.43	—	—	83.05	—
	Results BL-EL (B&A)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	53.18***	—	—	43.74***	—
	Results BL-EL (% of girls who reach the benchmark)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	90	—	—	80	—

Cohort	Parameter	English Literacy			Sindhi Literacy			Urdu Literacy			Numeracy		
		BL	EL	Impact	B L	EL	Impact	BL	EL	Impact	BL	EL	Impact
ALP	Instrument	EG RA	EGR A		E G R A	EGR A		EG RA	EGR A		EG MA	EGM A	—
	Treated (%)	6.52	85.84		20.22	89.35		12.28	82.90		27.46	86.34	—
	Benchmark (%)	—	67.64		—	80.33		—	76.64		—	84.88	—
	Results BL-EL (B&A)	—	79.32***		—	69.13***		—	70.62***		—	58.88***	—
	Results BL-EL (% of girls who reach the benchmark)	—	85		—	85		—	77		—	71	—

Notes: ¹ The results presented in this table are for the L&N group only, and not an average including TVET. This follows the decision made in the report.

Conclusions

The literacy and numeracy outcomes across all cohorts showed significant improvements from baseline to endline, demonstrating the effectiveness of the interventions in enhancing foundational skills. English, Urdu, and Sindhi literacy scores increased notably, with a clear shift of learners from non-learner categories to higher performance groups. Between 70% and 90% of girls reached the benchmarks established by each test and cohort. However, challenges remained, particularly in reading comprehension and writing dictation, indicating a need for targeted support to help learners achieve proficiency in more complex literacy tasks.

In numeracy, while the majority of learners surpassed established benchmarks, even though some ongoing difficulties were presented with higher-order tasks such as missing numbers and word problems, the proportion of non-learners in numeracy remained significantly lower compared to literacy.

Several critical considerations limit the interpretation of these results. The lack of comparison groups across all cohorts makes it difficult to definitively attribute the improvements to the interventions – though it is arguable that being out of school their opportunities to improve their literacy and numeracy skills would be low.

High attrition rates, particularly in Cohort 4 (61%), further challenge the reliability of the findings. High attrition not only suggests the possibility of bias – if those who dropped out were the most vulnerable or faced greater challenges, the results may overestimate the programme's impact – but also reduces the representativeness of the sample. This makes it harder to draw reliable conclusions about the broader target population.

For Cohort C1-C2, which followed a cross-sectional design, there were significant differences in sample locations between the baseline (drawn from Kashmore) and the endline (which included a large proportion of learners from Jacobabad⁵). This geographic variation complicates efforts to draw causal inferences and emphasises the need for caution when interpreting these findings.

The varying programme durations between cohorts is another key factor to consider when considering the achievements between cohorts. The ALP cohort underwent a 22-month intervention, compared to the eight-month interventions in Cohorts 1 and 4. This longer duration likely contributed to the stronger performance seen in the ALP cohort. Cohorts 1-2, which had to adapt to remote learning strategies during the pandemic, understandably scored lower across all tests, with fewer learners reaching the benchmarks, except in numeracy.

Regarding the Impact Study, the results indicate that learning improved for all three L&N cohorts (Cohort 1, Cohort 2, and Cohort 3) in Sindh, even after the endline. However, the comparison between Cohort 1's baseline and Cohort 2's endline raises some concerns due to sample differences. A more appropriate comparison would have been to track the same girls from Cohort 1 at baseline and compare their results at endline. Similarly, the same approach could have been applied to Cohort 2 at endline.

⁵ 65.2% of the endline sample is from Jacobabad.

2.2.2. Transition outcomes

Baseline to Endline

Transition rates were not measured in this project. Instead, the intention to transition was defined as an outcome. Additionally, other indicators related to graduation rates and participation in training sessions were presented by cohort to provide complementary data.

Related measure: Intention to transition

At baseline, nearly all girls in Cohort 4 and all girls in the ALP cohort expressed a strong desire to transition to education, training, or income-generating activities, and this enthusiasm remained unchanged at the endline evaluation (100% and 99%, respectively). Cohort 2 also demonstrated a similar commitment, with 98.7% of girls indicating a desire to transition, although baseline data is unavailable for comparison.

When examining the specific pathways they intended to pursue, a significant majority of the girls indicated plans to continue their education or training, with 95% in ALP, 90% in Cohort 4, and 85.7% in Cohort 1. These preferences closely mirrored those from the baseline, reflecting a small increase in the ALP cohort, while Cohort 4 experienced a slight decrease. Overall, these findings highlight the strong aspirations among the girls to pursue educational opportunities as a means of achieving their goals over income related activities.

Cohort-specific related measures

The Cohort 2 graduation rate is considered a key transition-related measure, with 1,155 GEC learners enrolled in L&N Cohort 2 and a graduation rate of 95% (1,094 learners).

For Cohort 4, ACTED initiated Knowledge About Business (KAB) sessions with a total of 731 C4 girls attending, which is 146% of the original target of 500. ACTED also conducted one-day sessions on business linkages, orienting girls about business and funding opportunities, which attracted 842 participants, or 109% of the target of 775.

The ALP programme tracked the number of graduates registered with the NFE directorate's transition plan, achieving a rate of 95%. These transition-related rates were only measured at endline for the three cohorts described.

Impact study

Even though the Impact Study did not measure actual transitions, it did analyse other indicators, including improved decision-making among girls regarding education and livelihood activities. The findings of this outcome indicate that 9.2% of L&N and TVET girls in the impact evaluation sample reported being enrolled in schools, showing that they continued their education after completing the project interventions.

Regarding girls' participation in income activities, the report indicated that 63.5% of the sample girls are earning income, and from them, 98.4% contribute to their family income.

Table 7: Transition rates by cohort

	Parameter	Intention to transition	Transition rate	
		Baseline	Endline	Impact study
Cohort 1 – Cohort 2	Instrument	—	Girls Survey	—
	Treated	—	98.7%	—
	Education and training	—	85.7%	—
	Income generating activities	—	13%	—
	Results BL-EL (B&A)	—	—	—
L&N and TVET Sindh (Cohort 1, Cohort 2, Cohort 3)	Instrument	—	—	Girls Survey
	Treated	—	—	—
	Education and training	—	—	9.2%
	Income generating activities	—	—	63.5%
	Results BL-EL (B&A)	—	—	—
Cohort 4	Instrument	Girls Survey	Girls Survey	—
	Treated	99%	99%	—
	Education and training	94.7%	89.8%	—
	Income generating activities	4.4%	9.2%	—

	Parameter	Intention to transition	Transition rate	
		Baseline	Endline	Impact study
	Results BL-EL (B&A)	—	(~0 pp)	—
Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP)	Instrument	EGRA	EGRA	—
	Treated	100%	100%	—
	Education and training	89%	95%	—
	Income generating activities	11%	5%	—
	Results BL-EL (B&A)	—	(~0 pp)	—

Conclusions

The project did not measure transition outcomes, so little can be determined about these results.

The external evaluations focused on assessing the girls' intentions to transition into further education, training, or income-generating activities. **Across all cohorts, the vast majority of girls expressed strong intentions to pursue further education or training, with few showing interest in income-generating activities.** These intentions remained consistent from baseline to endline, particularly in Cohort 4 and the ALP cohort. Additionally, complementary indicators such as graduation rates and participation in business-related activities were measured, showing positive engagement across cohorts. But despite these encouraging signs, the lack of concrete transition data means that the long-term impact of the project on the girls' progression remains unclear.

While these findings reflect girls' high aspirations, the absence of actual transition data limits our ability to determine whether these intentions translated into reality. In the Impact Study, the transition rate outcome is not addressed as planned, while actual transition rates are mentioned in the report. These are the closest statistics provided to understand what girls end up doing but are not reported in the transition section.

According to the Impact Study, the percentage of girls who effectively transitioned into education is significantly lower than those who initially intended to transition in the endline for Cohort 2 – 85.7% intended to transition, while only 9.2% did. Conversely, the percentage of girls engaged in income-generating activities is much higher than those who initially intended to pursue this path – 13% intended to transition to income generating activities but 63.5% did. It is important to note that the results do not clarify whether these transitions are mutually exclusive, meaning some girls could be both enrolled in education and involved in income-generating activities. This overlap is not addressed in the report. However, in cases where there was no overlap, 27.3% of the girls were not engaged in any activity.

3. What intermediate outcomes did the project deliver?

3.1. Overall project performance

The Closing the Gap project reported progress against its Intermediate Outcome (IO) at endline only, while the case study interviews mentioned results in various IO areas. The reported results, and degree of change, varied by IO area, with largely strong results reported in each area, including and especially Changing Community Attitudes and Norms (IO1) and Improved Teaching (IO3), while some challenges remained in the areas of Safer Learning Environments (IO5) and Attendance (IO7). This section provides a brief overview of the main reported changes according to the project's evaluation reports and primary research.

3.2. FM IO1: Changing community attitudes and norms – Changes in attitudes and perceptions towards girls and girls' education among male and female family and community members, educators, boys, and government officials

The project achieved success in altering community perceptions regarding girls' education. Key to this was engagement through community sensitisation and advocacy, leading to increased support for girls attending school. Endline evaluation reports across cohorts demonstrated that **parental and community attitudes shifted positively**, with a high parental support index, increasing from baseline (4.3 out of 5) to endline (4.5 out of 5). Secondary endline evaluation report data showed that 90% of parents were strongly in favour of girls' education, and community mobilisation activities ensured consistent attendance and reduced absenteeism. In addition, the external evaluation found that men and boys' engagement sessions increased understanding and support of girls' education, with a significant number of men (208% of the target) expressing positive views on girls' educational and economic participation.

Endline evaluation reports also emphasised the role that the **establishment of School Management Committees (SMCs) played in facilitating community involvement**, also supporting retention and safer learning environments. SMCs actively engaged with parents, encouraging enrolment, and addressing concerns about early marriage, security, and learning space accessibility. Notably, communities continued to express support even beyond the project's conclusion, highlighting a shift in long-term attitudes towards girls' education.

Findings from the case study primary research conducted aligned with the findings from the endline evaluation reports. Successful integration and engagement with the community was achieved despite strong resistance initially, with many community members and parents hesitant due to traditional norms, early marriage practices, and the perceived irrelevance of education for girls. However, consistent outreach and community mobilisation facilitated a substantial shift. Parents who were previously opposed to sending their daughters to school began to recognise the benefits of education, particularly in terms of improved behaviour, financial literacy, and contributions to household management. Traditional views on early marriage also started to change, with more families delaying marriage until after girls completed their education:

"Child marriages were once common, but things have changed significantly. There is now awareness that an educated daughter will manage her family better after marriage." (FGD Participant)

3.3. FM IO3: Improved teaching – Improvements in the quality and effectiveness of teaching, facilitation, and support to learning

Endline evaluation reports reported **substantial improvements in teaching pedagogies**. The external endline evaluation found that teacher preparedness rose from 64% at baseline to 96% at endline, reflecting increased clarity in content delivery, lesson planning, and classroom management. Enhanced pedagogical skills, including the use of creative, interactive exercises, contributed to better student engagement and learning outcomes. The endline stated that there was a direct correlation between improved teaching practices and higher literacy and numeracy scores.

Teacher training programmes were pivotal to these outcomes, preparing educators to handle diverse classroom needs effectively. Teachers incorporated life skills enhancement and interactive teaching methods, such as group work, which fostered a positive and inclusive learning atmosphere. This was reinforced by teacher feedback, noting

that training improved their teaching confidence and ability to support diverse learner needs, including girls with disabilities.

“The project incorporated play-based learning and sports activities, which not only improved learning competencies but also significantly increased confidence levels and leadership skills among the girls.” (IP KII)

These findings were corroborated by the case study primary research, with respondents stating that teaching practices improved markedly due to the project's focus on training and capacity building for teachers. Teachers adopted more student-centred, activity-based approaches, integrating practical skills, life lessons, and games to engage students effectively. This approach not only improved academic outcomes but also helped girls gain confidence and practical skills. The value of the emphasis on play-based learning was also underlined during the KII with the IP:

“The teachers taught with love and affection, focusing on each student, which motivated them to study with interest.” (Community Leader KII)

3.4. FM IO4: Effective management – Changes in leadership and management of formal and /or non-formal learning spaces and engagement of governance structures such as PTAs, BOMs, SMCs

Although not a primary focus of the project, the endline evaluation reports show that the formulation and support of School Management Committees (SMCs) was important in ensuring effective management of learning spaces. SMCs actively participated in monitoring attendance, maintaining safe and conducive learning environments, and facilitating communication between teachers, parents, and the broader community. Project data indicated that 98% of SMCs remained operational throughout, with 90% providing safe spaces, underscoring their role in the success of the project.

Multiple respondents in the case study research stated that the project fostered effective management and leadership within learning spaces, which was supported by ongoing training and monitoring. Teachers received regular support, which ensured high-quality classroom management and a positive learning environment. There was also effective engagement with local governance structures and community leaders, fostering a collaborative approach to sustaining girls' education.

3.5. FM IO5: Safer learning environments – Learning environments are safer and support girls' wellbeing, improved sexual and reproductive health and rights, reduced domestic violence

The project was largely successful in its aim to create safer learning environments by ensuring clean, accessible, and secure facilities. Endline evaluation reports described how learning spaces were established close to communities, reducing travel risks, and enhancing safety perceptions among parents. Over 95% of SMCs were rated as effective in providing safe spaces, and facilities were maintained to ensure cleanliness, availability of drinking water, and adequate amenities, contributing to girls' regular attendance. Safeguarding measures, including internal complaint response mechanisms, further ensured the well-being of the learners. Although, the case study primary research presented a slightly mixed picture with multiple respondents stating that a lack of proper facilities, particularly in hot weather, affected comfort and attendance due to the lack of a reliable water supply or fans.

Both the case study primary and secondary data described the project's successes in relation to broader health and safety concerns. This was achieved by integrating awareness sessions on sexual and reproductive health, early marriage, and violence prevention, thus fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment. The creation of safe, female-only learning environments was also crucial for gaining community trust. Safety measures, including the observance of cultural norms such as purdah⁶, and the absence of male visitors, reassured parents, resulting in increased attendance. Moreover, respondents reported that among the successes of the project were the promotion of good mental health practices and reduced domestic violence by teaching girls effective communication skills.

“It was safe because only females were allowed inside, and no males were to be allowed as the parents had kept this as a condition.” (Community Leader KII)

⁶ Purdah, meaning curtain, is the word most commonly used for the system of secluding women and enforcing high standards of female modesty. The crucial characteristic of the purdah system is its limitation on interaction between women and males outside certain well-defined categories: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/comparative-studies-in-society-and-history/article/abs/purdah-separate-worlds-and-symbolic-shelter/995F4B4DF54CF7ED9423FB919C6B80AF>

3.6. FM IO6: Empowering girls – Changes in girls' self-esteem, self-efficacy, confidence and a sense of agency and empowered to make good choices for herself

Endline evaluation reports across cohorts consistently found that the project empowered girls by enhancing their life skills, self-esteem, and confidence. Life skills training sessions, which covered communication, interpersonal skills, and self-efficacy, resulted in an 18.4% increase in the life skills index⁷ score from baseline to endline. Girls reported feeling more confident in expressing their views and participating in family decisions, a notable shift from baseline observations.

Vocational training further empowered girls by equipping them with employability skills, allowing them to start businesses or seek employment. Girls' empowerment was also reflected in the increased participation of girls in community activities and their desire to pursue further education, evidenced by engagement in business linkage sessions and microfinance opportunities.

These conclusions were underlined by the case study primary research with respondents stating that the project had genuinely empowered girls, fostering improvements in self-esteem, and confidence. Girls learned to make informed decisions, gained awareness of their rights, and developed practical skills through vocational training. These changes enabled them to contribute financially to their families, manage household responsibilities, and pursue career aspirations, including teaching, healthcare, and entrepreneurial activities.

"We learned about bad touch in the centre. Before, we didn't know what to do if someone touched us badly and how to react." (Beneficiary girl FGD)

3.7. FM IO7: Attendance – Changes in girls' attendance at opportunities for learning made available to them

The project had a meaningful and positive impact on attendance figures, with evaluation reports demonstrating an increase in attendance figures across all learning spaces, from a baseline of 73.7% to 88% at endline, surpassing the project's target. Monthly data trends showed that over 75% of girls maintained attendance rates above 70% throughout the project, correlating with improved learning outcomes.

The external evaluator found that a key factor in this achievement was the project's focus on making learning spaces accessible and safe, combined with parental support and community mobilisation efforts. The direct relationship between attendance and academic performance was clear, with better attendance linked to higher scores in literacy and numeracy assessments.

These insights triangulate with the sentiment evident in the case study primary research. Factors contributing to this included the proximity of learning spaces, the provision of free resources, and engaging, activity-based learning. However, respondents emphasised that some barriers had persisted, including cultural norms, household responsibilities, and economic pressures. Flexibility in school timings and community engagement were key strategies for mitigating these issues, as described during the KII with the IP:

"The project implemented flexible scheduling to address attendance issues during harvesting seasons. They changed the class timetable during seasonal cropping periods, allowing girls to attend classes either very early in the morning or later in the day. This flexibility enabled girls to continue their education while also fulfilling their agricultural responsibilities. The project also divided girls into smaller groups with different attendance times and provided home assignments to ensure continuity of learning during agricultural seasons." (IP KII)

⁷ The project's evaluators, GLOW Consultants, utilised a life skills index to assess progress made by girls on various metrics. This was based on the domains of confidence, communication, emotional management, decision making, problem-solving, health & hygiene, awareness about rights, child protection, safeguarding, inclusion, financial literacy, and quality of relationships.

4. What worked well /less well and why?

4.1. Overall project performance

The Closing the Gap Project achieved significant success, improving literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills while delivering personal empowerment and community support for girls' education. Enhanced academic and practical skills enabled participants to achieve economic benefits, build confidence, and support their families. Effective community engagement, resource provision, and strong partnerships with educational institutions contributed to high attendance and sustained interest in education. However, challenges included limited higher-level skill development, performance disparities among subgroups, and barriers to transitioning into formal education or advanced vocational training. Persistent cultural resistance and resource constraints highlighted areas for further improvement to ensure long-term impact and inclusivity.

4.2. What worked well in the Closing the Gap Project interventions?

The project successfully enhanced literacy, numeracy, and practical skills, which empowered girls in daily tasks and business activities, while vocational training in areas like sewing and embroidery promoted financial independence, contributing to family and community economic resilience. Project activities also helped to facilitate transitions to higher education and vocational training, with many girls going on to pursue income-generating activities which were supported through partnerships with local educational institutions. Community engagement through School Management Committees (SMCs) and awareness campaigns helped to begin to shift cultural attitudes, leading to increased support for girls' education and delayed marriage in some cases. Although there are exceptions, most learning centres were perceived as safe and well-equipped and supportive, compassionate teachers bolstered attendance and motivation, while the provision of resources and accessible locations reduced financial and logistical barriers. Life skills training further developed confidence, self-advocacy, and personal growth, enabling girls to make informed decisions and engage actively within their communities.

4.2.1. Enhanced academic and practical skills

The project successfully improved literacy and numeracy skills, with respondents in the case study primary research emphasising the role the project played in enabling girls to read and write in Sindhi, Urdu, and English. Girls not only developed their academic skills, but also applied them in their day-to-day lives, such as reading medicine labels, calculating household expenses, and managing finances. This led to tangible economic benefits, enabling participants to support their families and transfer skills to others, thereby creating a broader community impact and helping to challenge the traditional view of women's roles within the community.

Secondary evaluation reports state that girls' engagement in income-generating activities also had a mutually reinforcing positive effect on academic performance, as practical applications of learning helped enhance motivation, self-confidence, and engagement with learning. Respondents in the case study primary research describe how skills training, especially in areas like dressmaking and embroidery, was well-received, and business knowledge sessions and facilitated connections with microfinance institutions proved particularly popular. A survey conducted by the external evaluators indicated that 73% of grantees were supporting their families, while 20% reinvested profits to grow their enterprises, demonstrating not just immediate benefits but also the potential for longer-term sustainability through business expansion. Case study primary research respondents who completed the courses also reported increased confidence in applying for jobs or starting their own businesses, illustrating the long-term benefits of the skills they acquired.

"The best thing about the centre is that it made us independent and able to do something [to earn money]. [Doing people's] makeup is an ordinary thing, but independence is the greatest achievement." (Beneficiary girl FGD)

4.2.2. Successful transition and integration

Case study primary research shows that many project participants felt that the project effectively supported girls' transitions to higher grades and vocational training. Evaluation reports found that approximately 95% of girls expressed a desire to continue their education, with 13% showing interest in income-generating activities. This success was partly due to partnerships with institutions like the Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) and Allama Iqbal

Open University, which helped to develop the perception that involvement in the project was just the first step of many. These collaborations, formalised through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), facilitated access to non-formal education systems for graduates, enabling them to pursue further studies beyond the project.

4.2.3. Strong community engagement and support

The project successfully mobilised communities to support girls' education, with School Management Committees (SMCs) comprising local community members playing a key role in ensuring enrolment, attendance, and the establishment of safe learning spaces, which facilitated the consistent educational engagement of pupils. Primary research demonstrates that effective community mobilisation and awareness campaigns also increased support for girls' education, transforming previous resistance into acceptance. Evaluation reports found that parents who were initially hesitant became more open to sending their daughters to school as the benefits of doing so became more apparent. This was at least in part due to teachers and community leaders engaging directly with families and active community participation in door-to-door advocacy campaigns. This helped create a ripple effect, with the case study primary research suggesting that younger girls felt inspired to pursue education with the increased support of their families. The project also encouraged a shift towards delaying marriages, as families began to see the benefits of girls completing their education before marrying.

"Sir, one day I was doing some calculations, and my daughter was sitting with me. I forgot something in the middle, and she pointed out that I was wrong. She took out a page and pen, did a detailed calculation, and showed me the correct figures. When I checked again, I realised the mistake was mine. There's now a difference between our education and theirs." (Beneficiary parent KII)

Longer term, evaluation reports stated that these successes were likely to lay a solid foundation for sustained impact by establishing partnerships with local education departments and non-formal education bodies. Similarly, case study primary research respondents noted that the creation of SMCs and continued community engagement were key factors in ensuring the sustainability of educational spaces beyond the project's duration, as one respondent iterated their desire to maintain them after the project had finished.

4.2.4. High attendance and sustained interest in education

The physical environment of the learning spaces, including factors such as accessibility, safety, and cleanliness at the majority of facilities, contributed to sustained attendance. Both girls and their parents interviewed during case study primary research valued these conducive environments, which were seen as essential for continued learning. Evaluation reports also found that improved learning spaces, equipped with fans, furniture, and vibrant decorations, made classrooms inviting, leading to a positive learning experience and regular attendance.

"They [parents and the community] are accepting it [the project] because the girls are getting an education in a safe, secure, and healthy environment." (Indirect beneficiary boy FGD)

4.2.5. Positive experiences with teachers

Case study primary research respondents stated that the dedication, patience, and kindness of the teachers were vital in creating a supportive learning environment. Their compassionate approach made students feel comfortable, motivated, and encouraged to learn. In addition, teachers trained by the project showed interest in continuing to perform their responsibilities at the project site or elsewhere, which increased the likelihood that qualified educators would be more widely available in the future.

"We have no complaints about the teacher. She was like a mother to them. The other teacher who taught vocational skills was also very nice and taught them with love." (Parent FGD)

4.2.6. Provision of resources and accessibility

Primary and secondary research sources both noted that the project effectively provided essential educational resources, including free stationery and learning materials, which alleviated some of the financial burdens on the poorest families. Establishing schools and learning centres closer to communities also improved accessibility, ensuring more girls could attend regularly in the absence of distance-based, safety and travel cost-related barriers. Primary respondents appreciated these efforts, noting the benefits of receiving necessary supplies and having schools within their reach.

4.2.7. Empowerment and personal growth

Primary and secondary research sources demonstrate that the education and training provided by the project successfully boosted the girls' self-efficacy, and ability to manage responsibilities. Life skills and awareness of their rights empowered them to make informed decisions and assert themselves, contributing to personal growth and autonomy. Evaluation reports stated that education had also fostered greater awareness about rights, enabling girls to advocate for themselves and others within their communities.

Evidence from primary case study research shows that the project also had a marked impact on participants' confidence and self-esteem. Through education and vocational training, girls learned to handle complex tasks, engage in financial transactions, and make independent decisions, including the greater autonomy over the decision to delay marriage in favour of continuing their education. Life skills training, which covered safety, personal hygiene, and financial management, contributed to their assertiveness and active participation in community decision-making.

"I think my voice has a certain impact. This motivates me, and the desire to achieve something keeps a person going. What's the point of life if you have no goals? It's important to try to make your dreams come true."

(Beneficiary girl FGD)

4.3. What worked less well in the Closing the Gap Project interventions?

The project successfully improved foundational literacy and vocational skills; however, remaining limitations in higher-level comprehension restricted girls' prospects for skilled jobs. Participants expressed a need for advanced education and analytical training to pursue professional careers. Performance disparities were noted between subgroups, with girls with disabilities and young mothers underperforming relative to their peers due to their inconsistent attendance and a lack of tailored support. Variability in teaching quality further impacted learning outcomes, suggesting a need for more consistent teacher training and resources. Vocational training was popular, yet the absence of formal certification hindered business opportunities in fields requiring recognised qualifications. Economic and logistical barriers, alongside inconsistent distribution of vocational equipment, restricted the practical use of acquired skills. Additionally, inadequate facilities in some areas, including the lack of electricity and clean water, affected comfort and attendance, underlining the need for better-equipped learning environments and stronger integration with the formal education system for smoother educational transitions.

4.3.1. Challenges with higher-level analytical skills

The L&N aspect of the project's focus on foundational skills was effective, but did not extend beyond basic literacy and numeracy, which limited girls' prospects for higher-skilled jobs. Teachers interviewed during case study primary research observed that learners found it difficult to handle conceptual tasks, highlighting a need for stronger emphasis on developing analytical skills within the curriculum. Evaluation reports identified gaps in the curriculum, particularly concerning numerical reasoning and reading comprehension, suggesting that future programming should focus more on advanced proficiency. Case study primary research participants also expressed a need for education that went beyond Grade 5⁸, as this would better prepare them for careers in professional fields such as healthcare or teaching. Evaluation reports found that while the emphasis on basic education and life skills was appreciated, there was a clear demand for advanced educational opportunities and support for pathways to higher education.

"The project was great, but one suggestion would be to extend education beyond the 5th grade, perhaps up to matriculation or intermediate. This would qualify them for roles like lady health workers or nursing positions. If they continue their education, they could have better career prospects and financial independence."

(Government Official KII)

4.3.2. Performance gaps among subgroups

Significant disparities were observed between different subgroups of learners. Evaluation reports found that girls with disabilities and married girls with children underperformed compared with their peers (this is expanded on in [Section 6](#)), showing lower scores in both literacy and numeracy. These performance gaps were attributed to factors such as lower attendance, inadequate teaching methodologies, and lack of parental support. Girls who had previously dropped out of school and rejoined the education system through the project performed better than those new to the school environment, indicating that more tailored approaches were needed for first-time learners.

⁸ Typically, Grade 5 pupils are aged 10-11.

4.3.3. Vocational training and economic barriers

While vocational training was popular, economic conditions and logistical barriers limited some girls' access to advanced technical training. Evaluation reports found that although there was a strong desire to participate in income-generating activities, actual opportunities remained scarce, highlighting a need for stronger links with local markets and more robust employment support programmes. The lack of formal certification for vocational courses also hindered participants' ability to establish formal businesses, especially in sectors requiring recognised qualifications, such as in beautician work. There was also demand for more diversified vocational training that could broaden skill sets and improve employability across different fields, including healthcare and technical trades.

Despite the benefits of vocational training, the project's effectiveness was undermined by a lack of sufficient resources, such as educational materials. Some case study primary respondents expressed disappointment over unmet promises, particularly regarding the provision of vocational tools, such as sewing machines. The absence of these tools limited the practical application of the skills learned during training.

"I want to talk about centre facilities like they said they will teach them vocational skills like machine work, and they will provide sewing machines to them. They didn't get machines." (Indirect beneficiary boys FGD)

Evaluation reports stated that the project's transition activities highlighted the need for better integration between non-formal learning spaces and the formal education system. Although there were partnerships, such as with the Sindh Education Foundation, the lack of systemic support for transitioning students to formal schools remained a barrier. The endline evaluation report recommended that further collaboration with education authorities could facilitate a smoother transition for girls wishing to continue their education beyond basic literacy and numeracy.

4.3.4. Inconsistent improvements in life skills

Evaluation reports found that although there was an 18.4% increase in the life skills index⁹ from baseline to endline, the improvements were inconsistent across subgroups. Girls with disabilities and older girls (who were more likely to be married and have greater domestic responsibilities) showed less progress, suggesting the need for more targeted interventions to support these groups. Another finding was that the project struggled to maintain consistent life skills training across all four cohorts, especially in areas where implementation was disrupted, leading to uneven learning outcomes.

4.3.5. Difficulty in scaling and maintaining teacher quality

Secondary evaluation reports show that the teacher training provided by the project improved instructional quality, but there were still disparities in performance across different learning spaces. Variability in teaching methodologies led to inconsistent learning outcomes, with some areas reporting lower instructional quality.

Feedback from the case study primary research focus groups and interviews corroborated this finding, as participants described how teaching methodologies were not uniformly effective across learning spaces, and that in areas where teaching quality was rated lower, attendance and learner performance suffered. A contributing factor to this was reliance on local community teachers, which helped reduce costs but also contributed to variability in teaching experience and capacity. Evaluation reports stated that the inconsistency in teaching effectiveness pointed to a need for more robust teacher training and standardised instructional practices.

"The teachers did not teach well and sent us home early after covering only one or two subjects." (Beneficiary girl FGD)

4.3.6. Cultural resistance to girls' education

Deep-rooted cultural norms continued to pose challenges to girls' education. Primary respondents reported that while there were positive shifts, resistance from certain segments of the community persisted, particularly regarding traditional gender roles that prioritised domestic responsibilities over education.

"Another significant challenge is the persistent negative attitude towards girl education in some parts of the community. Despite our efforts and the progress made, many families still don't understand the importance of educating their girls. These families often discourage their girls from attending school or pursuing education,

⁹ The project's evaluators, GLOW Consultants, utilised a life skills index to assess progress made by girls on various metrics. This was based on the domains of confidence, communication, emotional management, decision making, problem-solving, health & hygiene, awareness about rights, child protection, safeguarding, inclusion, financial literacy, and quality of relationships.

leading to continued troubles and challenges for the girls. We need to continue working with the community to change this mind-set." (School Management Committee Member KII)

Progress was made in delaying marriages, but early marriage practices persisted in some areas, particularly among families holding traditional views. Case study primary research respondents described how such practices continued to limit educational opportunities for some girls, which reflected the ongoing cultural resistance. Secondary evaluation reports demonstrated that while there were shifts in attitudes to an extent, the belief in early marriage still influenced decisions about girls' education in certain communities.

4.4. What were the unexpected or unintended results from the Closing the Gap Project?

The project generated positive unintended outcomes such as the expansion of educational initiatives by Right to Play and other partners beyond the original scope of the LNGB project. Informal educational continuity during closures sustained trust and engagement among students and parents. However, the project also faced challenges such as resource constraints from high demand, retention issues as trained teachers sought better opportunities, and misconceptions about resources, which affected community trust. These outcomes demonstrated the need for proactive resource planning, teacher retention strategies, and transparent communication to address unexpected effects.

4.4.1. Positive unintended effects

Improved community perception and expansion of educational projects

The success of the project, particularly the play-based component led by consortium partner Right to Play, led to an increase in the recognition of the implementing organisation's educational efforts. This recognition resulted in more projects being initiated by Right to Play, further extending the benefits of education to other non-GEC communities. For example, some Right to Play projects that were initially meant to be temporary were continued due to community demand and the support of local education authorities.

"When we were working in Kandhkot, we started with non-formal education, but the project expanded, with support from Right to Play. And even though the expansion wasn't funded by the same source, it stemmed from the LNGB project, which was the foundation. The intervention from Right to Play didn't just end there. It extended to emergency responses during floods and work in formal schools.

There was also demand from the district administration and the education department, so we delivered the project in formal schools as well. An unintended positive outcome was that, though we had planned to wrap up the LNGB project in Kashmore and Kandhkot, we saw acceptance from both the community and district administration, which allowed us to expand further, even to farmers' groups." (Project staff KII)

Unexpected educational continuity

In some cases, learning spaces continued to operate unofficially even after official closures due to Covid-19 and/or educator remuneration issues (as detailed in [Section 4.5.2](#)), showing the dedication of teachers and students. Teachers kept students engaged through informal gatherings and activities, maintaining educational momentum until the formal reopening by project staff. This continuity helped sustain trust and interest among students and parents.

4.4.2. Negative unintended effects

Resource constraints due to high demand

The unexpected popularity of the project led to demand that outstripped available resources. Many more children wished to enrol than the project could accommodate, creating pressure on the existing infrastructure. This highlighted a gap between community needs and project capacity, affecting the ability of the project to absolutely maximise the number of girls that could be included.

Retention issues for trained teachers

While the development of teachers' skills was a positive outcome, it also led to retention challenges. Teachers who became more qualified often sought better employment opportunities elsewhere, particularly if they were not local to the area, leaving staffing gaps in the project and requiring the project team to restart recruitment and training

processes frequently. This turnover also had implications for the consistency of teaching quality as new teachers were recruited and trained.

Misconceptions and negative perceptions

In some cases, misunderstandings about the project's resources led to negative perceptions within the community. For example, there were rumours that supplies meant for the learning spaces were being misappropriated by staff. There were also instances where parents believed the project would provide free supplies indefinitely, leading to disappointment when this was not the case. This created challenges in maintaining enrolment and parent support, as some community members felt misled about the extent of the project's financial commitments. These perceptions had to be managed carefully to maintain trust and support from the community, demonstrating the need for transparent communication.

4.5. To what extent and how did external contextual factors influence the Closing the Gap Project's performance?

The project was supported by collaborative efforts between government and NGOs, enabling better curriculum development and rural access to education. However, numerous contextual challenges hindered performance. Political instability and regional policy inconsistencies affected implementation, while economic hardships forced families to prioritise income over education. Cultural norms, natural disasters, health issues, and Covid-19 further disrupted attendance and infrastructure. Accessibility barriers, including distant and unsafe schools, particularly impacted girls and demonstrated the need for inclusive, localised learning spaces.

4.5.1. Supportive factors

The performance of the project was enhanced by several supportive external contextual factors. These factors, spanning government policies, community engagement, economic incentives, and adaptive project implementation, played an important role in enabling educational initiatives. The following findings from the case study primary research and secondary sources outline how these supportive elements contributed to the success of the project.

Positive government and organisational collaboration

Secondary research suggests that ongoing collaboration between government education departments and NGOs helped provide a platform for improved continuity and support for education projects in Pakistan. This cooperation included aligning on curriculum development and infrastructure development assistance, which helped bolster the sustainability of projects like Closing the Gap. Case study primary research respondents reported that the engagement of local authorities also facilitated the establishment of learning centres in rural areas, increasing access to education for communities that previously had no schools.

4.5.2. Hindering factors

The performance of the project was impacted to a large degree by various external contextual factors that posed challenges to its effectiveness. These included political, economic, social, environmental, and infrastructural issues, affecting the sustainability, quality, and accessibility of the initiative. The following findings from primary and secondary sources highlight how these factors constrained the success of the project.

Political challenges and regional discrepancies

Secondary research shows that the decentralisation brought about by the 18th Amendment, while empowering provinces, led to inconsistencies in policy implementation across different regions. For instance, resistance from Sindh against the Single National Curriculum (SNC) highlighted the difficulties in enforcing national standards across diverse provinces. Political disruptions and frequent shifts in government further affected the consistency of educational reforms¹⁰, leading to implementation shortcomings, especially in regions with less developed infrastructure such as Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This meant that it proved challenging for policy initiatives to translate into tangible improvements in terms of transport infrastructure and agricultural reform, areas which had a direct impact on girls' ability to attend learning centres regularly.

¹⁰ [https://hed.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/Legislative-BackgroundHED\(1\).pdf](https://hed.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/Legislative-BackgroundHED(1).pdf)

Efforts to introduce progressive legislation, such as raising the legal marriage age for girls, faced resistance from conservative and religious groups, hindering broader societal acceptance of girls' education. Additionally, inconsistent enforcement of bans on corporal punishment contributed to a hostile school environment in some project areas, affecting attendance and retention.

Economic barriers

High poverty rates (around 39.5%¹¹) and income inequality meant that many families could not afford indirect schooling costs such as transportation and educational materials. Economic hardships forced many families to prioritise immediate financial needs over education. In districts like Kashmore and Jacobabad, case study primary research respondents described how overwhelming poverty meant that families often withdrew their daughters from the project's learning centres so they could participate in income-generating activities or manage household chores. Similarly, secondary sources demonstrate that economic pressures led to child labour, especially in agricultural sectors, where girls were often considered additional labour to support family income.

Social and cultural obstacles

Deep-rooted gender disparities continued to hinder girls' education, with lower enrolment and higher dropout rates linked to societal norms that favoured early marriage. Evaluation reports showed that although child marriage is illegal in some areas, entrenched cultural practices persisted, especially in rural Sindh and Ex-FATA, where they were seen as a way to secure a girl's future, thus directly impacting school attendance.

Social norms around gender roles also continued to limit girls' educational opportunities. Cultural expectations that girls should focus on domestic responsibilities, coupled with conservative views that viewed education as less valuable for girls, also contributed to low enrolment and high dropout rates.

Environmental and health-related risks

Secondary documentation and the case study primary research described how frequent natural disasters, such as floods and earthquakes, severely disrupted educational infrastructure. The 2022 floods alone displaced over 3.5 million children¹² from their education, with many schools being repurposed as shelters, delaying the resumption of classes. Flooding had a devastating impact on educational infrastructure, leading to damaged schools, displaced learners, and fluctuating attendance. Despite efforts to repair and reopen the project's learning centres, some students were unable to return, and issues like damaged boundary walls and lack of safe drinking water facilities made it difficult to maintain a stable learning environment.

Health-related issues, particularly malnutrition, also hindered the educational performance of project participants. High rates of stunting (44%) and wasting (15%)¹³ affected cognitive development and school attendance, disproportionately impacting girls who were often burdened with additional domestic responsibilities.

Impact of Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the project, primarily because widespread school closures severely disrupted the learning process. Even when schools reopened, social distancing measures and fears related to the virus affected attendance, leading to substantial learning losses. Case study primary research respondents reported that efforts to engage students through online and mobile platforms faced limitations due to a lack of technology access and internet connectivity, which particularly affected rural and under-resourced areas.

Accessibility difficulties

Both case study primary research and secondary research sources showed that in some instances, the physical limitations of educational spaces were another impactful issue. Inaccessible infrastructure for girls with disabilities, coupled with inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities, created non-inclusive and unsafe learning environments, particularly for the most marginalised girls. This hindered regular attendance and demonstrated the need for safer, more inclusive, and closer learning spaces.

Another concern was the distance required to travel to schools and the associated safety issues, particularly in relation to the risk of harassment during the journey. Primary respondents reported that safety fears discouraged regular attendance, with parents expressing worries about their daughters traveling alone.

"My home was some distance from school, and there were some men along the route, so I didn't go to school." (Beneficiary girl FGD)

¹¹ <https://www.worlddeconomics.com/Inequality/Gini-Coefficient/Pakistan.aspx>

¹² <https://www.redcross.org.uk/stories/disasters-and-emergencies/world/climate-change-and-pakistan-flooding-affecting-millions>

¹³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/pakistan-ipc-acute-malnutrition-analysis-march-2023-january-2024>

Similarly, case study primary research respondents stated that the long distances involved in reaching the school were a major deterrent, as parents were reluctant to send their daughters to schools that were far away, especially when safe and reliable transport options were not available or were beyond their financial means.

"The school was far away, and we are poor, so we couldn't afford to send them by rickshaw. We didn't have the money. That's why our girls didn't go to school." (Beneficiary parent FGD)

4.6. What were the implementation factors behind the Closing the Gap Project's success or lack of success?

The project's success was driven by effective teacher training, strong community engagement, adaptive implementation during crises, and strategic partnerships with organisations like the Sindh Education Foundation. Proactive safeguarding, resourcefulness during disruptions, and cost-efficient operations further supported its impact. However, limited class durations, inconsistent resources, infrastructure deficiencies, and financial constraints undermined long-term sustainability. Persistent challenges with teacher retention and community resistance in remote areas highlighted the need for extended engagement and strategic planning to enhance project outcomes.

4.6.1. Supportive factors

Several key implementation factors played an important role in the success of the project. These supporting elements, ranging from effective teacher training to strong community engagement and strategic partnerships, helped overcome challenges and sustain the project. The following insights from primary and secondary sources highlight the factors that contributed to the projects' success.

Teacher training and skill development

Evaluation reports describe how the project placed a strong emphasis on enhancing the skills of teachers, not only in curriculum delivery but also in providing mental health and psychosocial support to students. This comprehensive training approach facilitated improved literacy and numeracy performance among learners. In addition, the support extended to supporting teachers to secure mainstream jobs within the government sector, demonstrating a commitment to the long-term sustainability of teaching careers. Although many teachers chose to remain in the learning spaces to continue supporting their communities, this guidance was an important measure to ensure career stability and professional growth, reflecting the project's holistic approach to both direct and indirect beneficiaries.

Case study primary research respondents also reported that the training helped teachers and staff develop essential skills in stakeholder management, community engagement, and teaching strategies, which proved crucial in managing learning centres effectively and building community trust.

"We also invited community members to visit and inspect the learning space themselves. By inviting the community to participate and witness the activities, we fostered trust. This inclusion had positive effects, gradually changing their perceptions as they became more involved in our activities." (Teacher KII)

Adaptive and flexible project implementation

Case study primary research respondents stated that during external crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the adaptability of the project played a crucial role in maintaining educational continuity. Through the adoption of digital solutions, such as WhatsApp, phone calls, and printed worksheets, the project kept students engaged, highlighting the value of the flexible approach to learning during school closures.

Similarly, evaluation reports showed how during flood recovery efforts, ACTED successfully integrated educational initiatives with broader community services, such as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programmes, shelter, and food security. This holistic approach ensured that children could return to school while addressing immediate protection concerns, thereby reinforcing the importance of education amidst crises.

Transition and continuity of education through partnerships

Evaluation reports state that a strategic agreement with the Sindh Education Foundation¹⁴ (SEF) to transform existing ALP learning spaces into Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) learning spaces was pivotal in ensuring that beneficiary girls could continue their education wherever possible. By allowing access to post-primary approved curriculum packages, this transition provided learners with a more consistent educational journey, minimising interruptions, and fostering sustained engagement.

Collaboration with various other stakeholders, including the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), district education departments, and the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD), was critical to the project's success. Secondary sources noted the importance of these partnerships in facilitating efforts to sustain literacy and numeracy spaces, reflecting strong inter-organisational cooperation. Case study primary research respondents reported that positive engagement with local government bodies and NGOs also yielded essential resources and infrastructure improvements, helping to improve the efficiency of operations even during disruptions such as flooding and Covid-19.

Community mobilisation and engagement

Case study primary research respondents felt that effective community engagement strategies were a cornerstone of the project's successes. Initiatives such as parent meetings, the formation and involvement of School Management Committees (SMCs), and regular consultations with local leaders helped shift community attitudes towards supporting girls' education. Methods for achieving this included door-to-door campaigns and awareness-raising activities, which played a substantial role in building enthusiasm and increasing enrolment. Evaluation reports showed that over the course of the project, approximately 50% of families became more supportive of girls' education because of these efforts, showing a direct positive impact on community perceptions.

"Yes, we've seen a significant change. People are now more willing to send their daughters to school. Previously, traditions and the need to observe purdah¹⁵, along with schools being far away, made education difficult for girls. However, the learning space changed these beliefs and raised awareness about girls' potential. Now, 90-95% of people want to send their girls to the learning space, though it has since closed. They are now more accepting and supportive of girls' education." (Indirect beneficiary boys FGD)

Safeguarding and child protection mechanisms

The project proactively addressed safeguarding and child protection by sensitising teachers, community members, and government stakeholders on issues such as bullying, corporal punishment, and gender discrimination. Evaluation reports describe how training materials were adapted for local contexts and shared with other Implementing Partners, expanding the reach of these initiatives, and creating safer, more supportive environments for students. These efforts also contributed to the building of trust among parents, who were more willing to support their daughters' education because of the perception that the project had their daughter's best interests at heart.

Cost-effectiveness and value for money

Evaluation reports demonstrated that the project demonstrated cost-effectiveness, with a per-learner cost of GBP 114.79, which was substantially lower than the GBP 227 per learner cost reported by the Sindh Education Department. This suggests that the project delivered quality education more efficiently, achieving better value for money. Leveraging existing community resources, such as repurposing structures for learning spaces and engaging local teachers, further reduced costs while maintaining effective delivery.

No-cost extension and resource development

In response to disruptions, such as the disastrous flooding of 2022, ACTED secured a no-cost extension and developed a resource package to try to mitigate against learning losses. Secondary sources indicate that this proactive measure allowed for a more flexible and adaptive response to unexpected challenges, ensuring the relative continuity and success of the ALP programme. Additionally, case study primary research respondents describe how when floods damaged learning centres, the team arranged alternate funding sources to repair and rehabilitate these

¹⁴ The Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) was established under the Sindh Education Foundation Act, 1992 as a semi-autonomous organisation with a mandate to support education in the province through multifarious interventions. The Act provides wide ranging powers to the Foundation to support the education sector through a large number of instruments and support activities. Since its establishment in 1992, the Foundation has made serious efforts to increase access to quality education for students across Sindh, especially those in remote and underdeveloped regions of the province.

¹⁵ Purdah, meaning curtain, is the word most commonly used for the system of secluding women and enforcing high standards of female modesty. The crucial characteristic of the purdah system is its limitation on interaction between women and males outside certain well-defined categories: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/comparative-studies-in-society-and-history/article/abs/purdah-separate-worlds-and-symbolic-shelter/995F4B4DF54CF7ED9423FB919C6B80AF>

spaces, demonstrating resilience and resourcefulness in maintaining educational activities despite financial constraints.

4.6.2. Hindering factors

The success of the project was undermined by various implementation challenges that affected resource allocation, community engagement, and long-term planning. These hindering factors ranged from structural issues like inadequate class durations and inconsistent implementation to external barriers such as cultural resistance and economic hardships. The following insights from primary and secondary sources outline the key implementation factors that hindered the project.

Insufficient duration of classes and project lifespan

One of the main issues negatively impacting project implementation was the limited duration of classes at some learning centres, which forced teachers to rush through the curriculum. Some teachers interviewed in the case study primary research reported that the allocated time was insufficient to cover the daily lesson plans, making it difficult for students to thoroughly understand the material. They recommended extending the course duration by at least one month to allow for more comprehensive teaching.

Similarly, the delays with educators receiving their salary led to premature closures of learning centres, disrupting progress and demotivating students and teachers. Case study primary research respondents fed back that the sudden closure of learning centres was a severe setback, as it interrupted the educational progress of many girls. Participants expressed disappointment over the incomplete nature of their learning journeys and suggested that centres should remain open longer, potentially offering more comprehensive education that extends beyond basic literacy to higher grades.

"There was a time when the policies were changed, and the teachers' pay was stopped, so the teachers boycotted, and the learning space was closed. It created an issue to bring the learners back to the learning space. I think this created a problem for a month or half month. It was difficult for us to gain back the learner's trust, and to convince their parents." (Teacher KII)

Challenges in community engagement

Effective community engagement was crucial for the success of the project, but case study primary research respondents stated that the lasting impact of this behavioural change was undermined due to the insufficient duration of the project. In addition, in some areas, the engagement of key local figures such as religious leaders were not as proactive as needed, resulting in persistent resistance to educational initiatives. Participants recommended more consistent and extended engagement efforts to build stronger community support.

"The reopening of the learning space should be discussed. The society has experienced many positive changes, but now they are beginning to reverse." (Indirect beneficiary boys FGD)

Resource gaps and infrastructure deficiencies

Many primary respondents cited a lack of basic facilities, such as clean drinking water, reliable electricity, and adequate classroom infrastructure, underlining the unequal levels of the learning centres. These infrastructural issues were particularly prevalent in rural areas, where resources were already scarce. Resource gaps affected attendance and engagement, especially during extreme weather conditions. While there were attempts to address these issues by securing additional funding from other sources in the form of solar-powered fans and water systems, the uneven distribution of these resources led to dissatisfaction among participants. Efforts to improve the learning environment, while helpful, were insufficient to fully address these systemic challenges.

"There are other problems like the lack of cold drinking water and electricity. The solar system is not sufficient, causing students to be unhappy and parents to worry as students get sick from drinking hot water in hot weather." (School Management Committee member KII)

Case study primary research respondents also pointed out other inconsistencies in the implementation of the project, where some girls received tools and resources while others did not. Parents in some areas also perceived the quality of education as insufficient to justify the costs of attendance, citing issues such as overcrowded classes, poor teacher attendance, and lack of teacher training in inclusive education practices. Both primary and secondary research sources also state that the lack of comprehensive planning for the continuity of educational benefits post-project hindered long-term impact, as there were no clear strategies for transitioning learners into mainstream schools or providing continued vocational training.

"ACTED has provided supplies for 48 learning spaces but the quantities were insufficient. We were instructed not to give these items for home use; they were meant for emergencies in the learning spaces. When learners and their parents saw these supplies, they developed negative emotions and started demanding them. This negative perception from the community forced us to distribute the items ourselves and purchase additional supplies for the learning spaces to meet monitoring team requirements." (Teacher KII)

Financial and logistical constraints

The project also experienced broader financial management issues, including delays in budget finalisation, which impacted the efficient operation of activities. Evaluation reports show that concerns about the sustainability of funding for learning spaces were also expressed by local education authorities, who raised questions about the long-term viability of the initiative. Although efforts were made to reduce costs, primary research found that some community members doubted the affordability of maintaining these spaces independently, suggesting a need for continued support or innovative funding solutions. The IP stated that these difficulties were to an extent down to external crises stretching the project financial resources beyond what had initially been anticipated.

"Before the floods, the project had sufficient money for all planned activities across all partners and for the consortium lead. However, when the floods occurred, the project faced financial challenges. The damage to learning centres and the need for additional support, such as mental health assistance and hygiene education, put strain on the budget. A significant challenge arose when they discovered that, as this was not an emergency response project, they could not utilise project funds for the rehabilitation of damaged learning centres. This limitation in resource allocation flexibility posed a potential threat to the continuity of the project's activities." (IP KII)

Teacher capacity and retention challenges

Recruiting and retaining qualified teachers, particularly in remote areas, remained a persistent issue. Case study primary research respondents reported that although efforts were made to offer salary increases and transport allowances, these measures were insufficient to fully address the problem. There was also resistance from communities towards teachers who were recruited from outside areas, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive approaches in staffing.

"The continuous challenge we faced was finding quality teachers. These are very remote areas with hardly any good schools or colleges for girls. Without institutions for girls, there are no qualified resources. So, we invested heavily in training the available teachers. We hired teachers from the remote areas and spent a lot of energy and investment on their training, which helped. Finding qualified teachers was a big and continuous challenge." (Project Staff KII)

4.7. Key lessons learned

Effective transition and integration for sustainable educational pathways

Establishing formal collaborations with local education bodies and institutions is important for creating sustainable educational pathways. These partnerships can serve as models for similar projects, enhancing educational continuity and accessibility, especially for disadvantaged groups seeking further education or vocational training.

Practical skills development as a foundation for economic empowerment

Education that includes practical life skills, such as financial literacy, record-keeping, and small business management, empowers participants by enabling them to support family businesses and start independent ventures. This approach has broad applicability for projects aimed at enhancing self-reliance and financial independence, particularly in low-income communities.

Community engagement and attitudinal change as catalysts for girls' education

Educational projects aiming for sustainable impact must prioritise community engagement to foster long-term support for girls' education. Active involvement of local leaders and parents can overcome cultural resistance, increase enrolment, and enhance and extend project impact by addressing entrenched community norms and encouraging support for educational access for girls.

Enhanced learning environments for improved attendance and engagement

Providing safe, accessible, and comfortable learning environments greatly enhances engagement and attendance. This investment in learning infrastructure encourages higher attendance and improved learning outcomes, particularly in areas with previously low enrolment, because students and parents value having a positive learning experience.

Teacher training and positive learning experiences for sustained engagement

Compassionate, supportive teaching practices play a key role in student engagement and confidence, particularly for girls facing cultural or economic barriers to education. This is because improved student motivation and comfort reinforces the productivity of learning environments, leading to sustained enrolment and retention.

Adaptive strategies for continued engagement during crises

Flexibility in project delivery, including budget management and the ability to pivot to digital engagement and remote learning resources, is essential for maintaining educational continuity during crises. Adaptive approaches and resilience strategies are key for any projects working in unpredictable environments if they are to sustain learning engagement amidst unexpected challenges.

Underestimation of project duration required to achieve meaningful impact

Projects should not underestimate the length of time it takes to have a notable and /or sustained positive benefit on girls. The limited implementation period hindered the project's ability to achieve large improvements in life skills, such as confidence and communication. Behavioural change requires consistent and sustained engagement, and future interventions should allow for longer project durations to enable more comprehensive education and skill development. Community members expressed a desire for the project to continue for longer, as short timelines limited the depth of skills training and long-term impact.

5. To what extent and how did the Closing the Gap Project reach and benefit the most marginalised?

5.1. Summary of key findings

The Closing the Gap project successfully reached and provided educational opportunities to marginalised and vulnerable girls across the various poor, rural communities in which it worked by providing accessible learning spaces, vocational training, and essential infrastructure. The project emphasised inclusivity, focusing on girls who had disabilities, were married, out of school, faced socio-economic challenges, or were at the 'intersectionality of marginalisation'¹⁶ in the sense that they met several of the project's marginalisation criteria. Key successes included improved literacy and numeracy (as detailed in [Section 2.1.1.](#)), increased enrolment, improved awareness about the importance of education, and the development of essential life skills. Notable challenges, such as resistance from community members, logistical issues, social stigma, and cultural barriers, were effectively addressed through consistent community engagement, awareness campaigns, and strategic planning. Despite obstacles, the project led to substantial benefits, including financial independence for some girls, a ripple effect of educational improvement within communities, and increased female participation in education and local economies.

5.2. How were the most marginalised defined and identified?

Evaluation reports demonstrate that the most marginalised girls in the project's targeted communities were identified using various socio-demographic and educational indicators. Key criteria included disability status, school dropout history, marital status, and geographic location (rural or remote areas). Specifically, girls with disabilities, including those with vision, hearing, mobility, cognitive, and psycho-social impairments, were considered highly marginalised due to social stigma, lack of facilities, and untrained teachers. The project used tools like the Washington Group Child Functioning (WGCF) set of questions to analyse disability and identify learners who required tailored support.

Additionally, girls who had never attended school or had dropped out were categorised as out-of-school (OOS) and deemed in need of urgent educational support. Married girls, especially those with children, were also identified as marginalised, as they often faced restrictions on their mobility and educational opportunities. Rural children, particularly in regions like Sindh, faced further marginalisation due to fears of abduction and forced conversions, lack of accessible schools, and child marriage.

Findings from the case study primary research aligned with this, with respondents stating that the most marginalised girls were identified through village profiling and household assessments. This helped in identifying communities with high educational deprivation, ensuring that the focus remained on areas with the most need. There was also evidence throughout the project that monitoring, evaluation, and community profiling were used to continually refine and adjust the approach, ensuring that the most marginalised were included and retained in the project.

"The project employed a systematic approach to reach and engage the most marginalised girls. They began with village profiling to identify locations where there were no schools for girls, making this their primary criterion for selecting intervention areas. Following this, they conducted door-to-door household surveys to identify girls who could legitimately attend the learning centres. This meticulous process helped in identifying the most marginalised girls who were out of school. The project team then engaged in extensive community mobilisation efforts to convince parents to enrol their daughters in the project. They addressed parents' concerns about safety and security within the learning centres and explained the long-term benefits of the project." (IP KII)

5.3. How and to what extent were the most marginalised reached?

Overall, the project was successful in its efforts to reach its targeted beneficiary profiles. Evaluation reports show that at baseline, 98% of beneficiary girls had never attended school, and 85.7% were in the same category at

¹⁶ Intersectional marginalisation is the experience of discrimination and oppression that people face when they belong to multiple marginalised groups, for example, suffering from extreme poverty, being from an ethnic minority and being a child bride.

the endline, reflecting the programme's efforts to enrol OOS girls. The project achieved this by forming (in the case of SMCs) community groups and building relationships with local stakeholders to facilitate continuous access to learning centres. Engaging parents, caregivers and community leaders through door-to-door visits and community events also played a crucial role in encouraging the enrolment of girls from minority groups, rural areas, and those at the intersectionality of marginalisation, in terms of meeting more than one of the project's marginalisation criteria.

Awareness campaigns proved key in overcoming initial resistance, especially in regions where there were strong cultural and societal barriers against girls' education. By addressing these social and physical barriers (e.g., building ramps, ensuring drinking water), the project was able to make great strides in reaching the most marginalised.

The case study primary research supports the assertion that the project effectively reached a substantial number of marginalised girls, which respondents consistently attributed to the **flexibility and provision of learning centres** in communities where no formal educational institutions existed. In some cases, learning centres were moved closer to the communities to ensure better access, particularly in remote or conflict-prone areas. In regions such as Jacobabad, Kashmore, and Kandhkot, where security concerns were prevalent, virtual communication was employed to maintain engagement and ensure continuity of education.

"The activities were modified to ensure that disabled students could also participate. It was ensured that disabled students received proper education and encouragement to perform well. Teachers and other students were asked to be accommodating towards students with lower academic performance. Additionally, efforts were made to instil passion for games and raise awareness among the students." (School Management Committee member KII)

Both the case study primary and secondary research emphasised the efforts made by the project to include girls with disabilities, in particular. The project expanded its reach by providing infrastructure improvements (e.g., ramps, toilets, safe learning environments) and training teachers to address the needs of children with disabilities. Additionally, learning aids, assistive devices and resources were made available and a play-based approach to learning was implemented to create an inclusive learning environment. Despite these successes, it should be noted that both primary and secondary research sources sometimes cited logistical constraints, limited resources, and strict enrolment caps as factors which meant that even greater numbers of girls could not be enrolled, despite the project exceeding its targets in this regard.

5.4. Benefits realised by the most marginalised

Case study primary and secondary research demonstrated that the project generated numerous benefits for the most marginalised girls, including improved educational performance, life skills development, and increased livelihood opportunities. Girls who were previously out of school gained basic literacy skills, learning to read, write, and speak additional languages, which opened up a variety of new opportunities for them. Notably, girls with disabilities showed improvements in literacy and numeracy skills from the baseline, though they continued to face challenges in areas like word problems and dictation. Despite these challenges, the project fostered an inclusive environment, ensuring that all participants, including those with disabilities, could engage fully in the activities.

The project also positively influenced life skills, with young mothers and married girls showing gains in confidence, communication, decision-making, and awareness of rights. These improvements were modest, partly due to limited time for implementation, but were reinforced through Girls' Forums, which provided a safe space for play-based activities that built self-esteem and confidence.

Vocational training was also a substantial component of the project, enabling the poorest girls to acquire technical skills which enhanced their employability and livelihood prospects. Some girls participated in community initiatives such as polio campaigns, or went on to work in local organisations, achieving a level of financial independence and contributing to their households. This pathway to economic self-sufficiency was further supported by parental engagement, as the project successfully persuaded parents and caregivers of the importance of girls' education.

Additionally, the project equipped girls with essential life skills, such as awareness of health, hygiene, and safety, which they could share with their families, thereby extending the impact beyond the individual participants. Community perceptions shifted, with many parents recognising the long-term benefits of educating their daughters, leading to increased support for girls' education across the community.

5.5. Key lessons learned

The learning environment is fundamental to meeting the needs of the most marginalised

To engage and retain the most marginalised girls, future projects should ensure the physical learning environment is suitable and attractive to participants. Infrastructure and accessibility were identified as essential components for increasing enrolment, particularly in relation to girls with disabilities. Basic facilities like ramps, toilets, and reliable electricity were often lacking, and addressing these infrastructural issues, including providing solar-powered fans and water supply, proved critical for creating an inclusive learning environment.

Adaptive strategies for continued engagement during crises

Flexibility in project delivery, including budget management and the ability to pivot to digital engagement and remote learning resources, is essential for maintaining educational continuity for the most marginalised girls during crises. Adaptive approaches and resilience strategies are key for any projects working in unpredictable environments if they are to sustain learning engagement and community trust while continuing to protect the most marginalised girls amidst unexpected contextual circumstances. The project's adaptability meant that as unforeseen events occurred (such as security issues and logistical barriers) strategies could be adjusted to overcome challenges (for instance, the ability to relocate centres, use virtual communication, and modify outreach strategies to maintain engagement proved pivotal).

Considering sub-group needs to achieve consistent progress

Different sub-groups of girls require different and greater support than others, if the benefits of the project are to be equally experienced by all. The project highlighted the need for targeted support for different beneficiary demographics, such as girls with disabilities, dropouts, and married girls, who have diverse needs. While there was some improvement, more intensive support was necessary to ensure that girls with disabilities can achieve learning outcomes comparable to their peers. This includes providing specific educational aids, training for teachers, and continuous monitoring to bridge learning gaps.

6. Conclusions

Sustained gains and key challenges in foundational learning

The Closing the Gap project achieved substantial gains in literacy and numeracy across all cohorts, with clear improvements from baseline to endline and significant shifts in learners from the non-learner category to higher performance groups. By the endline, most learners, ranging from 70% to 90%, exceeded literacy and numeracy benchmarks. These gains were particularly pronounced in the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) cohort, which benefited from a longer intervention duration. Despite these achievements, challenges remained in complex literacy and numeracy tasks, such as reading comprehension, writing dictation, and analytical problem-solving, highlighting areas for further support.

Variations in outcomes between cohorts underscore the importance of programmatic differences. The ALP cohort's longer intervention period resulted in stronger performance increases compared to shorter-duration interventions for other cohorts. Remote learning adaptations necessitated by the pandemic also influenced the performance of Cohorts 1–2, contributing to lower scores in some areas. High attrition rates, particularly in Cohort 4, and geographic variations in sampling further complicate the interpretation of results, suggesting that gains should be viewed cautiously and as indicative rather than definitive of broader impact.

The Impact Study commissioned for the project supports the conclusion that learning gains were sustained or further enhanced post-endline, particularly in literacy and numeracy across all L&N cohorts.

Inconclusive findings regarding transition

The evaluation highlights substantial achievements in fostering girls' aspirations to transition to further education, training, or income-generating activities. Across cohorts, the majority of participants consistently expressed strong intentions to pursue educational opportunities, with a preference for continuing education or vocational training over income-related activities. Graduation rates and engagement in business-related sessions were also positive. However, the absence of concrete transition data limits definitive conclusions about the long-term impact of these efforts.

Findings from the Impact Study reveal a notable gap between intentions and actual outcomes. While a small percentage of girls continued their education, a majority transitioned into income-generating activities, far exceeding initial intentions for this pathway. This divergence underscores the complexity of post-programme transition and highlights the need for future programmes to better support girls in achieving their stated aspirations.

Success of School Management Committees (SMCs)

SMCs emerged as a fundamental component of the project's success, driving community engagement, and facilitating a degree of sustainability. These committees actively facilitated enrolment campaigns, supported the creation of safer and more inclusive learning environments, and acted as mediators between parents, teachers, and the IP. By involving community members directly in decision-making processes, SMCs fostered trust and strengthened the community's investment in girls' education. This participatory approach also played an important role in the progress made towards addressing early marriage, with many communities reporting a delay in marriage ages as families increasingly valued education. Even beyond the project's lifecycle, several SMCs continued to operate independently, highlighting their potential for sustaining long-term gains and reinforcing the transformative power of local leadership.

Effective partnerships with local organisations

The project demonstrated the value of strategic partnerships with local organisations, which greatly enhanced its implementation and adaptability. Collaborations with educational institutions created clear pathways for learners to transition into formal education or vocational training, ensuring the continuity of progress. These partnerships were also beneficial during external crises, such as Covid-19 and the 2022 floods, where local organisations provided critical expertise and resources to sustain educational activities. These collaborations not only improved the immediate outcomes of the project but also strengthened its resilience to external shocks, ensuring that it could meet the needs of its beneficiaries even under challenging circumstances.

Local Educators: trust and challenges

The employment of local teachers was a strength of the project, fostering trust and a sense of ownership within communities. Local educators, being familiar with the cultural and social norms of their communities, acted as accessible role models and were instrumental in gaining community acceptance for the project. Their involvement

also encouraged a broader societal impact, as it helped develop a local teaching workforce capable of continuing educational initiatives in the future. However, the reliance on local teachers also posed challenges, particularly in ensuring consistent teaching quality. While many educators excelled, others struggled due to inadequate training or limited prior experience, leading to variability in outcomes across different centres. Furthermore, the project failed to anticipate that the development of local educators would lead to high turnover of teachers due to better job opportunities. This created gaps in instruction and necessitated ongoing recruitment and training, which strained the project's resources and disrupted the continuity of learning.

Inconsistencies in project implementation

Inconsistencies in the project's implementation undermined its overall effectiveness, hindering its ability to deliver equitable outcomes. The quality of the learning environments varied; while some centres were adequately equipped and provided a conducive space for learning, others lacked basic amenities such as clean water, cooling systems, and appropriate seating arrangements. These deficiencies impacted the comfort and regular attendance of learners. Additionally, the distribution of vocational training materials was uneven, leaving many learners without the necessary tools to apply their newly acquired skills effectively. Inconsistencies in teaching quality further compounded these issues, with some educators demonstrating exemplary skills and engagement while others struggled due to inadequate training or experience.

Impact of delayed payments and learning centre closures

Delays in teacher payments and the unexpected closure of learning centres severely undermined the progress and achievements of the project. These disruptions eroded trust within communities, particularly among parents who had begun to see value in the project's activities. Gains in literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills were interrupted, leaving many learners without the means to consolidate their progress. Furthermore, the instability caused by payment delays and closures negatively affected community perceptions about the reliability of the project, reversing some of the social change the project had facilitated. The loss of continuity led to reduced access to education and vocational training, further entrenching existing barriers. Teachers' morale and commitment were also severely impacted, as the delays created financial insecurity and dissatisfaction, which often translated to absenteeism and, in some cases, permanent departures from the project.

Disparities among marginalised groups

Despite the project's ambitions to focus on the most marginalised, disparities persisted among different sub-groups of beneficiaries. Girls with disabilities faced numerous barriers, including inaccessible learning environments and limited specialist support, resulting in lower attendance and poorer academic outcomes compared to their peers. Young mothers also encountered challenges, as their domestic responsibilities often conflicted with their educational commitments, leading to inconsistent attendance and engagement. These gaps in inclusivity demonstrate the necessity for more targeted interventions that address the unique needs of these groups, such as flexible learning schedules, specialised training for teachers, and accessible infrastructure. Without addressing these disparities, the project's ability to achieve equitable outcomes for all beneficiaries remained limited, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalised girls.

7. References

PwC (2022), GEC Revised Logframe Milestone.

Annex K: Case Study Report: Plan International (Zimbabwe)

Project Case Study Report: *Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE)*, Plan International (Zimbabwe)

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of the Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education project

This report summarises the key findings, lessons learned and conclusions from the IE Team's case study research of the **LNGB project Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE) implemented by Plan International in Zimbabwe**. Primary case study data collection took place in July/August 2024. The purpose of all six project case studies is to provide an in-depth examination of the reported results (i.e., outcomes and Intermediate Outcomes); how and to what extent project interventions worked well or less well, why, for which types of beneficiaries; and the influences of contextual factors and Implementing Partners' (IPs) delivery capacities on project delivery. The structure of this report aligns with the evaluation sub-questions to enable the synthesis of the findings across the six case studies. The report structure also aligns with the structure of the main report to ensure the findings from the case study research complement and enrich the findings from the portfolio assessments of the GEC-T and LNGB Windows.

1.2. Project background

The SAGE Project, implemented by Plan International, aimed to support out-of-school (OOS) adolescent girls aged 10-19 across 11 districts in Zimbabwe (see [Figure 1](#)). The project began in August 2018, with the goal of providing foundational literacy, numeracy, and life skills, enabling highly marginalised girls to successfully transition into formal education, vocational training, or employment through the Integrated Skills Outreach Program (ISOP) (see [Table 1](#)). The project combined Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) sessions with a gender-transformative component, the Champions of Girls' Education (CoGE), aimed at shifting community attitudes towards gender equality. Further detail is available in [Table 1](#) below.

SAGE was designed to reach 13,200 of the most marginalised girls in Zimbabwe, with cohorts joining at staggered intervals across a planned four-cohort structure. Beneficiaries included girls from a variety of marginalised backgrounds, including young mothers, ethnic minorities, married girls, those from Apostolic communities, girls living with disabilities, and those engaged in child labour. The project provided tailored interventions based on each girl's age and starting skill level, aiming to facilitate both learning progress and sustainable transitions into productive opportunities.

The project had two distinct intervention pathways, which are covered in further detail in [Table 2](#):

- 1) Younger girls (aged 10–14) were encouraged to transition into formal or non-formal education after the ALP.
- 2) Older girls (aged 15–19) were oriented toward vocational training or income-generating activities, potentially leading to self-employment or employment after completing the ALP and CoGE components.

Table 1: SAGE Project Summary

Dimension	Project characteristics
Project name:	Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE)
Implementing Partner:	Plan International
Funding window:	Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB)
GEC Phase I:	N/A
Budget:	£11.9 million
Project start/ end dates (duration):	August 2018 – July 2023 (5 years)
Geographical focus:	Zimbabwe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peri-urban and rural communities • Chimanimani, Mutare, Mutasa, Epworth, Hatcliffe, Harare South, Mutoko, Reigate, Khami, Bulilima and Mbizo Districts
Beneficiary groups:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out-of-school girls aged 10-13

Dimension	Project characteristics
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out-of-school girls aged 14-19
Number of direct learning beneficiaries (girls)	13,460 girls enrolled in the learning programme
Number of direct transition beneficiaries	6,001 girls enrolled in the Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOP)
Other beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 697 community-level volunteers trained • 36,158 community members reached
Marginalisation focus:	Girls from Apostolic communities, girls who have never been to school, girls from ethnic minority groups, married adolescent girls, young mothers, girls with disabilities, and girls engaged in labour
Type of interventions:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Economic</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income-generating activity • Loans and savings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Infrastructure, resources and management</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New classrooms or learning centres, classroom or learning centre improvements or refurbishments • Toilets and wash facilities (including menstrual management) • Ed Tech for classroom learning • Textbook and learning material development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Teacher training and support</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills training for teachers/educators in participatory approaches to T&L for adolescent girls • Vocational training • Safeguarding training • Gender-responsive pedagogy • Accelerated learning • Targeted focus on literacy • Targeted focus on numeracy • Training in the use of formative assessment) • Teacher peer support, training, and mentoring • Formal in-service teacher training • Inclusive classroom strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Community-based awareness, attitudes, and behaviour</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media (radio, TV, advertising) • Community meetings (use of drama etc.) • Working with men and boys • Working with faith-based groups and traditional leaders • Community engagement through adult literacy • Household-level visits & support • Activities involving women's groups, parents' groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Extracurricular activity</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring (big sis / little sis; peer support/ learner guides) • Life skills training (including SRHR) • Vocational training/ girls' econ empowerment and IGA for girls • Mixed sex/ additional boys' clubs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>School management and governance</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with head teachers or other school management members • Hub Development Committees (HDCs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Empowerment, self-esteem and life skills</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls' and boys' clubs • Safe spaces • Activities that promote girls' voices & participation • Role models (older girls, community members, female teachers)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Safeguarding and protection of children and vulnerable adults</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community awareness • Supporting or running safe houses/shelters

Dimension	Project characteristics
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation schemes related to girls' safety on the way to school • Teacher training • Reporting mechanism in schools (including complaint boxes) • Harmful traditional practices including child marriage & FGM/C • Training SMCs, PTAs • Psychosocial support • Response and referrals (this includes working with service providers, village child protection committees etc.)
Total number of separate cohorts (LNGB only)	7
Baseline data collection (report) dates:	November 2019 (December 2019)
Midline data collection (report) dates:	May 2021 (February 2022)
Endline data collection (report) dates:	January 2023 (May 2023)

Figure 1: Map of SAGE project intervention areas

ZIMBABWE



■ GEC Project intervention areas

Table 2: Proposed intervention pathways for girls in SAGE programme

Intervention Pathway	Which girls follow this pathway?	How many girls follow this pathway for C1A?	How long will the intervention last?	How many cohorts are there?	What literacy and numeracy levels are the girls starting at?	What does success look like for learning?	What does success look like for transition?
Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) and Champions of	OOS girls aged 10–14	1461	2 years with an optional third year	4	Grade 5 and above	ALP Year 1 = Grades 1–3 ALP Year 2 = Grades 4–5	Enrolled in formal education / Non-Formal Education (NFE)

Intervention Pathway	Which girls follow this pathway?	How many girls follow this pathway for C1A?	How long will the intervention last?	How many cohorts are there?	What literacy and numeracy levels are the girls starting at?	What does success look like for learning?	What does success look like for transition?
Girls Education (CoGE)							
ALP and CoGE,	OOS girls aged 15–19	2611	2 years with an optional third year	4	Grade 5 and above	As above	Enrolled in NFE / Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOP) / (Self-) Employment / Entrepreneurship

External Evaluation: from four to seven cohorts (baseline, midline and endline)

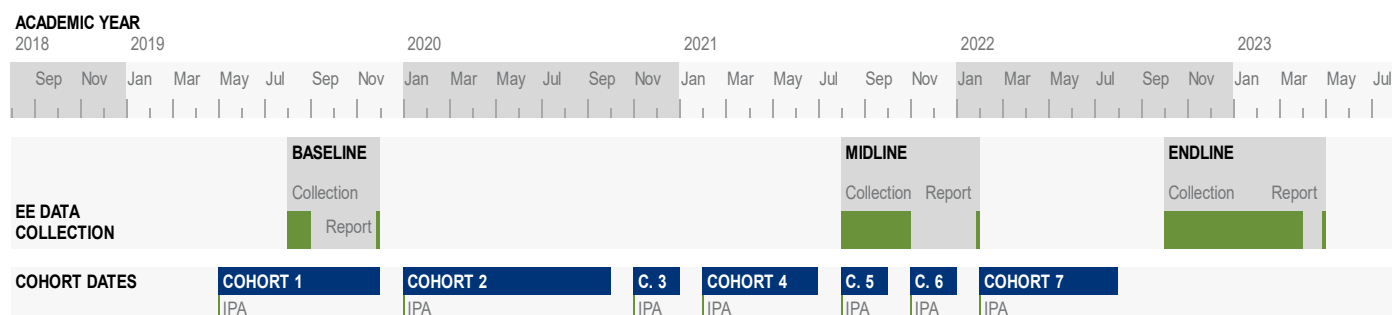
This project underwent significant changes from its original design, which initially envisaged enrolling four staggered cohorts (C1A, C1B¹, C2 and C3), each with different start dates and distinct geographic areas. The evaluation plan included two external evaluations (of C1A and C2), consisting of three data collection rounds (baseline, midline and endline) and follow-ups, combined with internal "light-touch" evaluations managed by the programme's MEL team (of C1B and C3) focusing on core learning and transition outcomes. For the external evaluation, C2 was initially intended to serve as a comparison group to gauge the project's impact on C1A, before eventually getting treatment after an 18-month intervention delay in different districts.

Table 3 provides a summary of the original design, as outlined in the baseline report, gathered between August 4 and September 10, 2019. *Figure 2* depicts how cohorts and evaluation activities were phased.

Table 3: Evaluation dates by cohort planned at baseline

Cohort	Start Date	Baseline	Midline	Endline	Completion	Review	Follow-up	Follow-up 2
C1A	June 2019	July 2019 (external)	July-September 2020 (external)	August-October 2021 (external)	May 2021 (optional extension)	--	August-October 2022	May-July 2024 (external)
C1B	January 2020	January-March 2020	January-March 2021	--	December 2021 (optional extension)	February-April 2022	May-July 2024	--
C2	January 2022	August-October 2021 (external)	November-January 2022	May-July 2024 (external)	December 2023 (optional extension)	--	--	--
C3	January 2023	August-October 2022	February-April 2024	--	December 2024	May-July 2024	--	--

Figure 2: Phasing of cohorts and evaluation activities



¹ C1A and C1B were originally distinguished by their start years, with C1A beginning in 2019 and C1B in 2020. After Covid, both cohorts were merged, and all girls from C1A and C1B were evaluated to assess their learning losses. Girls who passed the test remained in C1, while those who did not were classified as part of C2.

The midline evaluation was conducted internally by the project team. This report indicated that due to economic challenges and the Covid-19 pandemic, SAGE shifted from the four-cohort comparison model to a simplified pre-post evaluation model for six cohorts. The midline report, however, focused solely on comparing C1A, which had been under treatment for one year at the time of data collection, with the comparison group, C2, which had just started the intervention having just been exposed to 2-5 weeks of intervention. The rest of the cohorts had not started their interventions.

The **endline** data collection started in October 2022 and finished in May 2023. This evaluation presents the main outcomes comparing baseline, midline and endline for seven cohorts – they remove the distinction between cohorts C1A and C1B, and added a new cohort, C7.

Table 4 presents information about the intervention time for each of the cohorts that are evaluated and presented at endline. In the interview with the IP, they explained that the entry dates for the different cohorts spanned several months because girls joined the project at different times. This was mainly due to initial scepticism about what the project offered, and only when the information spread did girls start participating in the project. The learning results in the endline reports were produced through three tests: (1) Initial Progress Assessments (IPA); (2) Midline Progress Assessments (MPA); and (3) Endline Progress Assessments (EPA) standardised tests designed by the Open University. The baseline (IPA) was conducted as soon as girls joined the programme, the midline (MPA) evaluation for each cohort was conducted approximately one year after the cohort started, and the endline (EPA) evaluation two years after.

Table 4: Dates, samples, and number of districts by cohort supported by the SAGE project

Cohort	Number of districts	Entry date	Number of girls enrolled
Cohort 1	7	May 2019 – Dec 2019	4,456
Cohort 2	4	Jan 2020 – Oct 2020	2,283
Cohort 3	11	Nov 2020 – Jan 2021	849
Cohort 4	11	Feb 2021 – July 2021	1,995
Cohort 5	11	Aug 2021 – Oct 2021	1,324
Cohort 6	11	Nov 2021 – Jan 2022	1,356
Cohort 7	11	Feb 2022 – Aug 2022	1,197
Total	11	May 2019 – Aug 2022	13,460

2. What outcomes did the project deliver?

2.1. Review of changes to Logframe outcome indicators

To evaluate the project's effectiveness, two external evaluations (baseline and endline) and an alternative midline assessment were produced. Baseline data collection was conducted before the Covid-19 pandemic started and initially intended to evaluate the project based on a staggered cohort structure with four groups (C1A, C1B, C2, C3), each beginning at different times to facilitate a comparative evaluation approach. The report itself presents results for two of these cohorts, C1A and C2, where C1A was the first treatment group, while C2 served as a comparison group prior to receiving the intervention. This evaluation used a mixed-methods approach.

Due to economic challenges and the Covid-19 pandemic, this initial design was modified, expanding from four cohorts to seven (C1A, C1B, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6) and shifting the evaluation approach from a comparative cohort model based on the staggered intervention to a pre-post model. Despite this change, the midline assessment presented results only for two cohorts, maintaining C1A as the treatment group, now with one year of exposure to the intervention, while C2, which had only recently begun treatment (approximately five weeks in), continued to function as a comparison group. The midline evaluation was managed internally by the SAGE consortium, using a mixed-methods approach, but lacking the longitudinal tracking originally planned. This evaluation was cross-sectional, meaning that although the same cohorts were evaluated as the baseline, the same girls were not necessarily contacted. This adaptation preserved a means of gauging progress while adjusting to the constraints of limited resources and the pandemic.

Finally, the endline evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach and a longitudinal framework, recontacting girls from the midline across all seven cohorts, including a new cohort (C7). The distinction between C1A and C1B was also removed. After Covid-19, all girls from C1 (A and B) were invited to take an evaluation module to assess their learning situation post-pandemic. Those who passed the evaluation remained in C1, while those who did not were considered part of C2.

The outcomes covered in this report focus on learning and transition. Enrolment is not covered. The enrolment indicator was introduced by the Fund Manager in 2021 after the Baseline Report.

2.1.1. Review of changes to the Learning Outcome Indicator

At baseline, the SAGE project intended to measure learning outcomes through the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) for literacy and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA)², employing a staggered cohort design to facilitate a Difference-in-Difference (DiD) estimator approach for C1A as a treated group and C2 as a comparison.

Screening assessments were conducted to determine the eligibility of girls for the project, particularly focusing on those who had dropped out of school after Grade 5 and were found to be performing below the expected Grade 5 levels. The Baseline Report presented the results of Cohorts C1A³ (treatment) and C2 (control as not yet treated) in learning assessments and compared their EGMA and EGRA results against the established benchmarks. Based on this diagnostic, the baseline aimed to establish benchmarks by comparing the progress of the cohorts as they began their respective interventions. These benchmarks for learning outcomes at baseline were derived from data collected from girls enrolled in formal school in Grades 3, 5, and 7, reflecting the expected literacy and numeracy competencies associated with those grade levels within the formal education system.

At midline, the assessment framework shifted from EGRA/ EGMA to the Learning Progress Assessment (LPA) model. The report indicates that the LPA (Learning Progress Assessment) model was developed to better suit the specific needs of the SAGE project's target group, which includes girls with diverse educational backgrounds. Unlike traditional assessments like EGRA and EGMA, which focus on standardised benchmarks for formal schooling, the LPA model offers a more tailored approach for assessing learning outcomes in non-formal education (NFE) contexts⁴. This new model incorporates various assessment points: screening to determine eligibility, Initial Progress

² Both the learning assessments instructions were administered in Shona and Ndebele

³ The first cohort (C1A) had already commenced activities approximately two months prior to the baseline data collection.

⁴ The SAGE team recognised that EGRA and EGMA were insufficient for capturing the full range of achievements of SAGE girls, who face various intersectional barriers. Therefore, the assessments were designed to be conversational and supportive, allowing girls to respond comfortably. Additionally, the SAGE team deemed it unethical to administer formal tests due to the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Assessments (IPA), Mid Progress Assessments (MPA), and End Progress Assessments (EPA)⁵, enabling tracking of literacy (local and English) and numeracy progress across all cohorts.

In addition to changing the learning assessments, the evaluation methodology was also modified at midline. Originally designed to evaluate four cohorts, the project expanded this to six cohorts, incorporating IPA, MPA, and EPA for each of them (except for Cohort 1, which had already started, so they skipped BL). The midline report indicates that the estimation of learning outcomes would be measured at endline, applying a before-and-after estimation for each cohort.

At midline, the SAGE project presented a cross-sectional analysis comparing the MPA results from Cohort 1A, which had undergone one year of intervention, with the IPA results from Cohort 2, which had just started its intervention. This approach provided insights into the immediate impacts of the programme by evaluating the differences between a 1 year treated cohort and one that was newly initiated, effectively representing a before-and-after comparison.

Table 5 presents the evaluation status and plans by cohort at the time of the midline evaluation.

Table 5: Dates for Learning Progress Assessments by cohort planned at midline

Cohort	Total	Date Enrolled	Screening	IPA	MPA	EPA
Cohort 1a ¹	2713	May 2019 - Dec 2019	Partial ²		Nov - Dec 2020	Mar 22
Cohort 1b	1743	Dec 2020 - Jan 2021		Jan - Feb 2021		Mar 22
Cohort 2	2285	Jan 2020 - Oct 2020		Nov - Dec 2020	Feb - Mar 2022	Dec - 22
Cohort 3	849	Nov 2020 - Jan 2021		Dec 2020 - Jan 2021	Apr - May 2022 ³	TBC
Cohort 4	1996	Feb 2021 - July 2021		Feb 2021 - Aug 2021	Dec 22 ³	TBC
Cohort 5	1324	Aug 2021 - Oct 2021		Aug 2021 - Nov 2021	Dec 22 ³	TBC
Cohort 6	957	Nov 2021 to Jan 2022		Jan 2022 - Feb 2022	Dec 22	TBC

Note: Green: completed. Red: Not completed. Yellow: to be completed. Tbc: to be completed.

¹ Cohort 1 was split into two sub-groups: Cohort 1a (2,713 girls) enrolled in 2019 and completed the Mid Progress Assessment (MPA) without an Initial Progress Assessment (IPA), as they had been in the programme before LPA's rollout. They completed the End Progress Assessment (EPA) in early 2022, allowing progress tracking from MPA to EPA. Cohort 1b (1,743 girls) enrolled later and completed the IPA but not the MPA due to rolling enrolment; they will also complete the EPA, enabling progress tracking from IPA to EPA. ² Screening tests were conducted post-enrolment on 2,612 girls, or 64% of the total beneficiaries in C1A. ³ For Cohorts 3 to 5, although some Initial Progress Assessment (IPA) data were gathered during 2021, it was collected on a rolling basis after the analysis process had commenced. Additionally, Covid-19-related lockdowns caused delays in the timely sharing of this data by the hub teams.

The endline evaluation assessed learning outcomes based on the FM's line of evidence number one: "improvement in mean score over prior timepoint". For this, the evaluation was based on a longitudinal analysis of learning data for SAGE learners from the recontacted⁶ sample of girls.

The assessment considered the same subjects as the midline evaluation i.e. numeracy and literacy – girls could choose whether to do the test in the local language or English. Results from the learning assessments were presented in two distinct analyses at endline. The first analysis, *Learning outcome findings*, included all learners with data from at least one evaluation point, assessing scores by cohort at each assessment stage (IPA, MPA, and EPA) and highlighting the differences in scores between points. Although this constitutes a longitudinal analysis, as many girls had data for two or more points, it also incorporates results from girls who provided data for only one evaluation point. The second analysis, *Learning score progression*, focused exclusively on learners with data from two or more points, comparing each student to their previous assessments within a longitudinal framework. Essentially, this means that each student was evaluated based on their own earlier performance rather than against the scores of other students. This method helps eliminate the potential bias of attributing the results to differing profiles among the girls in each evaluation round.

⁵ Initial Progress Assessment (IPA): The IPA was conducted within two to five weeks of a girl joining the SAGE programme and was carried out by the Community Educators (CEs). The IPA serves as a starting point for assessing the girl's actual learning level and the CE's understanding of her needs.

Mid-Progress Assessment (MPA): The MPA was administered to girls midway through their SAGE learning journey by CEs, following the completion of Module 1c (equivalent to one year of the two-year learning programme).

End Progress Assessment (EPA): The EPA occurs when a girl completes the SAGE programme at the end of Module 2c (Year 2). The EPA is designed to capture the girl's progress from the initial data point to the endpoint as she graduates from SAGE.

⁶ In instances where recontacting sufficient participants proved challenging, new girls were included in these data collection phases to maintain the integrity of the evaluations.

Table 6 presents the number of learners who were considered by types of analysis, allowing comparison of sample size for each LPA.

Table 6: Sample size of each Learning Progress Assessment by cohort

Cohort	Total learners in cohort	Analysis with the whole sample (1)				Analysis with longitudinal sample (2)			
		Total learners for whom LPA data is available	IPA data	MPA data	EPA data	Data availability			
						IPA+EPA	IPA+MPA	MPA+EPA	IPA+MPA+EPA
Cohort 1	4456	3612	0	3093	3010	0	0	2491	0
Cohort 2	2285	2003	1477	1188	1073	666	1002	984	509
Cohort 3	849	849	777	360	234	174	311	129	46
Cohort 4	1996	1262	1081	730	429	311	702	170	102
Cohort 5	1324	1168	912	369	227	120	234	94	54
Cohort 6	1386	1333	1289	693	362	343	601	362	243
Cohort 7	1164	1169	1164	396	381	377	332	309	273
Total	13,460	11395	6700	6829	5716	1991	3182	4539	1227

Table 7 summarises the main changes in the Learning outcomes through the evaluation rounds.

Table 7: Summary of changes in measurement to learning outcomes

Parameters	Literacy			Numeracy		
Evaluation round	BL	ML	EL	BL	ML	EL
Instrument	EGRA	LPA	LPA	EGMA	LPA	LPA
Language assessed	English or local language	English or local language	English or local language	—	—	—
Comparison group	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Sample of girls	OOS	OOS	OOS	OOS	OOS	OOS
Sample size	T:459 C:264	IPA: 756 MPA: 2,713	IPA: 6,700 MPA: 6,829 EPA: 5,716	T:459 C:264	IPA: 756 MPA: 2,713	IPA: 6,700 MPA: 6,829 EPA: 5,716
Planned date ¹	—	—	—	—	—	—
Evaluation date	Aug- Sept 2019	Aug – Nov 2021	Oct 2022- May 2023	Aug- Sept 2019	Aug – Nov 2021	Oct 2022- May 2023

¹ The planned dates were done by cohort; these are presented in *Table 4*.

2.1.2. Review of changes to the Transition Outcome Indicator

A successful transition for girls in the SAGE programme was defined as their movement from non-formal learning hubs into formal education, vocational training, or employment. Girls aged 10 and above may transition into formal education grades. For girls aged 15 and older, transitioning into vocational or life skills training encompasses enrolment in formal vocational colleges or training offered by NGOs and government initiatives, including SAGE's Integrated Skills Outreach Programme ISOP. Transitioning into fairly paid employment⁷ was also targeted for girls aged 16 and above, which included both formal and informal jobs, such as farm work, domestic help, and retail positions. It is important to note that transitioning into employment is not considered successful for those under 16. Additionally, self-employment initiatives for girls aged 15 and older were recognised as valid transitions if they generated income for their upkeep, encompassing both individual and group ventures.

⁷ Industries which are not classified as fairly paid or gainful are sex work, illegal mining activities, etc.

At baseline, transition rates could not be measured due to a lack of comparison points; however, the project did assess *intentions* to transition based on survey data. This baseline data aimed to capture girls' intentions and anticipated needs for these pathways, with data collected for C1A. Transition indicators were designed to monitor formal schooling re-enrolment, vocational interest, and employment readiness. Additionally, transition benchmarks were estimated based on surveys conducted with girls in Grades 3, 5, and 7.

At midline, transition rates were measured through a survey targeting girls identified as being at high risk of dropping out, based on monitoring data that indicated inconsistent attendance patterns⁸. This approach allowed the programme to focus on those most vulnerable to disengagement and to gather insights into their experiences and pathways⁹. The survey aimed to assess the transitions these girls made, whether into employment, self-employment, vocational training, or formal education. However, it is important to note that the midline evaluation could not provide definitive transition rates since no cohort had completed the programme at that time.

In the SAGE endline evaluation, transition was measured using monitoring data to analyse transition pathways in Cohorts 1 and 2, as these were the only cohorts with sufficient exposure to the programme's interventions. Additionally, the girls' and household surveys contained questions to identify barriers to and the effectiveness of transitions for girls. For Cohorts 1 and 2, the survey captured their transition outcomes at a point when they finished the learning programme, allowing evaluators to assess their movement into formal education, vocational training, employment, or self-employment. [Table 8](#) summarises changes in the measurement to transition outcomes.

Table 8: Summary of changes in measurement to transition outcomes

		Intention to transition rate	Intermediate transition rate	Transition rate
	Parameters	BL	ML	EL
Parameters	Instrument	Girls Survey	Girls Survey	Monitoring Data
	Comparison group	No	No	No
	Sample of girls	OOS	OOS	OOS
	Sample size	T:399 (C1) Benchmark: 212	1,561 (C1)	6,739 (C1 and C2)
Evaluation dates (data collection)	Planned date	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
	Evaluation date	Aug- Sept 2019	Aug – Nov 2021	Oct 2022-May 2023

2.2. Outcome results

2.2.1. Learning outcomes

Baseline to Midline

To evaluate the learning gains of girls, a baseline assessment was conducted using the EGRA and EGMA tests, with Cohort 1A (C1A) serving as the treated group and Cohort 2 (C2) as the comparison group. Additionally, benchmark scores were estimated from girls in formal schooling. Aggregate scores were calculated based on the percentage of correct answers for each subtask of the tests, with all subtasks weighted equally. The EGRA test for literacy included seven subtasks: letter sound identification, familiar word reading, oral reading fluency (both short and long stories), reading comprehension (both short and long stories), and listening comprehension. The EGMA test for numeracy included eight subtasks: number recognition, quantity discrimination, missing numbers, two levels of addition and subtraction, and word problems.

At baseline, no significant differences were observed between the C1A and C2 cohorts in either literacy or numeracy. Both cohorts performed significantly lower than the benchmark Grade 5 group but slightly higher than Grade 3 in some subtasks. Overall, girls in the treatment cohort struggled more with literacy than with numeracy, particularly in the reading and listening comprehension subtasks, as well as the decoding subtasks. More than one-third (41.61%) of girls scored as non-readers in the short reading comprehension subtask, and almost half (48.15%) were non-learners in the long reading comprehension subtask.

⁸ This is not mentioned in the report, but it is expected that this survey was done only for girls in C1A given the fact that girls were targeted based on their attendance rates.

⁹ This was not a representative survey from the programme, they only focused on girls with a higher probability of drop-out.

Despite these results, one conclusion from the baseline is that both the **EGRA and EGMA assessments appear to exhibit ceiling effects**, identifying significant challenges with the learning assessments' ability to capture growth over time. Among the EGRA subtasks, familiar word reading and oral reading fluency for both short and long passages were identified as unlikely to measure progress effectively, with over one-third of girls in the treatment cohort already proficient on these tasks. The only tasks with no ceiling effect were reading comprehension (short and long passage) and listening comprehension. Similar patterns were observed among the group of in-school girls assessed as a benchmark for the Grade 5 group. On the EGMA, all subtasks except the missing number subtask demonstrated ceiling effects.

The findings suggest that the programme has **enrolled girls who, on average, demonstrate relatively high overall scores but still perform poorly in specific subtasks such as reading and listening comprehension**. The report indicates that as the girls' literacy skills are comparable to those of Grade 5 students in formal schooling, the first-year intervention materials, designed for ECD-Grade 3 level, may be misaligned with the learning needs of some participants.

At the midline assessment of the SAGE programme, learning outcomes were evaluated using a new assessment framework (Learning Progress Assessment) that categorised scores into distinct bands: 0-15 (no score), 16-33 (ECD-Grade 2), 34-60 (Grade 2-4), and 61-81 (Grade 5+). This evaluation included the Initial Progress Assessment (IPA) for Cohort 2 and the Mid Progress Assessment (MPA) for Cohort 1A, focusing on selected cohorts. This will allow comparison between IPA in the comparison group and MPA in the treatment group. The literacy assessments were conducted by comparing the cross-sectional results from both groups. No benchmark comparison is introduced in this evaluation round.

For literacy, the Initial Progress Assessment (IPA) included several subtasks: Speaking and Listening, Letter/Sound Knowledge, Word Reading, Picture Reading, Reading, Comprehension, and Writing, for a total of 81 points. In the Midline Progress Assessment (MPA), Short Passage Reading was added, and the scoring for the other subtasks was adjusted, raising the total to 87 points. The numeracy assessments in both the IPA and MPA featured the same subtasks, divided into two categories: Number Sense, which included Counting, Number Recognition, Missing Numbers, Comparing and Ordering Numbers, and Place Value; and Number Operations, which encompassed Addition, Subtraction, Multiplication, and Division.

Findings from the midline indicate that 15% of girls performed at the Grade 5+ level in literacy during the IPA, while 17% did so in numeracy. These figures increased to 54% for literacy and 47% for numeracy at the MPA. The analysis must be conducted for each category of results, as no mean scores are presented for the entire test. [Table 9](#) present learning scores at IPA, MPA and EPA in treatment groups.

Table 9: Learning scores at IPA, MPA and EPA in treatment groups

Cohort	Parameter	English - Local Literacy		Numeracy	
		BL	ML	BL	IPA
Cohort 1A – Cohort 2	Instrument	EGRA (C1A) / IPA (C2)	MPA	EGMA (C1A) / IPA (C2)	MPA
	Treated (%) C1A	44.55	No score 6% ECD-Grade 2 8% Grade 2-4 32% Grade 5+ 54%	66.25	No score 12% ECD-Grade 2 7% Grade 2-4 34% Grade 5+ 47%
	Control (%) C2	41.82	No score 18% ECD-Grade 2 29% Grade 2-4 37% Grade 5+ 15%	67.65	No score 27% ECD-Grade 2 14% Grade 2-4 41% Grade 5+ 17%
	Benchmark G3 (%)	38.75	—	65.93	—
	Benchmark G5 (%)	49.18	—	78.90	—
	Benchmark G7 (%)	67.40	—	87.74	—
	Comparison against the Benchmark	Grade 7 significantly higher than C1A & C2	—	Grade 5 and 7 significantly higher than C1A & C2	—

Midline to Endline

The SAGE Programme's endline evaluation employed a longitudinal study design to assess the impact of its interventions over time, comparing results with those from the midline evaluation. The evaluation specifically addressed seven cohorts of participants. At endline, the results of IPA (2 to 5 weeks since the programme started), MPA (1 year) and EPA (2 years) are presented for all the cohorts except C1A that did not have IPA. The same subtasks were considered for the three evaluations.

The endline report declared as a target that 65% of girls improve their learning in the EPA for literacy and numeracy. This report presents results through two distinct analyses: (1) the findings on learning outcomes for girls with at least one evaluation point; and (2) the assessment of learning score progression based on longitudinal data.

Learning outcome findings

The learning outcomes were initially assessed for all girls with data from at least one evaluation point. The results indicate that **70.6% of girls achieved the highest category of literacy, while 71.9% reached the same level in numeracy**, which corresponds to Grade 5 and above. This reflects the fact that more than three-quarters of the girls – 76.7% in literacy and 78.9% in numeracy – improved their scores in the endline assessment, exceeding the initial target of 65%. The report highlights that the most significant improvements came from girls who performed weakest at baseline, aligning with the project's theory of change, which focused on foundational skills. Non-learners at baseline improved their learning by an average of three grades between the Initial Progress Assessment (IPA) and the Endline Progress Assessment (EPA). **Girls made significant progress in their learning from the IPA (or MPA for Cohort 1) to the EPA across all cohorts and in all subtasks for both literacy and numeracy.**

Learning score progression

The longitudinal analysis reveals a significant overall improvement for literacy of 27.38 points from IPA to MPA. The improvement between the MPA and the EPA was also significant but smaller, at 12.32 points. This results in a substantial overall increase of 39.7 points from the IPA to the EPA, which is statistically significant. For numeracy, the results follow a similar pattern but show a more consistent increase across the different assessments: an increase of 16.19 points from IPA to MPA, 16.44 points from MPA to EPA, and 32.63 points from IPA to EPA, all statistically significant.

Analysing the results by cohort reveals significant increases in literacy and numeracy scores between the IPA and MPA, the MPA and EPA, and the IPA and EPA for each cohort.

The learning progression scores indicate that literacy improvements were greater in the first half of the programme compared to the second half, whereas numeracy improvements were consistent throughout. This varying rate of improvement in literacy and numeracy aligns with established findings in accelerated learning programmes. Research¹⁰ indicates that learners often experience more significant and rapid advancements during the initial stages of such programmes. *Table 10* shows the learning scores at IPA, MPA and EPA in treatment groups.

Table 10: Learning scores at IPA, MPA and EPA in treatment groups

Cohort	Parameter	English - Local Literacy			Numeracy		
		IPA ¹	MPA	EPA	IPA ¹	MPA	EPA
Cohort 1 - Cohort 7	Instrument	LPA	LPA	LPA	LPA	LPA	LPA
	Treated (%)	41.42	68.80	81.12	47.10	63.29	79.73
	Target (% of girls who improve their score)	—	—	65%	—	—	65%
	Difference with the target	—	—	(~11.71%)	—	—	(~13.9%)
	% of girls who reach the level G5+	7.76%	—	70.55%	10.37%	—	71.92%

¹⁰ Based on the literature, in the early phases, students focus on mastering essential components of literacy — such as letters, words, sentences, and verbal comprehension — rather than tackling more complex tasks related to reading fluency and comprehension. While these advanced skills are introduced, substantial progress in these areas is less common during the initial programme stages, with notable gains primarily in simpler tasks.

Cohort	Parameter	English - Local Literacy			Numeracy		
		IPA ¹	MPA	EPA	IPA ¹	MPA	EPA
	Results IPA to MPA (B&A)	—	27.38***	—	—	16.19***	—
	Results MPA to EPA (B&A)	—	—	12.32***	—	—	16.44***
	Results IPA to EPA (B&A)	—	—	39.70***	—	—	32.63***

Note: Difference coefficients with three asterisks are significant at the 99% confidence level (P-value lower than 0.01=1%), two asterisks are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level (P-value lower than 0.05 = 5%). Those with one asterisk are statistically significant at the 90% level (P-value lower than 0.1 = 10%). ¹ This score does not include C1.

2.2.2. Conclusions

The SAGE programme demonstrated significant progress in learning outcomes, achieving a significant improvement in both literacy and numeracy across multiple cohorts. By the endline, more than 70% of girls achieved Grade 5 proficiency, and the project surpassed its target (65% of girls increase their score) by 11.71 points in literacy and 13.9 points in numeracy. This success was particularly evident among the girls who had the weakest performance in the IPA, reflecting the programme's focus on foundational skills and the effectiveness of its interventions. However, the evaluation also highlighted some limitations that need to be considered.

The shift in evaluation methodology from a comparative cohort design to a pre-post model, necessitated by external factors including the Covid-19 pandemic, diminished the ability to compare the treatment group against a comparison group. This change meant that the evaluation no longer considered the potential effects of external variables that could impact the learning outcomes, thereby raising concerns about the overall robustness of the findings. The staged intervention of the programme could have allowed them to compare their results against not yet treated comparison groups.

Additionally, it is important to note that the programme changed its learning assessment instrument from EGRA/EGMA at baseline to the Learning Progress Assessment (LPA) at midline. This change prevents a direct comparison with baseline results for Cohort 1A and inhibits comparisons against benchmarks established with in-school girls. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assert that the counterfactual for out-of-school (OOS) girls includes those who are not improving their learning. So, the gains in learning achieved through this project are significant and positive across all cohorts and subtasks.

2.2.3. Transition outcomes

At baseline, the programme assessed the *intention* to transition for participants in Cohort 1A and established benchmarks for in-school girls in Grades 3, 5, and 7 collectively. The findings revealed that a substantial majority of respondents preferred to transition into vocational training or employment /self-employment, with 47.6% and 47.1% expressing these intentions, respectively. In stark contrast, only 2.5% aimed to transition into formal schooling and 2.5% were not interested in transit or did not know. This preference was largely attributed to the ongoing economic crisis in Zimbabwe, which led to reduced household incomes and a high proportion of girls already involved in labour. By comparison, 95.8% of in-school girls indicated a desire to move into formal education, while none expressed an interest in vocational training and less than 1% aimed to transition into employment.

At midline and endline, the programme set a target of 60% for successful transitions into one of four pathways: (1) formal education, (2) vocational training, (3) employment, or (4) self-employment. At midline, the SAGE programme concentrated on equipping girls with the necessary skills for these transitions and conducted a survey targeting those at higher risk of dropping out of the programme. From the 1,561 girls surveyed, only 21% (321 girls) had transitioned to the second year of the project, falling short of the transition goal. Among these, 82% moved into either employment or self-employment. This survey is not representative of the girls' programme given that they exclusively targeted girls at risk of dropping out.

At the endline, the project continued to target a 60% transition rate into designated pathways. Transition rates were measured after the learning programme and before the vocational training phase. Results indicated that 77.7% of girls from Cohorts 1 and 2 successfully transitioned, with the majority (52.7%) entering vocational /skills programmes (Integrated Schooling and Out-of-School Programme - ISOP), followed by 20.6% transitioning into fairly paid employment. However, the report highlighted a limitation concerning the transition rates for girls who moved into the

ISOP programme. The programme did not collect sufficient data after the ISOP phase, which lasted only two months, resulting in inadequate information on post-ISOP outcomes for these girls. This lack of comprehensive data hindered the ability to assess the effectiveness of ISOP in facilitating successful long-term transitions, making it challenging to evaluate how well the ISOP component supports the intended transition goals. [Table 11](#) shows transition rates at baseline, midline and endline by treatment group.

Table 11: Transition rates at baseline, midline and endline in treatment groups

Parameters		Intention to transition rate	Intermediate transition rate	Transition rate
		BL	ML	EL
C1 and C2	Instrument	Girls Survey	Girls Survey	Monitoring Data
	Cohorts	C1A	C1A (sample not representative)	C1 and C2
	Treated	97.49%	21%	77.17% ¹
	Formal or non-Formal Education	2.76%	17%	4.91%
	Vocational training	47.62%	1%	52.69%
	Employment	47.12%	82%	23.6%
	Benchmark	96.73%	—	—
	Formal Education	95.79%	—	—
	Vocational training	0.00%	—	—
	Employment	0.93%	—	—
	Target B&A (%)	—	65%	65%
	Achievement against target	—	(~0%)	(~118.72%)

¹ Categories of transition pathway do not add 100% because girls can transit to more than one category.

2.2.4. Conclusions

The project only measured actual transition rates at endline. At baseline, the SAGE project did not assess transition rates because the girls had just begun the intervention; instead, it focused on evaluating *intentions* to transition. At midline, although transition rates were intended to be measured, Zimbabwe's prolonged lockdown—one of the longest in Africa—prevented girls from leaving their homes to access education, vocational training, or employment. As a result, the evaluation was limited to a specific at-risk cohort, which did not represent the broader group. While the endline measured transition with monitoring data, this was partly due to funding constraints at the time, as determined by the funder and fund manager. The highly mobile nature of the girls made tracing them costly, and with a priority placed on measuring learning outcomes, transition tracking was not prioritised within the available resources. Despite the positive aspirations expressed by this cohort, the **project did not meet its transition target**, highlighting the challenges faced by participants.

At endline, while a substantial percentage of girls successfully transitioned into various pathways, the **lack of comprehensive follow-up data** on those who moved into vocational training and employment restricted the ability to fully evaluate the project's long-term impact on the educational and career trajectories of participants. This situation underscores the necessity for ongoing assessments to ensure that transition outcomes are not only achieved but also sustained over time. Additionally, at the endline, only Cohorts 1 and 2 were included in the analysis, leaving out the other cohorts because their interventions were not finished. This implies that the results do not cover the whole project.

3. What intermediate outcomes did the project deliver?

3.1. Overall Project Performance

The SAGE project made notable progress against its intermediate outcomes (IOs), as evidenced by both secondary data sources and case study primary research. This was particularly evident in relation to Changing Community Attitudes and Norms (IO1), Improved Teaching (IO3), and Effective Management (IO4). It also empowered girls to gain confidence, take control of their futures, and participate actively in educational opportunities. These achievements were made possible through community-driven approaches, targeted financial and pedagogical interventions, and consistent efforts to address barriers to girls' education. This section provides a brief overview of the main reported changes according to secondary evaluation reports and case study primary research.

3.2. FM IO1: Changing community attitudes and norms – Changes in attitudes and perceptions towards girls and girls' education among male and female family and community members, educators, boys, and government officials

The case study primary research demonstrated that the project successfully reshaped entrenched perceptions regarding girls' education through an integrated approach involving intergenerational dialogues, community leader engagement, and tailored awareness campaigns. These interventions encouraged community members, including families and leaders, to reconsider their attitudes towards educating girls.

Engagement with initially resistant groups, such as the Apostolic¹¹ community, was key to changing norms. The project leveraged relationships with organisations like the Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust¹² (AWET) to challenge traditional practices and encourage acceptance of girls' education. Boys, too, were included in sessions focusing on gender equality and the rights of girls, which facilitated positive peer interactions.

Case study primary research respondents also stated that graduation ceremonies provided another opportunity for change, with husbands and fathers publicly celebrating their wives' and daughters' achievements, marking a cultural shift. These sessions emphasised the collective benefits of girls' education, leading to a broader acceptance of equal opportunities for all genders.

"In the case of boys, initially, there was some resistance to the project. Some boys believed that the focus on gender equality was about teaching girls how to control men, which negatively affected enrolment. However, over time, the dialogues helped them understand that the project was about fostering peaceful coexistence and mutual respect." (Community Educator KII)

3.3. FM IO2: Reducing financial barriers – Changes in financial barriers that improve the chances of girls participating in learning.

Although a smaller component of the project, interventions such as the provision of free learning materials and direct financial assistance aimed to alleviate financial barriers to education. Secondary evidence sources describe how the provision of textbooks and sanitary products helped to lower the cost of schooling for many participants. Community-led savings schemes, led by communities themselves, were another critical component, equipping families with financial literacy skills to manage resources effectively. Such initiatives were particularly impactful in rural areas, where economic pressures often resulted in early marriages or school dropouts.

"At the Learning Hubs, I felt safe and welcome since they provided us with learning materials and stationery, we never lacked anything." (Beneficiary girl FGD)

¹¹ The Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe is a classical, conservative Pentecostal Christian denomination in Zimbabwe.

¹² The Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust consists of a group of unified women who provide long-term vision and direction for the needs of all women by exploring the characteristics or spiritual disciplines needed for women to grow spiritually. The goal of this team is to show women the pathway for living for God, focusing on all women of all ages and stages in the Christian Walk: <https://awet.org.zw/>

3.4. FM IO3: Improved teaching – Improvements in the quality and effectiveness of teaching, facilitation, and support to learning

Both case study primary and secondary research sources emphasise the extent to which the project transformed teaching practices by equipping educators with skills in inclusive and gender-responsive pedagogy. Teachers participated in workshops on disability inclusion, safeguarding, and participatory methodologies, enabling them to adapt lessons to varied learner needs.

“Our teachers were always patient with us. I believe they were trained to teach and help us in the best way possible.” (Beneficiary girl FGD)

Mentorship by non-formal education (NFE) buddies also improved lesson delivery, with teachers demonstrating increased confidence in managing diverse classrooms. Interactive techniques, such as collaborative projects and real-life applications, were introduced, making sessions more engaging. Regular evaluations and refresher courses ensured sustained improvements, while the provision of quality teaching materials further supported effective instruction. These combined efforts resulted in notable improvements in literacy and numeracy outcomes, with participants expressing pride in their progress.

3.5. FM IO4: Effective management – Changes in leadership and management of formal and/or non-formal learning spaces and engagement of governance structures such as PTAs, BOMs, SMCs

Learning hubs were effectively managed through Hub Development Committees (HDCs), composed of parents, educators, and community leaders. These committees oversaw education hub operations, addressed absenteeism, and resolved conflicts.

“At the hub, volunteers were recruited to instruct the students, collaborating closely with the hub committee, which ensured active community involvement. The committee served as a representative of the community, facilitating a holistic management approach that included contributions from community members, SAGE, educators, and the students themselves. Furthermore, the project involved local leaders who played a crucial role in driving the initiative forward.” (Non-Formal Education Buddy KII)

Evaluation reports state that the involvement of local governance structures fostered accountability and encouraged collective ownership. HDCs collaborated with communities to implement sustainability projects, such as small businesses that generated funds for the hubs' upkeep. Despite occasional challenges, such as disputes over resource allocation, clear communication and defined roles helped mitigate conflicts. These efforts ensured the hubs' functionality and longevity.

3.6. FM IO5: Safer learning environments – Learning environments are safer and support girls' wellbeing, improved sexual and reproductive health and rights, reduced domestic violence

The project prioritised the creation of safe and inclusive learning spaces by upgrading infrastructure and introducing safeguarding mechanisms. Accessibility improvements included ramps, secure perimeters, and disability-friendly toilets, which made hubs welcoming to all learners. Both case study primary research and secondary sources described the perceived success of hygiene education, with the provision of sanitary items further supporting girls, reducing absenteeism linked to shame or health concerns. Sessions on gender-based violence (GBV) empowered girls to identify and report abuse, helping to make girls feel safer.

“On safeguarding, there was a reduction in child marriages. Child marriages were rampant in our area. By coming to the hub Monday and Wednesday, being kept busy with activities they were given by the CEs, this safeguarded the girls from getting into child marriages.” (Non-Formal Education Buddy KII)

Community-wide awareness campaigns complemented these measures, reinforcing the hubs' role as secure, respectful spaces. The hubs' location in respected community institutions, such as churches, further enhanced their safety and trustworthiness.

3.7. FM IO6: Empowering girls – Changes in girls' self-esteem, self-efficacy, confidence, and a sense of agency and empowered to make good choices for herself

The project focused on empowering girls by building their self-confidence and agency. Sessions on assertiveness, decision-making, and financial literacy equipped participants with practical skills to navigate challenges and advocate for their rights. Case study primary research demonstrated that role models – former participants who had successfully leveraged their education – served as inspiration, demonstrating the tangible benefits of sustained learning. Intergenerational dialogues also played a pivotal role, enabling girls to share their aspirations and receive encouragement from family members. These interventions collectively transformed how girls viewed themselves and their futures.

“The Champions of Girls' Education (COGE) sessions helped a lot, there are different modules about life in general. We had sixteen modules which taught something different about life in general. It helped build learners' confidence to talk about hygiene and etiquette, growing up etc. – those human rights and domestic violence. In fact, they learnt everything that makes one be worthy in society. There were activities in the modules that gave them confidence.” (Non-Formal Education Buddy KII)

3.8. FM IO7: Attendance – Changes in girls' attendance at opportunities for learning made available to them

Evaluation reports show that attendance rates improved substantially, thanks in part to the project implementing comprehensive strategies that addressed logistical and societal barriers. Flexible scheduling allowed girls to balance education with household responsibilities, ensuring consistent participation. Follow-ups by Hub Development Committees (HDCs) ensured that absentees were identified and encouraged to return, while the development of satellite hubs minimised travel-related challenges. The hubs' reputation as safe, inclusive, and engaging spaces further motivated attendance.

“As committee members there were times when we were supposed to make spot checks at the hub to see if learners were coming as per their agreed schedule. This helped or enabled us to make follow-ups on those learners who fell behind in attendance. The follow-ups made us understand if the learners were facing challenges in attending sessions either emanating from home or the hub. We could then have a dialogue with the concerned parties, and the learners could resume their normal sessions.” (Community Member KII)

4. What worked well/ less well and why?

4.1. Overall Project Performance

The project demonstrated notable successes, particularly in enhancing literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills, empowering participants with practical competencies that positively influenced their lives and communities. Effective community engagement fostered cultural shifts, increasing support for girls' education, and reducing harmful practices like early marriages. However, challenges such as inadequate start-up capital, resource limitations, and reliance on volunteers hindered sustainability. Flexibility and responsiveness to participant feedback emerged as critical areas for improvement to maximise the project's long-term impact and inclusivity.

4.2. What worked well in the project interventions?

The project delivered some transformative impacts, improving literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills among participants, which enabled practical applications like managing market sales, starting businesses, and contributing to household incomes. Tailored resources and accessible training ensured inclusivity, particularly for girls without prior education and married women. Community engagement with leaders and figures in positions of cultural influence led to widespread support for girls' education, challenging traditional norms and reducing early marriages and domestic violence. Life skills training enhanced confidence, decision-making, and communication, leading to positive changes in family dynamics and community relationships. Role models and success stories inspired participants to pursue education and entrepreneurship, creating a ripple effect of empowerment. Capacity-building for educators and robust community structures ensured sustainability and local ownership of the project's aims.

4.2.1. Accelerated Teaching and Learning

The Accelerated Teaching and Learning (ATL) approach greatly improved participants' literacy and numeracy skills. Case study primary research respondents described how because of the effectiveness of literacy lessons, they managed to progress from recognising letters to constructing sentences and understanding comprehension passages. Numeracy improvements included mastering addition, subtraction, and profit-loss calculations. For example, one participant used these skills to independently calculate change during banana sales, reducing losses due to previous mismanagement. Evaluation reports found that the project's tailored modules and resources, including individual workbooks, flip charts, and group activities, created a conducive learning environment that was particularly effective for girls who had never attended school.

"As part of the project, we were taught basic numeracy skills, which enabled me to sell bananas more effectively at the market. I learned to manage my sales and calculate my profits." (Beneficiary Girl FGD)

4.2.2. Vocational skills training

The Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOP), providing hands-on training in practical skills such as baking, dressmaking, and hairdressing, which were described by case study primary research beneficiaries as highly relevant to community needs. Partnerships with local craftsmen and community-based training ensured accessibility and cultural appropriateness, allowing married women to participate without disrupting family dynamics. Vocational certificates further boosted participants' credibility and employability within their communities and participants reported that they were able to secure educational placements, start small businesses or earn supplementary income using their new skills, supported by their official documentation.

"Master crafts tutors (individuals experienced in a specific trade taught by the ISOP) would teach skills. For example, for our dressmaking class, the Fashion and Fabrics teacher at Mafarikwa secondary school assisted us while a local man who runs his own bakery taught baking. Everyone who participated in the SAGE project was highly skilled in what they did which made classes to be seamless." (Community Educator KII)

4.2.3. Community engagement and leadership

Evaluation reports state that the project's strategic involvement of community leaders, including village heads and religious figures such as members of the Apostolic community, was instrumental in shifting attitudes toward girls' education. By facilitating workshops on gender equality and intergenerational dialogues, the project fostered trust and

mutual understanding, encouraging conservative groups to support the initiative. Case study primary research demonstrated that testimonies from project alumni and community educators further persuaded sceptical parents, as evidence of the tangible value of education was presented by fellow community-members.

“The project effectively engaged community leaders, health officials, church representatives, and businesspeople, which significantly influenced how families, teachers, boys, and government officials perceive girls and their education. By involving these key stakeholders in discussions and activities related to girls’ education, the project fostered a broader understanding of its importance and helped shift cultural norms. This collaborative approach not only raised awareness but also encouraged community support for girls pursuing their education. The active participation of influential figures in the community created a supportive environment that reinforced the value of educating girls and challenged existing biases against them.” (Non-Formal Education Buddy)

Village heads and other community leaders actively championed girls’ education, which led to increased enrolment and helped to cultivate a collective sense of responsibility among families. Case study primary research shows that their advocacy challenged patriarchal norms that traditionally devalued girls’ education, legitimising the initiative and creating a more inclusive environment. Evaluation reports highlight how this cultural shift was epitomised by sceptical Apostolic communities building schools, such as St. Noah College, showcasing the transformative impact of the project.

4.2.4. Behavioural and cultural shifts, improved confidence and decision-making

Both case study primary research and evaluation reports state that the project greatly enhanced girls’ confidence, communication skills, and decision-making abilities through life skills training, assertiveness modules, and a gender-focused curriculum. Case study participants reported improvements in self-presentation and hygiene, leading to positive shifts in parental attitudes toward girls’ education in the sense that they began to consent more readily to their daughters’ participation, recognising the benefits of improved discipline, self-presentation, and communication skills facilitated by the project.

Structured training on assertiveness and safeguarding enabled girls to make independent decisions and assert their rights in various aspects of life. Many participants experienced better interactions at home and within the community, including improved relationships with spouses and greater involvement in family and community affairs. Peer discussions and intergenerational dialogues reinforced these shifts, addressing family and community issues while engendering mutual respect for education. This ripple effect of empowerment extended to broader community changes, supported by peer networks and the curriculum’s focus on gender equality.

“I must say that the project has been a game-changer for our girls. Initially, we didn’t know what to expect, but the various programmes within the project have helped our daughters develop invaluable skills. They’ve become more respectful, and their general hygiene has improved significantly. It’s heartwarming to see them apply their newfound skills in their daily lives.” (Female Parents /Caregivers FGD)

4.2.5. Role models and entrepreneurial success

Case study primary research shows that role models played a pivotal role in inspiring and empowering the girls participating in the project. Former participants who had successfully transitioned into employment or entrepreneurship returned to share their stories, serving as tangible examples of what could be achieved through education and skill development. These role models, often women who had overcome serious societal and personal challenges, provided practical insights into the pathways to success. For instance, girls were inspired by peers who had started their own businesses in baking, tailoring, and hairdressing.

During intergenerational dialogues and public gatherings, role models spoke openly about their experiences, highlighting how their skills not only transformed their lives but also contributed positively to their families and communities. This approach fostered both a sense of aspiration and relatability among current learners, who began to view education as a stepping stone to independence and success. By witnessing the tangible outcomes of these role models’ efforts, many girls gained the confidence to challenge traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Additionally, their achievements were frequently cited in community discussions as evidence of the importance of continued investment in girls’ education and training, reinforcing the long-term value of the project.

“A majority of the girls who participated in activities at the hub are now empowered and have started their own businesses. The project has created a ripple effect within the community. Women and girls who attended the hubs became role models, inspiring others to join and learn new skills. The skills training and startup kits

provided by SAGE enabled these girls to become self-reliant, contributing not only to their households but also to the local economy.” (Village Head KII)

4.2.6. Reduction in early marriage and domestic violence

Both case study primary research and evaluation reports show that the project contributed to a decline in early marriages and domestic violence within participating communities. Targeted campaigns, intergenerational dialogues, and structured activities at the hubs helped keep girls safe and occupied, reducing the pressure for early marriages. Apostolic communities, traditionally resistant to girls' education, experienced a cultural shift through safeguarding lessons and gender equality sessions, fostering greater protection and educational opportunities for girls. Collaborations with local leaders, families, and child protection committees reinforced these changes, creating safer households and empowering girls to report abuse. These efforts educated families on the importance of safeguarding and supported a broader cultural transformation in conservative communities.

“Gender-based Violence was rampant within this community due to a lack of literacy; most young wives would be physically assaulted by their husbands due to the misappropriation of family funds because they were illiterate. After the enrolment of these young wives into SAGE, there has been a decline in GBV cases as they gained literacy and numeracy skills. The gender and safeguarding lessons were an eye-opener to Community Leaders on some social ills like child marriages, which were a common practice due to religious beliefs. SAGE, through safeguarding, helped the girls realise the disadvantages of early onset of sexual activities.” (Female Parent/ Caregivers FGD)

4.2.7. Capacity building for staff

Educators interviewed for the case study primary research described how regular training workshops equipped Community Educators (CEs) and Buddy Teachers with enhanced teaching methodologies and skills in inclusive education. These workshops included training in sign language, braille, and gender-sensitive teaching strategies, which improved educators' ability to cater to diverse learners, particularly those with disabilities. Additionally, capacity-building efforts focused on safeguarding empowered educators to create safe and supportive learning environments. These training sessions also fostered collaboration among staff, enabling them to share best practices and troubleshoot challenges collectively.

4.2.8. Hub Development Committees

Evaluation reports noted that the Hub Development Committees (HDCs) were vital to the success of the learning hubs, developing strong community ownership and ensuring smooth operations. Comprising parents, community leaders, and educators, the committees acted as a bridge between the community and the project. Their inclusive structure encouraged active participation and accountability, aligning the hubs with local needs.

HDCs excelled in responsive decision-making, addressing challenges such as infrastructure issues and learner absenteeism. For instance, they mobilised resources to repair damaged facilities and worked with families to improve attendance during farming seasons. These efforts ensured the hubs remained functional and accessible. By maintaining the hubs and reinforcing the importance of education, HDCs delivered lasting benefits to the community. They enhanced the hubs' sustainability, fostered a supportive environment for learners, and strengthened the community's commitment to education. Their active role highlighted the value of local engagement in driving sustainable development outcomes.

Transformative impact on Apostolic communities

Secondary endline evaluation reports found that girls from Apostolic communities, who had initially been resistant to the project, showed remarkable improvement, surpassing other groups in terms of their learning results. As detailed further in [Section 4.2.6](#), the project exposed them to new opportunities, leading to increased participation, establishment of child protection committees, and reduced gender-based violence due to women's economic contributions. Notably, case study primary research respondents emphasised the importance of the discussions facilitated by the AWET, which helped to challenge traditional norms and support girls' education within these communities.

“Organisations such as AWET are working to inform the Apostolic community about the benefits of educating girls. Initially, attendance at these sessions was low; however, over time, participation has increased, indicating a positive transformation within our community.” (Non-Formal Education Buddy KII).

4.3. What worked less well in the SAGE project interventions?

The project faced several challenges that limited its impact and undermined the efficient delivery of activities. A lack of start-up capital hindered participants' ability to apply vocational skills effectively, with insufficient funds to purchase equipment and ineligibility of girls to access microfinance options leaving many reliant on external support. Limited training durations and inadequate resources, including shared or outdated equipment, constrained skill development and scalability. Additionally, the reliance on community educators awaiting deployment to formal teaching roles led to high turnover, disrupting learning continuity and highlighting the need for sustainable funding and retention strategies. Inclusive education efforts were also hampered by the removal of specialised learner assistants, leaving participants with disabilities without adequate support in some cases. Initial community resistance to age restrictions during enrolment created tensions, though adaptive responses allowed for the inclusion of older learners, showcasing the importance of flexibility and communication in addressing local concerns. These challenges demonstrate the need for sustained resources, strategic planning, and inclusive approaches to maximise the project's long-term impact.

4.3.1. Lack of start-up capital

Although participants acquired valuable vocational skills, case study primary research respondents complained that their ability to implement them was hindered by insufficient financial resources. For example, dressmaking graduates lacked funds to purchase sewing machines, and bakers struggled to afford ingredients to sustain their businesses. The inadequate funding severely limited the project's potential for sustained economic empowerment and left many participants reliant on external support. For many participants, their ineligibility for microfinance opportunities and a lack of partnerships with financial institutions compounded this issue.

"The project did not end well as it did not empower us with capital to grow and nurture our project. If there is still a chance to garner funding, may SAGE consider its ISOP beneficiaries." (Beneficiary Girls FGD)

4.3.2. Limited scalability of vocational skills

Case study primary research shows that while theoretical knowledge improved, some participants expressed frustration over insufficient resources to practice newly learnt vocational skills such as dressmaking effectively. While the ISOP provided a strong foundation, the short duration of training – typically one to two months – was insufficient for participants to master advanced skills. Additionally, the lack of modern equipment, such as electric sewing machines, constrained participants' ability to master their new vocation or subsequently scale their businesses and compete in the local market. These limitations emphasised the need for extended training periods and improved resources to maximise the project's impact.

"The dressmaking and sewing class faced significant challenges due to the presence of only one sewing machine, which was utilised by the instructor for demonstrations. This situation was exacerbated by the large number of students enrolled in the class, leading to diminished enthusiasm as they were required to share the sole machine. Additionally, the time allotted for lessons proved insufficient for students to fully grasp the concepts being taught, particularly considering that many of these students had previously left school and needed extra time to comprehend the material." (Community Educator KII)

4.3.3. Volunteer model sustainability

Evaluation reports noted that the project's reliance on volunteers receiving low-level incentivisation in the form of a stipend for teaching roles proved unsustainable, as many community educators (CEs) transitioned to formal teaching roles or other jobs throughout the duration of the project and afterwards. This high turnover disrupted learning consistency, requiring repeated training of replacements, and delaying students' progress as they adjusted to new instructors. These challenges demonstrated the need for a sustainable funding model, retention strategies, and long-term incentives.

"We encountered a challenge with the Community Educators (CEs) due to their qualifications as teachers. The project involved retired educators and individuals awaiting employment with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Consequently, when a CE departed for other opportunities, it proved difficult to find a suitable replacement." (Non-Formal Education Buddy KII)

Additionally, when Learner Assistants (LAs) departed the project there was a notable negative impact on participants with disabilities, as CEs lacked specialised training to meet their needs. Learners with hearing or visual impairments

struggled to engage without specialist support, highlighting the importance of sustained resources and inclusive teaching practices to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all participants.

4.3.4. Resistance to enrolment and age restrictions

Evaluation reports found that the project faced substantial challenges during the initial stages of learner recruitment, primarily due to community resistance to the specified age restrictions. Many families, especially those with older children who had previously missed out on educational opportunities, perceived these limits as exclusionary. Tensions escalated as some parents accused project staff of prioritising younger children at the expense of older learners, viewing this as an unfair deprivation of opportunities for their children to re-engage with education. In response, project staff engaged in extensive dialogue with local leaders and community members to address these concerns. This process involved explaining the rationale behind the age criteria, which was grounded in the project's goals of aligning with formal education pathways and ensuring sustainable outcomes.

“There was an incident where I visited the hub and found learners above 19 and I wanted to withdraw them from the hub. I was met with resistance such that the School Head had to intervene. People are interested in the benefits only, not wanting to be left out whether eligible or not.” (Non-Formal Education Buddy KII)

However, recognising the importance of inclusivity and community buy-in, the project adapted its approach. After negotiation, provisions were made to include some older learners in the programme. While this adjustment demonstrated a commitment to responding to community needs, it also required careful resource planning and adaptations to the project's delivery model. The process highlighted the value of flexibility and effective communication in addressing localised challenges.

4.3.5. Inadequate integration of feedback mechanisms

Evaluation reports found that although the project included periodic assessments of learner progress, the mechanisms for incorporating participant feedback into project adjustments were insufficient. Examples of difficulties of which the project were aware, but which were insufficiently addressed included participants and educators frequently raising concerns about the short duration of training sessions, which left learners with only basic skills and limited mastery of their chosen vocations. In relation to resource shortages, modern equipment was absent, such as electric sewing machines or adequate classroom space, which were often reported but not addressed. This lack of responsiveness hindered the project's ability to adapt to the evolving needs of learners and to address practical barriers to their success. It should be noted however that grant restrictions around flexibility to divert resources constrained the project's ability to adapt in light of this.

4.4. What were the unexpected or unintended results from the SAGE Project?

The project produced several unexpected positive effects, such as broadening access to learning beyond traditional classrooms and transforming Apostolic communities, where increased participation and economic empowerment reduced gender-based violence. Indirect beneficiaries, including older women, gained literacy skills informally, showcasing the project's inclusivity. External organisations further supported participants with resources, enhancing credibility. However, cultural tensions arose, as some families viewed the project's emphasis on independence as counter to traditional norms. Additionally, unmet expectations regarding resources, such as computers or start-up capital, led to disappointment and demotivation, highlighting the need for clearer communication about project goals.

4.4.1. Positive unintended and unexpected effects:

Increased learning opportunities beyond traditional settings

Both evaluation reports and case study primary research respondents stated that the project led to a recognition that learning could occur outside traditional classroom environments, facilitated by unique tools like the linear mixed-effects model (LPAS)¹³ as an alternative to conventional testing methods. These tools enabled the project to assess

¹³ A linear mixed-effects model is a regression model but has an added component that accounts for variation across individuals. It is used when repeated measures are taken (in this instance, learning scores at IPA, MPA and EPA) to account for multiple learning score observations getting nested within each learner.

progress in literacy and numeracy in a more flexible and inclusive manner, particularly benefitting learners with no prior formal education.

Indirect beneficiaries and broader community impact

Case study primary research demonstrated that women outside the targeted age range participated informally, gaining literacy and numeracy skills and inspiring others. For example, women aged in their 30s brought their own materials, such as books and pens, to engage in learning activities, showcasing the project's flexible and inclusive approach to education. This led to significant literacy improvements among indirect beneficiaries, as well as creating a ripple effect within communities and broadening the coalition that advocated for the importance of female education.

Unexpected support from external entities

Local organisations and government ministries provided additional support to project participants. For instance, the Women's Empowerment Bank offered start-up capital to graduates of the Integrated Skills Outreach Program (ISOP), enabling them to establish ventures such as tailoring and carpentry workshops. Both secondary sources and case study primary research respondents stated that this external validation of the project's success enhanced its credibility and reach.

4.4.2. Negative unintended and unexpected effects:

Cultural tensions and family backlash

Case study primary research respondents described how husbands and parents criticised the project for promoting independence, which they perceived as being counter to traditional roles. For example, some parents viewed girls' entrepreneurial activities, such as baking and tailoring, as detracting from family responsibilities, creating tensions and discouraging consistent attendance. In some cases, husbands felt the project encouraged wives to leave marriages, further fuelling resistance.

"Some early meetings with apostolic community church leaders did not work as well as expected, as the members of the apostolic community were accustomed to their traditional ways of doing things. For example, when a man had five wives and the project aimed to enrol any of those wives, they would not agree, as they feared change. They were concerned that if their women became educated and learned to read and write, they might challenge them or use family planning methods, which go against their doctrine." (Community Educator KII)

Unmet expectations around resources

Case study primary research shows that there were some misconceptions within communities about the project's aims and resources. One example of this was that many participants and their families expected to receive computers and mobile phones. When these were not delivered there was disappointment as they felt access to this technology would have enhanced their learning, leading to demotivation and drop-outs in some cases. Another example was that some community members' focus on short-term outcomes conflicted with the project's long-term educational goals. For instance, some participants expected immediate financial benefits, such as start-up capital, and were disillusioned when these did not materialise, leading to damage to the project's reputation among communities. These miscommunications and resulting tension highlighted the need for better expectation management about project objectives.

"One challenge that arose was the learners' expectation that they would receive financial capital or funding. Many believed that, upon completing the programme, they would be given money or resources to start a business. This misconception affected the enrolment for Phase 2, as learners were disappointed to realise that financial support was not part of the project scope." (Community Educator KII)

4.5. To what extent and how did external contextual factors influence the SAGE project's performance?

The project benefited from strong community engagement, with locals contributing materials and labour, and external support from initiatives like micro-loans boosting economic stability and attendance. However, geographic barriers, economic instability, cultural norms, and crises like Cyclone Idai and Covid-19 significantly disrupted participation. Poor technological access further hindered remote learning efforts, underscoring the critical role of local context in shaping project outcomes and sustainability.

4.5.1. Supportive factors

Proactive community engagement

Case study respondents highlighted that the project's success was greatly enhanced by active community contributions, including donations of labour and materials for constructing learning hubs. Local craftsmen volunteered to improve vocational training infrastructure, while parents made financial contributions to fund infrastructure improvements such as classroom renovations and toilet construction. In addition, schools external to the project provided resources like furniture and training equipment for vocational training of sewing and baking. This collaboration demonstrated the community's commitment to the project's success and scalability.

"The Hub has been renovated and a toilet has been constructed with the help of community members who donated rivers and, pit sand and bricks to aid the renovation and construction process." (Community Leader KII)

Economic empowerment initiatives

Evaluation reports emphasise the importance of concurrent economic empowerment initiatives provided by governmental and non-governmental entities, such as micro-loans from the Women's Affairs Department, which enabled some learners and their families to initiate small businesses. This economic stability often translated into consistent attendance, as families faced fewer economic pressures.

4.5.2. Hindering factors

Geographic and environmental barriers to attendance

Both case study primary research and evaluation reports stated that long travel distances, household responsibilities, and seasonal farming activities were sizable barriers to attendance at learning hubs. For example, agricultural commitments during harvest seasons and January particularly affected participation. Proposed satellite hubs aimed to address these issues, but limited resources prevented their establishment in all necessary areas, disrupting learning continuity for many girls.

In addition, adverse weather events, such as Cyclone Idai, destroyed infrastructure like roads and bridges, further isolating remote communities and preventing access to learning hubs. Droughts worsened food insecurity, forcing learners to prioritise subsistence farming over education. These challenges highlighted the need for additional logistical support and satellite hubs, though resource constraints limited their feasibility.

"Our area is highly affected by climate induced negative effects of El-Nino. Against this background, water has been scarce in the area leading to some students being given slots to water their crops in nutritional gardens. This presented a challenge to the project as some students needed to balance watering the garden and attending lessons. Some students would choose to water their crops which in most cases were their sources of livelihood and the next meal thereby affecting their attendance." (Non-Formal Education Buddy KII)

Economic instability leading to drop-out

Evaluation reports noted that hyperinflation and volatile exchange rates greatly reduced families' disposable income, forcing many learners to prioritise work over education. Rising costs of educational resources, such as books and materials, strained the project's budget, while the declining value of volunteer incentives demotivated key stakeholders like Community Educators. Many learners left to work as domestic helpers or street vendors, prioritising

immediate income over their education. Economically driven migration decisions compounded the issue, disrupting consistent attendance at learning hubs and limiting the project's ability to achieve sustained engagement.

Cultural and social norms

Both case study primary research and secondary evaluation reports described how persistent cultural beliefs, particularly in patriarchal and conservative religious communities like the Apostolic community, posed severe challenges to girls' education. Barriers included early marriages, prioritisation of boys' education, and scepticism toward empowerment initiatives. Some families feared that the project would disrupt traditional household dynamics, leading male community members to discourage female participation. For example, misinformation about the project's objectives in one community triggered initial backlash, requiring extensive dialogue sessions to be held to address concerns.

Resistance was also evident in rural and farming areas, where some community members mistrusted the project, believing its benefits were exclusive to specific groups or affiliations. Limited attendance at community dialogues in these areas, particularly to begin with, constrained the project's impact. In some cases, influential individuals interfered with recruitment processes, undermining transparency and equity, causing disputes and further reducing participation.

Political and health crises

Evaluation reports noted the impact of election-related tensions and political interferences, which limited access to certain communities. For example, the run-up to the 2023 General Harmonised Elections saw increased scrutiny of public gatherings, which disrupted scheduled learning activities. Public health crises, including cholera outbreaks, further affected attendance. Although mitigations like health awareness campaigns and the provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) were implemented, these crises caused substantial interruption. Case study primary research shows that during the Covid-19 pandemic, some families were hesitant to send children to hubs despite safety measures, reducing participation. In addition, the pandemic disrupted project activities, particularly entrepreneurial ventures, and caused further dropout rates due to economic instability. Lockdowns restricted movement and halted group learning activities, greatly impacting the project's momentum and outcomes.

Limited technological access

Efforts by the project to implement remote learning during Covid-19 faced difficulties due to poor network coverage and lack of access to mobile devices among learners. In areas with weak connectivity, learners and educators struggled to sustain meaningful engagement. To compound this, many students lacked the foundational skills needed for independent learning, exacerbating the challenges of remote education. Teachers often had to resort to door-to-door visits to provide support, which was time-intensive and reached only a limited number of learners.

"The Covid-19 outbreak significantly impacted our community, particularly affecting students' learning. Many learners lacked access to phones for remote instruction, which created barriers to their education. However, the project adapted by organising group learning sessions while ensuring safety measures, such as wearing masks.

Despite these efforts, there were major setbacks for those without phones, as home visits to support them were challenging. Overall, while the project tried to mitigate the impact of Covid-19, many students still faced difficulties in maintaining their learning during this period." (Community Stakeholder KII)

4.6. What were the implementation factors behind the SAGE Project's success or lack of success?

The project's success was bolstered by effective partnerships with organisations such as AWET and Christian Blind Mission (CBM), which improved inclusivity and addressed barriers for marginalised groups. Adaptations during Covid-19, such as remote learning strategies, and consistent provision of resources ensured operational continuity. However, staff turnover, resource gaps, and logistical challenges hindered implementation. Short training durations and unmet expectations around start-up capital and equipment negatively affected participant morale and project sustainability.

4.6.1. Supportive factors

Effective partnerships with organisations

Evaluation reports underline the importance of collaborations between the project and organisations such as the AWET and CBM, which improved project outcomes to a great degree. AWET's outreach targeted marginalised groups, notably girls from the Apostolic communities, and included culturally sensitive dialogue sessions to mitigate resistance. Meanwhile, CBM's provision of assistive devices like glasses and hearing aids enabled learners with disabilities to better engage in educational activities, reducing barriers and promoting inclusivity.

"We received valuable support from Christian Blind Mission, which assisted in working with individuals with disabilities. They provided assessments and guidance, ensuring that the needs of people with disabilities were adequately addressed. Additionally, sector-specific partners like AWET played a crucial role in supporting sexual health education, contributing to the effectiveness of those sessions." (Community Educator KII)

In addition, effective working relationships with local and national political stakeholders, particularly the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE), proved to be a cornerstone of success. These partnerships facilitated the recruitment of qualified teachers and ensured alignment of teaching resources with the national curriculum. District-level education officials played a key role in streamlining processes, such as securing formal school registers to identify out-of-school girls, improving the project's ability to reach its targeted beneficiaries.

Adaptation to Covid-19 challenges

Evaluation reports highlighted that despite the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the project demonstrated resilience by implementing remote and multimodal learning strategies. These included phone-based lessons, door-to-door teaching, and small-group sessions. Teachers received specialised training to leverage technology effectively, and customised learning materials were created to suit different delivery modes, such as printed guides for self-directed study during lockdowns. The provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and adherence to safety protocols ensured that hubs remained operational, while the inclusion of mental health and psychosocial support sessions, facilitated by trained professionals, helped learners cope with pandemic-related stress.

Availability of resources

Case study primary research respondents stated that the consistent provision of resources, including learning materials and teaching aids, ensured smooth project operations. For instance, stationery such as exercise books, pens, and textbooks were provided in sufficient quantities, enabling both educators and students to engage effectively in learning activities. Moreover, over-provisioning of some resources, such as extra stationery, allowed hubs to accommodate more learners than initially planned, supporting broader participation.

4.6.2. Hindering factors

Staff turnover

Case study primary research respondents cited the issue of high turnover among Community Educators, many of whom were awaiting formal teaching appointments, which disrupted project continuity. Educators often left without notice upon receiving government postings, leaving gaps that were difficult to fill. The recruitment of less qualified replacements, while necessary, required additional induction and training, which strained resources and delayed

implementation. This issue underscored the need for stronger retention strategies, such as competitive incentives and long-term contracts.

“This cycle of turnover was particularly pronounced in remote areas, where education is often not prioritised. As a result, qualified teachers were difficult to retain, and those who were available frequently sought employment in more accessible locations. The lack of stability in staffing made it challenging to implement consistent teaching methods and support for students.” (Project Staff KII)

Challenges with infrastructure, resources and organisation

Evaluation reports show that while many learning hubs were upgraded, delays in securing building materials hindered the timely completion of renovations in some communities. Case study primary research respondents reported that in some cases, girls had to learn in unfinished classrooms or without sufficient furniture, compelling learners to sit on the floor during lessons which impacted their comfort and engagement.

In addition, while vocational training resources were generally adequate, notable gaps hindered project outcomes. For example, the lack of electric sewing machines for dressmaking training limited learners' ability to gain hands-on experience with modern equipment. In baking, shortages of essential materials like flour occasionally disrupted training sessions, forcing learners to purchase their own supplies.

Similarly, the case study primary research found that there were instances of community members expressing dissatisfaction with time management and session scheduling, impacting participation rates and overall project effectiveness. This led to organisers often facing delays in starting sessions, causing frustration and reduced engagement among participants. These logistical challenges demonstrated the need for better planning and resource allocation.

Limited time for skills acquisition

Case study primary research respondents reported that the short duration of Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOP) training sessions often left them with inadequate time to fully develop technical skills. For instance, dressmaking students struggled to achieve proficiency due to limited hands-on practice. Participants frequently requested extended training periods to build confidence and competence in areas such as carpentry and sewing, for which they did not feel they had the requisite time to practice due to limitations imposed by the project.

Unfulfilled promises

Case study primary research shows that some participants felt that their expectations were unmet in relation to the provision of start-up capital and equipment for vocational training graduates, which led to disillusionment. For instance, learners trained in baking and carpentry were unable to start their own businesses due to a lack of financial support and tools. Similarly, the lack of access to computers and smartphones hindered digital skill development, limiting participants' ability to engage with modern learning tools effectively. This gap restricted opportunities for learners to apply their education in more modern settings, and both negatively impacted morale and undermined community trust in the project's long-term impact.

“We expected to sew using machines; however, this did not happen. In addition, we were promised smartphones, which never materialised.” (Beneficiary Girl FGD)

4.7. Key lessons learned

1) Early and sustained community engagement to overcome cultural resistance

Early and sustained collaboration with local stakeholders is essential to overcoming cultural resistance.

Engaging respected figures such as religious and traditional leaders can shift community norms and attitudes, creating a supportive environment for project implementation. Future initiatives should prioritise early and continuous engagement with community leaders and stakeholders to build trust and facilitate buy-in.

2) Tailored curricula enhance learning outcomes

Customised educational resources, such as individual workbooks and practical training modules, can greatly improve learning outcomes for different types of marginalised groups. Tailored curricula ensured the content was relevant to learners' immediate needs, making the project particularly impactful for girls with no prior formal

education. Future projects should integrate context-specific resources to maximise engagement and learning outcomes.

3) Vocational training needs sustained support for impact

If future projects want to amplify economic empowerment outcomes, microfinance opportunities or partnerships with financial institutions are key. While vocational training was highly valued, the lack of start-up capital and access to equipment limited its long-term impact. Future projects should integrate mechanisms to address post-training financial and resource needs.

4) Volunteer models require sustainability measures

Offering competitive incentives or career development opportunities can mitigate high staff turnover rates. Future projects should develop sustainable staffing models to ensure consistent implementation, as reliance on lowly-incentivised volunteers, such as Community Educators, can create challenges in retaining skilled staff, impacting the continuity and quality of education delivery.

5) Adaptive approaches foster resilience during crises

The SAGE project's ability to adapt during the Covid-19 pandemic – via remote and multimodal learning – highlighted the importance of flexibility in project delivery. However, challenges such as limited technological access underscored the need for preparedness in resource-constrained settings. Future projects should incorporate contingency planning and invest in blended learning capabilities to sustain momentum during disruptions.

6) Flexibility in participant criteria enhances participation

The project's adaptation to include older learners in response to community concerns improved enrolment and strengthened trust. Where resource allow, future initiatives should balance structured criteria with flexibility to accommodate diverse community needs while maintaining project objectives.

7) Managing expectations is key to trust building

Transparent communication about project objectives and deliverables is essential to avoid misunderstandings and manage community expectations effectively. Unrealistic expectations among participants regarding financial benefits, such as start-up capital, leads to disillusionment and reduced trust.

8) Strategic partnerships amplify impact

Building effective partnerships with organisations that can complement the Implementing Partner's capabilities allows staff to focus on their area of specialist expertise and expands the project's offering. Collaborations with organisations like the Apostolic Women's Empowerment Trust and Christian Blind Mission enhanced project outcomes through culturally sensitive approaches and additional resources. Future projects should leverage multi-stakeholder partnerships to address complex challenges and ensure sustainability.

9) Resource availability and time allocation impact skills mastery

Extending training periods and ensuring adequate resources are critical to achieving competency and long-term impact. The short duration of training and limited access to modern equipment constrained participants' ability to master vocational skills. Future projects should allocate sufficient time and materials to maximise skill acquisition and application, because not doing so risks undoing the achievements of the project.

5. To what extent and how did the SAGE Project reach and benefit the most marginalised?

5.1. Summary of key findings

The project successfully reached many highly marginalised girls in target communities by targeting diverse subgroups, including girls with disabilities, young mothers, those from Apostolic communities, and girls engaged in labour. Significant improvements in literacy, numeracy, and life skills were noted across all target groups, with many participants achieving transition pathways into formal education, vocational training, or employment. The inclusivity of the project and its flexible learning environments were key to this success, ensuring even those in remote areas or with disabilities could participate in some way.

Challenges such as cultural resistance, geographical barriers, and inadequate resources for severe disabilities were addressed through community engagement, strategic partnerships, and satellite hubs. For instance, cultural scepticism in Apostolic communities was overcome by repeated engagement sessions with community and religious leaders, resulting in a positive shift in attitudes towards girls' education. Ultimately, the project not only provided education but also empowered participants by enhancing their confidence, skills, and community involvement, demonstrated by examples of girls passing on their new skills and attitudes to their communities.

5.2. How were the most marginalised defined and identified?

The project defined the most marginalised girls based on the criteria of never having attended school, dropping out due to early marriages or financial constraints, disabilities, or belonging to minority or Apostolic communities. Target groups were identified through community consultations, needs assessments, and collaboration with local leaders and organisations like the AWET.

"Yes, as I have discussed above, we do not work in isolation at the Learning Hubs. We work with the headmaster of Mafarikwa Primary school, the NF Buddy, who is also a teacher at Mafarikwa primary school and the school development committee who represented the community. When selecting vulnerable children, the above committee would sit and select the would-be beneficiaries. The selection process was done in a transparent manner, as we would send the notice at school of the girls that we needed to join the SAGE classes. The girls would come and present themselves in person and the committee would select those who they deemed most vulnerable." (Community Educator KII)

Specific criteria included girls aged 10–19 years, with priority given to those with high poverty levels, chore burdens, or chronic illnesses. In addition, the project incorporated flexible criteria, such as accepting girls without formal identification documents like birth certificates, to ensure inclusivity. Innovative outreach methods, such as the "Bring a Girl" campaign, encouraged enrolled participants to invite peers facing similar challenges, thereby organically expanding the project's reach.

5.3. How and to what extent were the most marginalised reached?

The project employed innovative approaches to reach the most marginalised girls, including flexible schedules at learning hubs, partnerships with district officials who were well-informed about where the most marginalised girls lived, and community mobilisation through community and religious leaders. Satellite hubs in remote areas addressed geographical challenges, ensuring girls from inaccessible locations could participate. For instance, areas like Chavhanga and Mount Zuma benefitted from hubs established closer to learners, greatly improving attendance and participation.

For girls with disabilities, assistive devices such as hearing aids, wheelchairs, and accessible facilities, including ramps and disability-friendly toilets, were provided, enabling more active engagement. Additionally, customised teaching materials, such as those designed for learners with poor vision, were utilised to cater to individual needs.

Despite challenges such as scepticism from some community members and logistical impacts of Cyclone Idai, over 13,460 beneficiaries were enrolled, surpassing the initial target. Continuous engagement with families, follow-up visits to absentee learners, and tailored lesson schedules for working girls further supported retention and inclusion.

5.4. Benefits realised by the most marginalised

The project delivered tangible benefits, including improved literacy and numeracy skills, increased confidence, and practical life skills such as baking and sewing. For instance, one girl with hearing impairments, after receiving hearing aids, was able to better integrate with her peers and fully participate in classes, demonstrating good progress in both academic and social aspects.

The most marginalised girls, including those with profound disabilities, experienced empowerment through newfound independence. Specific examples included a girl with physical disabilities who, after receiving a wheelchair, became more active and engaged in her education, and another girl who learned to bathe independently, enhancing her self-esteem. Vocational skills training allowed girls to gain economic independence, as seen in participants who began baking or sewing projects.

Cultural attitudes also shifted positively, particularly in Apostolic communities. Community-wide changes were observed, with increased decision-making roles for girls within their households and community structures, attributed to targeted leadership engagement sessions and consistent advocacy for girls' education. Additionally, reductions in gender-based violence and improvements in self-reliance were noted as broader societal benefits of the project's initiatives.

5.5. Key lessons learned

1) Flexibility in addressing geographical barriers

Flexible delivery mechanisms, such as satellite hubs, are effective in addressing geographical challenges, therefore ensuring more marginalised girls can be reached and retained by the project. Adapting interventions to local needs ensures participation and can be applied to education or health initiatives in similarly remote regions. If future projects establish decentralised learning hubs in remote areas and provide resources such as bicycles or transport subsidies, travel barriers can be reduced.

2) Tailored support for learners with disabilities

Tailored interventions for individuals with disabilities – including physical accessibility, assistive devices, and specialised teaching – enhance participation and outcomes. If projects are targeting girls with disabilities, incorporating inclusive design principles and providing specific resources and training for teachers, learners with disabilities can be better supported and included.

3) Overcoming resource limitations

Meeting the resource thresholds required for including the most marginalised learners requires proactive planning and leveraging partnerships. Integrating resource sustainability into project design can amplify long-term impact and applicability to various sectors. If projects ensure they secure dedicated funding for essential resources and advocate for partnerships with private and public sectors, the most marginalised can be better included.

4) Sustained focus on retention strategies

Retention of the most marginalised participants in educational projects requires adaptable and community-supported interventions. Strategies like home visits, flexible lesson timings, and engaging guardians are replicable across education and social service projects for marginalised populations. If projects devise and implement bespoke retention strategies, such as follow-ups, flexible schedules, and community-based support systems, then retention of the most marginalised can be improved.

5) Addressing cultural resistance through advocacy

Advocacy and awareness-building are critical for altering cultural perceptions about the most marginalised groups and their place in education. Targeted sessions, such as those with men's clubs or intergenerational forums, are effective in shifting attitudes. These methods are adaptable to addressing gender-based or cultural barriers in diverse contexts, particularly in relation to male family members permitting the mother of their children or wife to attend. If projects incorporate advocacy campaigns and intergenerational dialogue sessions at the earliest possible point of the project, entrenched cultural norms can be challenged effectively.

6) Expanding the definition of marginalisation

Flexibility in defining and addressing marginalisation ensures that interventions remain relevant and inclusive. Adaptive approaches are essential for projects operating in dynamic social contexts. If projects use adaptive targeting strategies, emerging marginalised subgroups can be better integrated during implementation.

7) Strengthening monitoring and feedback mechanisms

Regular monitoring and stakeholder feedback enable dynamic adjustments to project design, including targeting girls who may drop-out of the project mid-way through. This iterative approach is critical for enhancing reach and sustained engagement, and projects should embed robust monitoring systems and feedback loops to help adapt to these challenges.

6. Conclusions

The benefits and accessibility of a tailored curriculum

The SAGE project demonstrated substantial progress in learning outcomes, achieving a significant improvement in both literacy and numeracy across multiple cohorts. By the endline, more than 70% of girls achieved Grade 5¹⁴ proficiency, and the project surpassed its target (65% of girls increase their score) by 11.71 points in literacy and 13.9 points in numeracy. This success was particularly evident among the girls who had the weakest performance in the IPA, reflecting the project's focus on foundational skills and the effectiveness of its interventions.

The development of 12 tailored learning modules from Early Childhood Development (ECD) to Grade 5 proved highly effective in meeting the diverse needs of marginalised girls. These materials, including teacher guides, pupil workbooks, and relatable characters grounded in local contexts, addressed literacy barriers and ensured inclusivity. By translating content into local languages, the project accommodated participants with limited formal education, creating an accessible and engaging learning environment.

Assessing initial literacy and numeracy levels enabled a tailored "start where they are" approach, ensuring interventions were relevant and avoided a one-size-fits-all strategy. Adaptable teaching practices, such as small group support and individualised, pace-based learning, further facilitated substantial improvements. This bespoke curriculum highlighted the importance of culturally relevant and learner-centred educational design in driving impactful outcomes.

Methodological flaws in the measurement of transition

The project only measured actual transition rates at the endline. At baseline, the SAGE project did not assess transition rates because the girls had just begun the intervention; instead, it focused on evaluating intentions to transition. At midline, although there was an intention to measure transition rates, the evaluation was limited to a specific cohort identified as at-risk, which did not represent the broader group. Despite the positive aspirations expressed by this cohort, the programme did not meet its transition target, highlighting the challenges faced by participants.

Several factors contributed to these results. Firstly, the reliance on a limited evaluation model hindered the project's ability to track transition comprehensively across all cohorts. The midline's exclusive focus on at-risk participants created an unrepresentative dataset, leaving gaps in understanding about how the broader group progressed. Additionally, resource constraints limited the project's capacity to establish robust follow-up mechanisms. Insufficient data collection post-vocational training, particularly regarding the Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOP), further compounded the project's inability to evaluate long-term impacts on employment or self-employment.

At endline, while a significant percentage of girls successfully transitioned into various pathways, including vocational training, employment, and formal education, challenges persisted in sustaining these outcomes. Economic instability and the lack of start-up capital for vocational graduates severely undermined participants' ability to apply their skills effectively, a key issue identified as a barrier to impactful transitions. Many participants struggled to secure equipment or financial resources to establish businesses, limiting the project's potential to be truly transformative in this regard.

In addition, the exclusion of later cohorts from the endline analysis reflected systemic delays in project implementation, exacerbated by external factors like the Covid-19 pandemic and economic instability. These issues disrupted training schedules, delayed data collection, and prevented the project from achieving its full reach in terms of the number of girls included in the data collection. High turnover among community educators, who played a critical role in guiding participants through transition pathways, further impacted the consistency and quality of delivery.

This situation demonstrated the necessity for ongoing assessments to ensure that transition outcomes are not only achieved but also sustained over time. Additionally, at the endline, only Cohorts 1 and 2 were included in the analysis, leaving out the other cohorts because their intervention was not finished. This implies that the results are not general for the whole project, highlighting the importance of more inclusive and longitudinal tracking frameworks for future interventions.

Strong partnerships and coherent governance

The success of the project was rooted in its strong and strategic partnerships, which allowed each organisation in the consortium to deliver specialised interventions efficiently. Collaborations with entities like the AWET facilitated

¹⁴ Grade 5 students are typically 11-12 years old

outreach to resistant communities, notably the Apostolic communities, and built trust through culturally sensitive engagement. Similarly, partnerships with the CBM ensured girls with disabilities had access to assistive devices, such as hearing aids and wheelchairs, improving their participation.

Government collaboration, particularly with MoPSE, was also pivotal. This partnership enabled the project to access records of out-of-school girls, align teaching resources with national standards, and secure trained teachers. Engagement with village heads, churches, and social welfare organisations further legitimised the project and mobilised community participation, particularly among marginalised groups.

Governance structures, such as technical working groups and steering committees, streamlined decision-making, while weekly coordination meetings among partners enabled swift adaptation to challenges and shared learning. Collective planning and monitoring strengthened cohesion, enhanced efficiency, and maximised the project's impact. These partnerships underlined the value of leveraging the expertise and influence of diverse stakeholders in addressing complex challenges.

Comprehensive, wide-ranging, and effective community engagement

A defining strength of the project was its commitment to engaging a broad range of community figures and demographics. Male involvement, facilitated through inter-generational dialogues, played a critical role in gaining acceptance for the project and embedding its messages. The inclusion of diverse sub-groups within communities, such as older men and women and religious leaders, further enhanced the project's credibility and reach. Hub Development Committees (HDCs), composed of community members, exemplified the benefits of this inclusive approach by engendering local ownership and accountability. By securing buy-in from a variety of community demographics, the project effectively challenged traditional norms and entrenched its objectives within the community, paving the way for sustainable change.

Extensive benefits from safeguarding and empowerment sessions

The safeguarding and empowerment sessions provided by the project had wide-reaching impacts, addressing multiple layers of vulnerability among the participants and their communities. At the individual level, these sessions were instrumental in building self-esteem, assertiveness, and resilience. Girls learned to identify risks, assert their rights, and take active steps to protect themselves. For example, modules on hygiene and domestic violence not only equipped them with practical knowledge but also fostered a sense of self-worth and dignity. Participants who engaged with these modules displayed increased confidence, better communication skills, and greater independence in making decisions.

At the community level, safeguarding sessions contributed to a reduction in GBV, including domestic violence and early marriages. By educating girls, families, and community leaders about safeguarding principles, the project catalysed a cultural shift. For instance, in Apostolic communities, which traditionally resisted such discussions, safeguarding messages were reinforced through collaboration with local leaders and organisations like the AWET. This led to the establishment of safer households and broader societal recognition of girls' rights. These efforts illustrate how safeguarding interventions, when thoughtfully integrated into education projects, can drive transformative change by addressing systemic barriers and empowering vulnerable groups.

Strengths and weaknesses of a Community Educator and volunteer-based staffing model

The community educator model was a cornerstone of the project's delivery, offering both advantages and challenges. Community educators were deeply embedded within the local context, helping build trust and rapport with learners and their families. Their familiarity with local cultural norms and languages enabled them to deliver sensitive topics, such as gender equality and safeguarding, with credibility and relatability.

Despite these strengths, the reliance on unpaid or minimally incentivised volunteers revealed critical limitations. Many community educators, often awaiting formal teaching appointments or other employment opportunities, left the project prematurely, leading to high turnover rates. This disrupted the consistency of education delivery and required frequent retraining of new staff, straining the project's resources. Participants with disabilities were particularly affected by these challenges, as the departure of specialised Learner Assistants left some without adequate support, hindering their engagement and progress.

Annex L. Methodological Challenges in Assessing GEC Outcomes at the Portfolio Level

Methodological challenges in assessing learning at the portfolio level

GEC II represents one of the most extensive efforts to measure learning outcomes in large-scale girls' education programming, generating a wealth of evidence on literacy and numeracy across diverse contexts, providing valuable insights into the progress of marginalised girls against key outcomes and the effectiveness of targeted interventions. However, given the breadth and complexity of the programme (covering multiple countries, education systems, and learner profiles) certain methodological challenges arose when aggregating project-level findings into a portfolio-wide assessment. **These challenges do not necessarily reflect weaknesses in individual project evaluations but rather the trade-offs inherent in balancing flexibility with standardisation.**

In particular, in the *IE Study* - [Aggregate Impact of GEC-T projects between baseline and midline](#), the IE found that the GEC-T portfolio did not easily lend itself to aggregating project-level data to assess the overall impact of the portfolio and to comparing performance across different girls, interventions and contexts. Among other challenges, projects used **different targeting and sampling strategies**; undertook bespoke **adaptations of learning assessments**; and used **different ways of tracking girls**. These challenges also largely apply to the LNGB Window.

The **measurement requirements for Phase II were less standardised than in Phase I** to improve the flexibility and relevance of projects' evaluation designs, as GEC projects operated across diverse and often challenging environments, including fragile and conflict-affected areas, remote rural regions, and refugee camps. However, this limits the accuracy and validity of a portfolio-level evaluation of the results.

A **more consistent measurement strategy** would have been needed across the portfolio to achieve the right balance between project-level adaptability and portfolio-level consistency to enable aggregate impact assessment and to compare performance across the portfolio. Some of the **key challenges** to aggregating project-level learning outcomes across the GEC II portfolio are:

Variability in 'standard' learning assessments within and across projects: The GEC's flexible approach to learning assessments allowed projects to tailor evaluations to local education systems, ensuring greater contextual relevance. This approach acknowledged that a one-size-fits-all model would not work in highly diverse settings, particularly for girls with interrupted schooling or those enrolled in alternative education pathways. At the same time, this flexibility made it more difficult to track learning gains consistently over time and to compare results across projects. While standardised assessments of literacy and numeracy, such as EGRA/ EGMA and SeGRA/ SeGMA, were widely used before 2021, projects frequently selected **only a subset of tasks or adapted assessments for local contexts**. This variability made longitudinal comparisons difficult even within projects, as subtasks used to assess one cohort¹ usually differed from those used in another. More widely, this means that **aggregate literacy and numeracy scores** (even when derived from standard assessments) are not directly comparable across projects, across different girls from the same project, or across time for the same girl. Furthermore, adapting assessments sometimes resulted in a focus on easier subtasks and discarding more advanced ones to avoid floor effects, which may have overstated gains while failing to capture gaps in more complex skills like critical thinking or problem-solving.

Plan (Zimbabwe) (LNGB) – challenges due to changes in learning assessment tools

Plan (Zimbabwe) effectively adapted its assessment tools to fit its target learners, transitioning from EGRA/ EGMA at baseline to the Learning Progress Assessment at midline and endline. This change made it difficult to track consistent progress across cohorts and to compare learning changes among different sub-groups, such as in-school vs. out-of-school girls, which did not use the same learning assessments.

HPA (Rwanda) (GEC-T) – challenges assessing learning levels across grades levels

HPA (Rwanda) collected learning data on several subtasks and intended to calculate an aggregate score for literacy and numeracy by aligning overlapping subtasks across assessments – specifically, between EGRA and SeGRA for literacy and between EGMA and SeGMA for numeracy. However, for numeracy, a significant proportion of girls scored 0% on the overlapping subtask, leading the External Evaluator to implement a different, standardised scoring methodology for this outcome.

Reporting learning for the 'average girl': One of the GEC's strengths was its ability to generate learning data for girls who are often overlooked in large-scale education evaluations, such as out-of-school learners, girls with disabilities, and those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. However, portfolio-level aggregation of results

¹ Cohorts were usually defined according to the girls' baseline grade level.

sometimes masked **differences in learning progress between sub-groups**. This lack of granularity meant that aggregated findings do not fully capture the spectrum of progress across different sub-groups of learners or highlight specific learning areas where interventions were successful. Sample size limitations when disaggregating results by underrepresented sub-groups was a common challenge. This is especially true for vulnerable sub-groups, such as girls with disabilities or those who started at lower baseline levels, who could have been underrepresented in aggregated results, limiting the ability to identify which interventions were most effective for these populations.

HPA (Rwanda) (GEC-T) – differences in improvements across sub-groups

Improvements in English literacy were primarily driven by gains in two subtasks: (1) Oral Reading Fluency; and (2) Advanced Reading Comprehension, demonstrating progress in both foundational and more complex reading skills. While changes across other subtasks were more limited, these advancements indicate targeted success in key literacy competencies. The most notable gains were observed in higher grades (S1 and S3), while improvements in primary grades were modest.

ACTED (Pakistan) (LNGB) – differences in improvements across tasks and learners

ACTED (Pakistan) achieved strong gains in literacy and numeracy, with up to 90% of girls reaching proficiency benchmarks. Notably, many learners made significant progress in foundational skills, while higher-order tasks like reading comprehension and writing dictation remained challenging for many girls. High attrition rates, especially in Cohort 4 (61%), might however have biased results by excluding the most vulnerable learners.

Challenges in maintaining a robust counterfactual: The GEC set a high standard for evidence generation by requiring projects to measure learning progress over time. While many GEC-T evaluations used **quasi-experimental longitudinal designs** based on a comparison group, the absence of formal comparison groups in many projects (including all LNGB projects) meant that learning gains could not be rigorously attributed to the interventions. In some cases, alternative methods such as before-after and/or cross-sectional comparisons were used to estimate impact. While these approaches provided useful insights, they also introduced limitations in determining the exact contribution of GEC projects versus broader contextual changes. This reflects a broader challenge in large-scale education programmes balancing rigorous impact evaluation with the practical constraints of real-world implementation. This challenge was further increased by variations in project contexts and the diversity of participants, making it very difficult to assess what learning progress would have occurred in the absence of the interventions.

CSU (Uganda) (GEC-T) – adaptations in counterfactual design over time

The project faced additional challenges in tracking learning progress over time, as assessment subtasks varied across evaluation rounds. CSU (Uganda) made efforts to tailor its evaluation approach to the local context, initially incorporating a comparison group of non-disabled girls but later dropped it due to comparability concerns. The project also adapted its learning assessments over time, though variations in subtasks across evaluation rounds posed challenges in tracking progress consistently.

CARE (Somalia) (GEC-T) – continued use of comparison groups in FCAS setting

Care (Somalia) continued to use a quasi-experimental evaluation when other projects working in FCAS settings were permitted to stop using comparison groups for their evaluations. Care (Somalia) valued the level of rigour and rich quantitative data that could be collected from large sample sizes and panel surveys and learning tests over multiple rounds supporting by robust triangulation across different data collection tools (*IE Study - Lessons Learned Study*, FCD with External Evaluators).

Challenges isolating and comparing the impact of specific interventions: Because GEC projects were designed as holistic interventions, they often implemented multiple activities simultaneously, such as teacher training, community engagement, and direct learning support. This comprehensive approach ensured that girls benefited from a range of strategies tailored to their needs. However, it also made it **difficult to isolate which specific interventions or factors (contextual or internal) had the greatest impact on learning outcomes**. Evaluations were designed at the project level rather than at the individual intervention level, meaning that the combined effect of interventions was assessed, but the distinct contribution of each component could not be quantified separately. As a result, while project-level evaluations provided valuable insights into overall effectiveness, it remains challenging to compare outcomes across projects or determine which elements within a single project were most impactful. This complexity limits the ability to produce robust, **portfolio-wide quantitative analysis** on the effectiveness of different intervention types. Instead, understanding how different interventions contributed to the GEC II learning outcomes required **rigorous qualitative research and analysis**, as used in this study.

Impact of Covid-19 on learning interventions and their assessment: The Covid-19 outbreak and resulting school closures profoundly affected both the implementation of projects and the evaluation of their outcomes. The **changes in definition and scope of learning outcomes during this period (described in the previous section) further limited the comparability of results over time and across projects**. Projects with midline evaluations conducted before the pandemic largely adhered to the original evaluation methodologies, which assessed learning progress through standardised assessments and comparison groups. These evaluations offered relatively robust insights into progress at that stage. However, most endline evaluations conducted in 2020-2021 faced significant constraints, leading to **ad hoc approaches to measuring learning outcomes**. Many GEC-T endline evaluations conducted in 2020 and 2021 lacked independent learning assessment data due to school closures and other disruptions. As a result, **qualitative evidence**, such as girls' perceptions of learning progress, became the primary means of assessing learning outcomes during this period, which led to variations in the strength and depth of available evidence across evaluations.. Some projects that ended after 2022 incorporated multiple lines of evidence (introduced in 2022 following FM guidance), but these methodological shifts further complicated comparability across time and across projects.

Mercy Corps (Nepal) (GEC-T) – limited learning assessments due to Covid-19

In response to Covid-19, **Mercy Corps (Nepal)** adjusted its evaluation methods, initially shifting from EGRA/ EGMA assessments to the Secondary Education Examination (SEE). When the SEE was later cancelled, the project relied on qualitative data, such as girls' perceptions of learning. While necessary under the circumstances, these adaptations introduced challenges in assessing sustained learning progress and in comparing results with pre-pandemic evaluation data.

Methodological challenges and limitations to assessing transition at the portfolio level

The approach to assessing transition was designed with flexibility, allowing GEC II projects to define and measure transitions in ways that best suited their contexts and target groups. Projects generally concentrated on **three primary pathways for transition**: (1) progression within formal education between grades and phases e.g., upper primary to lower secondary; (2) entry into vocational training, and (3) employment or self-employment. A fourth pathway, emphasising personal choice, was used by some projects, particularly for older girls and young women. While this diversity of pathways ensured relevance to local contexts, it also introduced challenges in aggregating and comparing data at the portfolio level.

The measurement and assessment of transition during GEC II faced additional constraints due to the absence of tracking systems for girls dropping from activities and/or leaving project areas. These constraints implied that there is usually no available long-term data on girls who dropped out or relocated, potentially **biasing the outcomes toward those who remained accessible**. As a result, the ability to draw robust conclusions about what drives sustained improvements in girls' transition outcomes is limited. The main methodological challenges to the assessment of transition at the portfolio-level are as follows:

Variable definitions and measurement approaches: Across the GEC II portfolio, there were **differences in how transition was defined and measured**. Some projects focused on enabling girls to progress through formal education, while others supported alternative routes such as vocational training or entrepreneurship. This **context-driven flexibility ensured that transition definitions reflected real opportunities available to girls**, rather than imposing a standardised model that might not be feasible everywhere. However, the variety of approaches also made it **difficult to compare transition outcomes** across projects or to assess trends at the portfolio level. While some projects tracked girls beyond the immediate intervention period, others faced challenges following up with those who moved or entered pathways outside formal education systems. This lack of uniformity prevents an evaluation of whether improvements in one context could be meaningfully compared or replicated elsewhere.

ActionAid (Kenya) (LNGB) – The multiple pathways hidden behind the overall transition rate

The Education for Life project achieved high transition rates, with up to 97% in some cohorts. Many girls opted for non-formal pathways, such as entrepreneurship and apprenticeship, rather than returning to formal education as intended. Entrepreneurship proved particularly impactful, with 90% of girls maintaining their businesses post-endline. While apprenticeships had more varied outcomes, the project effectively supported girls in identifying pathways that aligned with their aspirations and circumstances.

Short-term tracking and limited insight into 'meaningful' transition: Projects were not required to follow girls beyond the immediate end of the intervention. In many projects, **girls successfully advanced to the next stage of education or into skills training**, but the **ability to track whether these transitions were stable over the long**

term varied. While midline evaluations often captured positive movement, the shorter duration of some projects meant that endline assessments could not always confirm whether transitions were maintained. Some projects implemented **strategies to reduce attrition**, such as keeping in touch with girls and collecting additional contact information, which helped strengthen follow-up. However, for projects where high mobility was common, tracking remained a challenge. In some contexts, short-lived improvements could quickly be reversed due to factors like early marriage, family mobility, or economic pressures. As a result, transition rates often presented a limited snapshot of success for the subset of girls who were still reachable, rather than reflecting the longer-term realities for some beneficiaries.

PIN (Nepal) (LNGB) – Post-completion support and systematic tracking enhances transition rates

The *IE Study - [Value for Money of Educating the Most Marginalised Girls through the GEC](#)* through the GEC found the greater the proportion of project spending on post-completion support to girls to support their transition the higher the transition rate project achieved – PIN Nepal: 28% of spending and highest transition rates; PIN Ethiopia: 19% of spending and next highest transition rates; Link Malawi: 17% of spending and lowest transition rates. PIN Nepal was the only project to systematically collect data tracking the actual transitions of girls beyond project completion.

Plan (Zimbabwe) (LNGB) – Assessing girls’ transition outcomes beyond project participation

Plan (Zimbabwe) successfully supported many out-of-school girls in re-engaging with education and training, with a high proportion transitioning into further learning or economic opportunities. However, the lack of follow-up data on those who moved into vocational training and employment restricted the ability to fully evaluate the project’s longer-term impact on the educational and career trajectories of participants. This highlights the necessity for transition assessments to ensure that transition is not only achieved but also sustained over time.

The cohort study (see *box* below) that the IE team commissioned through the Rapid Research and Learning Fund provided valuable insights into the short and longer-term effects of the CARE (Somalia) project delivered in Phase 1. While, this level of investment was beyond GEC II projects, this study shows the value of tracking girls’ pathways at least for a limited time after transitioning on to the next phase of their education or employment.

Rapid Research and Learning Fund (RRLF) Study – Six years later, what has become of them?

Through the RRLF, the IE team commissioned the University of Portsmouth and Consilient to conduct a cohort study² tracing Somali women and girls six years after participating in the GEC-T Somali Girls’ Education Promotion Programme (SOMGEP) delivered by *CARE (Somalia)* during Phase I. The findings demonstrated a clear link between participation in SOMGEP and positive outcomes for women today identifying participation in the GEC I project with increased educational attainment for these women, a greater likelihood of employment and decreasing tolerance of intimate partner violence. The evidence also pointed to differential impacts across outcomes suggesting that progressive attitudes, actions, or beliefs in certain spheres of SOMGEP women’s lives do not necessarily flow through to others. The study showed the short and longer term impacts of SOMGEP, and the value of the FCDO’s investment in girls’ education.

High attrition and biased samples: Another key challenge already mentioned involved high attrition rates, which affected the representativeness of the data (as shown in *IE Study - [Aggregate Impact of GEC-T projects between baseline and midline](#)* and *IE Study - [Educating Girls with Disabilities in GEC II](#)*). Tracking school-aged populations over time presents natural difficulties, particularly when working with marginalised groups who may experience greater mobility or external pressures. Girls who left the project target areas because they dropped out of school or learning centre – e.g., due to school closures related to Covid-19 or migrated elsewhere – frequently resulted in incomplete datasets and an underestimation of the true number of unsuccessful transitions. Some GEC projects mitigated these challenges through **household-based sampling and targeted follow-ups**, helping maintain contact with girls who were no longer in formal education. This **attrition bias may have created an overly optimistic depiction of transition outcomes**, as projects tended to retain and report on the progress of girls who stayed within easier reach. Consequently, project evaluations may have overstated success rates and drawn conclusions that did not account for those who left the project prematurely and whose future educational or employment status was unknown.

² Study can be found [here](#).

Mercy Corps (Nepal) (GEC-T) – High attrition rates were a gap in tracking post-graduation outcomes

High attrition rates were noted among Grade 10 participants, many of whom migrated for work or were untraceable. Though some girls transitioned into vocational training or employment, a large proportion graduated without further engagement, underlining gaps in tracking post-graduation outcomes.

CSU (Uganda) (GEC-T) – Managing attrition in tracking transition

CSU (Uganda) faced challenges tracking girls who moved or left school, impacting transition rate estimates. Attrition led to some transitions being classified as unsuccessful, potentially underestimating progress. At endline, monitoring data was used effectively to show an 80% transition rate for girls with disabilities, with many progressing to secondary or tertiary education, exceeding national averages.

Lack of targeted, real-time data for adaptive management: While baseline, midline and endline evaluations provided helpful summaries, the programme would have benefited from systems that generate real-time data on outcome indicators such as transition throughout implementation, as shown in *IE Study - [Value for Money of Educating the Most Marginalised Girls through the GEC](#)*. Such data would have made it easier to spot emerging challenges and adapt interventions quickly, for instance by identifying which girls were at risk of dropping out or failing to progress and then customising support accordingly. Instead, many projects relied heavily on annual or endline evaluations, limiting the window for data-driven decision-making. This approach often meant that when evaluations highlighted gaps in transition outcomes, there was insufficient time remaining in the project cycle to address them. By focusing on a streamlined set of priority indicators and ensuring data collection was both frequent and reliable, GEC II projects could have fostered a more dynamic response to challenges, ultimately leading to better outcomes and stronger evidence on what drives successful transitions for marginalised girls.

Annex M. GEC Portfolio Contextual Factors and Beneficiary Groups

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
		AKF	BRAC	Save the Children	Save the Children	World Vision	Camfed	Camfed	Camfed	Camfed (ex-BRAC)	CARE	Relief Int.	Opportunity	PEAS	VIVA	Cheshire Services	HPA	Mercy Corps
GEC-T Contextual Factors & Target Beneficiary Groups	Content	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	DRC	Mozambique	Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe	Zambia	Tanzania	Tanzania	Somalia	Somalia	Uganda	Uganda	Uganda	Uganda	Rwanda	Nepal
National Level																		
FCAS	H/M/L	H	H	H	H	M	M	M	L	L	H	H	L	L	L	L	L	L
WB income group (2024-25)		LOW-INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOW-INCOME
Global Multidimensional Poverty Index		0.272	0.272	0.331	0.372	0.11	0.11	0.232	0.284	0.284	N/A	N/A	0.281	0.281	0.281	0.281	0.231	0.074
Community Level	✓																	
Urban	✓									✓					✓	✓		✓
Peri-urban	✓									✓					✓			✓
Rural	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Slum-dwellers	✓												✓					
Long distance from nearest school	✓		✓															
Climate fragility	✓											✓						
Individual Level	✓																	
School Phase	✓																	
Lower Primary	✓	✓		✓		✓					✓				✓	✓		
Upper Primary	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Lower Secondary	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Upper Secondary	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Vocational training	✓		✓													✓		
University	✓														✓			
Social Groups	✓																	
Girls with disabilities	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Boys with disabilities	✓															✓		
Orphaned girls	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Pastoralist girls	✓										✓							
Internally displaced girls	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓			✓						
Girls in refugee camps	✓																	
Slum-dwellers	✓												✓					
Excluded caste	✓			✓														
Child labour	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓				✓			
Affected by HIV /AIDS	✓												✓		✓			
Young mothers	✓			✓									✓	✓	✓		✓	
Street children	✓											✓	✓		✓	✓		
Death /separation in family structure	✓											✓			✓			
Extreme poverty /hunger	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓
High household chore burden	✓																	
Household language (not LoI)	✓	✓		✓	✓							✓						
Religious group members	✓	✓		✓														
Married girls		✓			✓					✓								✓
Other girls?	✓		✓	✓								✓			✓	✓	✓	
School enrolment	✓																	
Girls in school	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Out-of-school girls	✓					✓			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓
Girls in alternative education	✓																	
Girls dropped out	✓		✓				✓											
Girls at risk of drop-out	✓												✓					

https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups?_gl=1*n3r8t1*_gcl_au*MTQzMdMyOTg0MS4xNzI0NzUwODk0

<https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-global-multidimensional-poverty-index-mpi#/indicies/mpi>

https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fdatacatalogfiles.worldbank.org%2Fddh-published%2F0037712%2FDR0090755%2FCLASS.xlsx%3F_gcl_au*MTQzMdMyOTg0MS4xNzI0NzUwODk0&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK

Sources:
Evaluation reports
Proposal reports /Subgroup lists?
Primary data

Potential Issues:
Target /beneficiary subgroups change during Covid and after as interventions designs adapted?

Country external data:

GEC-T

1. Uganda
2. Rwanda
3. Nepal

LNGB

1. Zimbabwe
2. Kenya
3. Pakistan

		18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
		VSO	Mercy Corps	Varkey	DLA	DLA	DLA	EDT	I Choose Life	Leonard Cheshire	Avanti	WUSC	Plan Int.	LINK	Child-hope
GEC-T Contextual Factors & Target Beneficiary Groups	Content	Nepal	Nigeria	Ghana	Ghana	Nigeria	Kenya	Kenya	Kenya	Kenya	Kenya	Kenya	Sierra Leone	Ethiopia	Ethiopia
National Level															
FCAS	H/M/L	L	H	L	L	H	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	H	H
WB income group (2024-25)		LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOW-INCOME
Global Multidimensional Poverty Index		0.074	0.175	0.111	0.111	0.175	0.171	0.171	0.171	0.171	0.171	0.171	0.293	0.367	0.367
Community Level	✓														
Urban	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						
Peri-urban	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				
Rural	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Slum-dwellers	✓							✓	✓						
Long distance from nearest school	✓														
Climate fragility	✓							✓							
Individual Level	✓														
School Phase	✓														
Lower Primary	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Upper Primary	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lower Secondary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Upper Secondary	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Vocational training	✓									✓					
University	✓														
Social Groups	✓														
Girls with disabilities	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Boys with disabilities	✓														
Orphaned girls	✓		✓					✓					✓		
Pastoralist girls	✓								✓			✓		✓	✓
Internally displaced girls	✓											✓			
Girls in refguee camps	✓											✓			
Slum-dwellers	✓							✓	✓						
Excluded caste	✓												✓		
Child labour	✓														
Affected by HIV /AIDS	✓														
Young mothers	✓		✓					✓	✓				✓	✓	
Street children	✓														✓
Death /separation in family structure	✓		✓										✓		
Extreme poverty /hunger	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
High household chore burden	✓														✓
Household language (not LoI)	✓	✓													
Religious group members	✓														
Married girls											✓				✓
Other girls?	✓		✓					✓					✓		✓
School enrolment	✓														
Girls in school	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Out-of-school girls	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓					
Girls in alternative education	✓														
Girls dropped out	✓														
Girls at risk of drop-out	✓			✓							✓				

	1	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
	AKF	PIN	Street Child	VSO	IRC	ACTED	Action Aid	Plan Int	LINK	PIN	Pop. Council	CARE	IRC	WEI
LNGB Contextual Factors & Target Beneficiary Groups	Afghanistan	Nepal	Nepal	Nepal	Pakistan	Pakistan	Kenya	Zimbabwe	Malawi	Ethiopia	Ethiopia	Somalia	Sierra Leone	Ghana
National Level														
FCAS	H	L	L	L	L	L	L	M	L	H	H	H	L	L
WB income group (2024-25)	LOW-INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOW-INCOME	LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME
Global Multidimensional Poverty Index	0.272	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.198	0.198	0.171	0.11	0.231	0.367	0.367	N/A	0.293	0.111
Community Level														
Urban		✓			✓			✓			✓	✓		
Peri-urban								✓				✓		
Rural	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
Slum-dwellers														
Long distance from nearest school										✓				
Climate fragility						✓								
Individual Level														
School Phase														
Lower Primary		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Upper Primary		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Lower Secondary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Upper Secondary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Vocational training		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
University														
Social Groups														
Girls with disabilities	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Boys with disabilities														
Orphaned girls						✓	✓		✓			✓		✓
Pastoralist girls							✓							
Internally displaced girls								✓				✓		
Girls in refugee camps														
Slum-dwellers														
Excluded caste			✓									✓		
Child labour			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Affected by HIV /AIDS														
Young mothers	✓		✓				✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Street children														
Death /separation in family structure														
Extreme poverty /hunger	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓
High household chore burden	✓					✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Household language (not Lol)	✓						✓					✓		
Religious group members	✓	✓						✓						
Married girls	✓	✓				✓		✓				✓		✓
Other girls?						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
School enrolment														
Girls in school														
Out-of-school girls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Girls in alternative education														
Girls dropped out			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Girls at risk of drop-out	✓	✓												✓

Annex N. GEC Portfolio Types of Interventions

GEC Portfolio - Types of Interventions

		ID	01	02	03	04_1	04_2	04_3	05	06	07	08	09_1	09_2	09_3	10	11	12	13
		FM ID	5147	9003	5085	5101	5101	5101	5276	5274	7879	5170	9001	9001	9001	5252	6317	6803	6627
		Window	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T
		Project Name	Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Education Success (STAGES)	iMlango	Community-Based Education for Marginalised Girls in Afghanistan	The Virtuous Cycle of Girls' Education	The Virtuous Cycle of Girls' Education	The Virtuous Cycle of Girls' Education	Girls Learn, Succeed and Lead	Somali Girls Education Promotion Programme (SOMGEP - T)	Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education	Excelling Against the Odds	Discovery Project	Discovery Project	Discovery Project	Let our Girls Succeed (Wasichana Wetu Wafaulu)	Rwandan Girls' Education and Advancement Programme 2 (REAP 2)	Jielimishe (Educate Yourself)	Expanding Inclusive Education Strategies for Girls with Disabilities Kenya
		Implementing Partner	AKF	Avanti Communicatio ns	BRAC	Camfed International	Camfed International	Camfed International	Camfed International (ex-BRAC)	CARE International	Cheshire Services	Childhope UK	Impact(Ed) International	Impact(Ed) International	Impact(Ed) International	EDT	HPA	I Choose Life – Africa	Leonard Cheshire Disability
		Country	Afghanistan	Kenya	Afghanistan	Tanzania	Zambia	Zimbabwe	Tanzania	Somalia	Uganda	Ethiopia	Kenya	Nigeria	Ghana	Kenya	Rwanda	Kenya	Kenya
Economic interventions	Cash Transfers			✓	✓											✓			
	Bursaries		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓		✓	✓
	In-kind resources (e.g. uniforms, transport, back to school kits, menstrual supplies)		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		✓	✓
	Income generating activity					✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Loans and savings			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓										
Infrastructure and resources (at school level) (LNGB: Infrastructure, resources and management (at school/learning centre-level))	New classrooms, classroom improvements, school grounds improvements (LNGB: New classrooms or learning centres, classroom or learning centre improvements or refurbishments)		✓		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
	Toilets and wash facilities (including menstrual management)		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓
	Ed Tech for classroom learning			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
	Text books and learning materials		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Teacher training and support	Skills training for active T&L (LNGB: Skills training for teachers/educators in participatory approaches to T&L for adolescent girls)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
	Gender Responsive Pedagogy		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Accelerated Learning		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓		
	Targeted focus on Literacy		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Targeted Focus on Numeracy		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Use of formative assessment (LNGB: Training in the use of formative assessment)		✓	✓	✓				✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	Teacher peer support, training and mentoring		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Formal Pre-service teacher training (LNGB: Reintegration to formal school)		✓																✓
	Inclusive classroom strategies		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓					✓		✓
Community Based Awareness, Attitudes and Behaviour	Media (radio, TV, advertising)		✓							✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
	Community meetings (use of drama etc)		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Working with men and boys		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
	Working with faith based groups and traditional leaders		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓				✓
	Community engagement through adult literacy		✓							✓									
	Household level visits & support		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓			✓
	Activities involving women's groups, parents' groups		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Extra Curricular Activity	Tutoring / homework clubs / reading corners / literacy clubs		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
	Mentoring (big sis / little sis; peer support / learner guides)				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Life skills training (including SRHR)		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Vocational training / girls' econ empowerment and IGA for girls		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	Mixed sex/ additional boys' clubs		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
School Management and Governance	Ed tech for improved school management			✓		✓	✓	✓								✓		✓	
	Working with SMCs and PTAs		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Community & private school provision		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓											
	Working with head teachers or other school management members		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Empowerment & Self Esteem (LNGB: Empowerment, self-esteem and life skills)	Girls' clubs																		
	Safe spaces					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓				
	Mentoring				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
	Activities that promote girls' voices & participation		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Marginalisation	Role models (older girls, community members, female teachers)		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
	Remote/difficult/nomadic locations		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓			
	Cultural marginalisation including linguistic		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓								✓			
	Disability		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓					✓		✓
Violence against Children (LNGB: Safeguarding and Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults)	Other special groups (to be defined) - pregnant or young mothers		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓						✓	
	Community awareness		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Supporting or running safe houses/shelters					✓	✓	✓				✓						✓	
	Transportation schemes related to girls safety on the way to school				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓								✓
	Teacher training		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Reporting mechanism in schools (incl complaint boxes)		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓
	Harmful traditional practices including child marriage & FGM/C		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓						✓	✓
	Training SMCs, PTAs		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
	Psychosocial																		
	Response and referrals (this includes working with service providers, village child protection committees etc)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

GEC Portfolio - Types of Interventions

GEC Portfolio - Types of Interventions		ID	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
		FM ID	6473	6616	9002	8980	5096	7374	5253	5100	5099	7045	6595	7042	5243	5136
		Window	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T	GEC-T
		Project Name	Supporting Transition of Adolescent Girls through Enhanced Systems (STAGES)	Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali (STEM)	Educating Nigerian Girls in New Enterprises (ENGINE)	Girls' Education Finance: Empowerment for Girls' Education	Girls' Access to Education	GEARR-ing Up for Success After School	Educate Girls, End Poverty	Réussite et Épanouissement via l'Apprentissage et L'Insertion au Système Éducatif (REALISE)	Successful Transition and Advancement of Rights for Girls (STAR-G)	Making Ghanaian Girls Great!	Building Girls to Live, Learn, Laugh and 'SCHIP' in Strong, Creative, Holistic, Inclusive, Protective, Quality Education	Sisters for Sisters' Education	Improving Girls' Access through Transforming Education (IGATE)	Kenya Equity in Education Project (KEEP)
		Implementing Partner	Link Education International	Mercy Corps Nepal	Mercy Corps Nigeria	Opportunity International United Kingdom	PLAN International	Promoting Equality in African Schools (PEAS)	Relief International	Save the Children	Save the Children	Varkey Foundation ('Plan International' in 2023 report)	Viva	VSO	World Vision	WUSC
		Country	Ethiopia	Nepal	Nigeria	Uganda	Sierra Leone	Uganda	Somalia	DRC	Mozambique	Ghana	Uganda	Nepal	Zimbabwe	Kenya
Economic interventions	Cash Transfers											✓				✓
	Bursaries	✓				✓			✓	✓	✓					✓
	In-kind resources (e.g. uniforms, transport, back to school kits, menstrual supplies)	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Income generating activity		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		✓	✓			
	Loans and savings		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓			
Infrastructure and resources (at school level) (LNGB: Infrastructure, resources and management (at school/learning centre-level))	New classrooms, classroom improvements, school grounds improvements (LNGB: New classrooms or learning centres, classroom or learning centre improvements or refurbishments)	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
	Toilets and wash facilities (including menstrual management)	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
	Ed Tech for classroom learning							✓				✓		✓		✓
	Text books and learning materials			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Teacher training and support															
Teacher training and support	Skills training for active T&L (LNGB: Skills training for teachers/educators in participatory approaches to T&L for adolescent girls)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Gender Responsive Pedagogy	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	Accelerated Learning			✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Targeted focus on Literacy		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Targeted Focus on Numeracy		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Use of formative assessment (LNGB: Training in the use of formative assessment)	✓					✓			✓		✓				✓
	Teacher peer support, training and mentoring	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Formal Pre-service teacher training (LNGB: Reintegration to formal school)						✓		✓			✓				
	Inclusive classroom strategies		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Community Based Awareness, Attitudes and Behaviour	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓
Community Based Awareness, Attitudes and Behaviour	Media (radio, TV, advertising)	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓
	Community meetings (use of drama etc)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Working with men and boys							✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
	Working with faith based groups and traditional leaders			✓				✓	✓	✓					✓	✓
	Community engagement through adult literacy						✓								✓	✓
Extra Curricular Activity	Household level visits & support		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Activities involving women's groups, parents' groups	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Tutoring / homework clubs / reading corners / literacy clubs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Mentoring (big sis / little sis; peer support / learner guides)	✓									✓			✓	✓	✓
	Life skills training (including SRHR)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School Management and Governance	Vocational training / girls' econ empowerment and IGA for girls		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	Mixed sex/ additional boys' clubs	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Ed tech for improved school management	✓						✓			✓					✓
	Working with SMCs and PTAs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Community & private school provision					✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
School Management and Governance	Working with head teachers or other school management members	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Empowerment & Self Esteem (LNGB: Empowerment, self-esteem and life skills)															
	Girls' clubs															
	Safe spaces			✓			✓				✓		✓		✓	
	Mentoring			✓			✓				✓	✓		✓	✓	
Marginalisation	Activities that promote girls' voices & participation	✓	✓	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Role models (older girls, community members, female teachers)	✓		✓							✓		✓		✓	✓
	Remote/difficult/nomadic locations								✓	✓					✓	✓
	Cultural marginalisation including linguistic		✓						✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
	Disability								✓		✓				✓	✓
Violence against Children (LNGB: Safeguarding and Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults)	Other special groups (to be defined) - pregnant or young mothers			✓							✓	✓			✓	✓
	Community awareness	✓	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Supporting or running safe houses/shelters									✓						
	Transportation schemes related to girls safety on the way to school														✓	
	Teacher training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Violence against Children (LNGB: Safeguarding and Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults)	Reporting mechanism in schools (incl complaint boxes)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Harmful traditional practices including child marriage & FGM/C		✓			✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Training SMCs, PTAs	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Psychosocial															
	Response and referrals (this includes working with service providers, village child protection committees etc)				✓			✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

GEC Portfolio - Types of Interventions

GEC Portfolio - Types of Interventions		ID	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42
		FM ID	4300	4200	5147b	4125	4325	4350	4075	4275	4250	4100	4150	4225	4025	4050	4375
		Window	LNGB	LNGB	LNGB	LNGB	LNGB	LNGB	LNGB	LNGB	LNGB	LNGB	LNGB	LNGB	LNGB	LNGB	LNGB
		Project Name	Closing the Gap	Education for Life	Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Education Success Phase II (STAGES II)	Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia (AGES)	Teach and Educate Adolescent Girls with Community Help (TEACH)	Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient (EAGER) project	Team Girl Malawi	CHANGE: Improving Access to Education in Ethiopia for Most Marginalized Girls	Aarambha Project	Supporting Adolescent Girls Education in Zimbabwe (SAGE)	Biruh Tesfa for All	Marginalised No More	Empowering a New Generation of Adolescent Girls through Education in Nepal (ENGAGE)	Strategic Approaches for Girls' Education (STAGE)	Strengthening Transition and Resilience of Orphaned Girls (STRONG)
		Implementing Partner	ACTED	ActionAid International	AKF	CARE	IRC Pakistan	IRC Sierra Leone	LINK	PIN Ethiopia	PIN Nepal	PLAN	Population Council	Street Child	VSO	World Education Inc	WUSC
		Country	Pakistan	Kenya	Afghanistan	Somalia	Pakistan	Sierra Leone	Malawi	Ethiopia	Nepal	Zimbabwe	Ethiopia	Nepal	Nepal	Ghana	Afghanistan
Economic interventions	Cash Transfers									✓	✓	✓		✓			
	Bursaries			✓	✓					✓	✓						
	In-kind resources (e.g. uniforms, transport, back to school kits, menstrual supplies)	✓	✓	✓				✓								✓	
	Income generating activity		✓				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Loans and savings	✓			✓	✓				✓		✓	✓			✓	
Infrastructure and resources (at school level) (LNGB: Infrastructure, resources and management (at school/learning centre-level))	New classrooms, classroom improvements, school grounds improvements (LNGB: New classrooms or learning centres, classroom or learning centre improvements or refurbishments)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓			✓		
	Toilets and wash facilities (including menstrual management)		✓		✓	✓				✓		✓	✓				
	Ed Tech for classroom learning				✓					✓	✓	✓					
	Text books and learning materials	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
	Teacher training and support	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Teacher training and support	Skills training for active T&L (LNGB: Skills training for teachers/educators in participatory approaches to T&L for adolescent girls)	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Gender Responsive Pedagogy		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Accelerated Learning	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Targeted focus on Literacy	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Targeted Focus on Numeracy	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
	Use of formative assessment (LNGB: Training in the use of formative assessment)		✓								✓	✓		✓			
	Teacher peer support, training and mentoring	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Formal Pre-service teacher training (LNGB: Reintegration to formal school)	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓						
	Inclusive classroom strategies		✓		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Media (radio, TV, advertising)						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Community Based Awareness, Attitudes and Behaviour	Community meetings (use of drama etc)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
	Working with men and boys		✓		✓	✓					✓	✓		✓			
	Working with faith based groups and traditional leaders		✓		✓						✓	✓					
	Community engagement through adult literacy										✓	✓					
	Household level visits & support		✓		✓				✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Extra Curricular Activity	Activities involving women's groups, parents' groups	✓	✓					✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Tutoring / homework clubs / reading corners / literacy clubs			✓					✓						✓		
	Mentoring (big sis / little sis; peer support / learner guides)	✓			✓	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Life skills training (including SRHR)		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Vocational training / girls' econ empowerment and IGA for girls	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
School Management and Governance	Mixed sex/ additional boys' clubs											✓	✓				
	Ed tech for improved school management																
	Working with SMCs and PTAs														✓		
	Community & private school provision																
	Working with head teachers or other school management members	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Empowerment & Self Esteem (LNGB: Empowerment, self-esteem and life skills)	Girls' clubs	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓			✓			✓	✓	
	Safe spaces		✓				✓		✓			✓		✓			
	Mentoring																
	Activities that promote girls' voices & participation		✓		✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓			
	Role models (older girls, community members, female teachers)		✓					✓	✓			✓				✓	
Marginalisation	Remote/difficult/nomadic locations	✓			✓					✓		✓			✓		
	Cultural marginalisation including linguistic	✓	✓			✓				✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Disability		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Other special groups (to be defined) - pregnant or young mothers		✓				✓	✓			✓		✓				
	Community awareness		✓				✓	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓	
Violence against Children (LNGB: Safeguarding and Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults)	Supporting or running safe houses/shelters											✓					
	Transportation schemes related to girls safety on the way to school											✓					
	Teacher training							✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Reporting mechanism in schools (incl complaint boxes)											✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Harmful traditional practices including child marriage & FGM/C		✓									✓		✓			
	Training SMCs, PTAs								✓			✓			✓		
	Psychosocial		✓	✓					✓	✓		✓			✓		
	Response and referrals (this includes working with service providers, village child protection committees etc)		✓						✓			✓		✓	✓		

Annex O: What intermediate outcomes did the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios deliver?

How has GEC-T delivered its intermediate outcomes?

IO1: Changing community attitudes and norms - Changes in attitudes and perceptions towards girls and girls' education among male and female family and community members, educators, boys, government officials

Projects across the GEC-T Window employed a variety of interventions that engaged communities and caregivers through tailored strategies, including awareness-raising campaigns, family dialogues, and household visits. These efforts aimed to shift negative community attitudes and norms towards girls and girls' education, creating a supportive environment for learning. By addressing specific barriers, these initiatives sought to create sustained support networks that encourage regular school attendance and promote the value of girls' education.

Working with communities and caregivers

GEC-T projects used various interventions to change negative community attitudes and norms towards girls and girls' education. Projects did so by engaging in a targeted way with caregivers, and through broader awareness-raising at the community level. This entailed both one-to-one sessions (such as household visits) and mass campaigns, including the use of theatre or radio.

Interventions that intended to directly target community and parental attitudes were among the most prominent across the GEC-T Window and shifting parental attitudes contributed to girls' regular attendance. This included awareness-raising campaigns, family dialogues, and household visits. School Management Committees (SMCs) played an important role in raising awareness and responding to caregivers' concerns relating to sending girls to school, including addressing security concerns in conflict/ insecure contexts. Parental sensitisation activities, such as family dialogues, aimed to shift attitudes to ensure parents saw the value of educating girls and encouraged education over early marriage.

Engaging religious and community leaders that were seen as influential figures within their contexts to promote positive attitudes towards girls and shift general opinion towards the acceptance of girls' education was regarded as critical to community sensitisation. Project activities from across the GEC-T Window engaged with local, cultural, and religious leaders to influence parents and overcome barriers to girls' education; acting as role models and promoting girls' education.

IE Study - Sustaining Changes in Community Attitudes and Norms to Improve Girls' Education Outcomes

All GEC-T projects included activities related to community sensitisation and awareness, which were delivered through formats such as campaigns, radio, dramas, and billboard advertising. Eight of the 27 projects aimed to address the harmful effects of gender-based violence through community-based outreach. Such activities allowed projects to reach a larger target group and disseminate key messages more widely.

Engaging men and boys as champions

Some GEC-T projects recognised the important role men and boys play in addressing education inequality. Select projects opened dialogues, held workshops, created gender-specific groups, and conducted household level activities; actively engaging with male family members to discourage dropouts. These activities intended to engage men and boys as advocates for girls' education and reduce stigma. Across the GEC-T Window, there were some examples of boys taking concrete actions as a result of sensitisation, such as dividing up household chores equally with their sisters, allowing an enabling environment for girls' learning.

Mercy Corps (Nepal) – Delivering attitudinal change

The project employed a mix of interventions to change community attitudes and norms at both the household level and through broader community initiatives. These included street dramas, awareness raising campaigns, community discussions; family dialogues and household visits targeting parents directly.

Overall, **Mercy Corps (Nepal)** delivered important results through these activities, resulting in reduced household chores, increased time for studying (in school) and reduced prevalence of early marriage. Differences remained between sub-groups, with lower caste girls continuing to be more affected by harmful gender norms. IE case study primary research found evidence of some community-level change, but barriers linked to gender norms continued.

IO2: Reducing financial barriers - Changes in financial barriers that improve the chances of girls participating in learning

The GEC-T Window implemented strategies to alleviate financial obstacles that hinder girls' education. By combining direct financial assistance with vocational training and financial literacy programmes, these projects aimed to empower participants to tackle immediate economic issues while developing essential skills for future success. GEC-T projects sought to reduce the cost of school in the immediate term through cash transfers as well as the provision of materials and physical support. In the longer-term, some projects aimed to support girls' and their families' income-generating potential. This was linked to their continued education as well as transition to employment and contribution to household livelihoods.

Providing in-kind resources

The most common type of intervention under IO2 across GEC-T projects was the provision of material support that aimed to increase girls' attendance. This included providing learning materials, uniforms, transport, and menstrual hygiene products, with many projects focusing on reaching low-income households. Projects identified a lack of access to menstruation products as a reason for a lack of attendance and consistent absenteeism. Across all GEC-T projects in Nepal, in-school girls received sanitary pads, in line with the Nepalese government initiative 'National Sanitary Pad Procedure.'

Delivering direct financial support

A common form of support in this IO area was direct financial aid to cover the cost of girls' school fees and school costs. Projects aimed to remove key economic barriers to education and enable girls to attend school through scholarships, loans, and bursaries. Across many GEC-T projects, a commonly cited reason for girls not being able to continue their education was not having the financial resources to do so. Specific Bursaries and Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) were relevant to addressing girls' economic barriers to access education. According to parents, these were effective as they additionally supported income generation as well as the capacity to send girls to school. Scholarships, the provision of school materials and cash transfers were used by several GEC-T projects and aimed to support transition of girls in project communities. Direct economic support aimed to help families cover education costs and contribute to meeting basic household needs. The economic support was anticipated to increase girls' commitment to continue learning.

Directly reducing financial barriers through school fee payment

Contributing to this IO, the project paid school fees and covered other school costs; supported family incomes through training and loans; and provided cash transfers during Covid-19.

Interventions under this IO led to increased attendance and participation in class, which was described as an essential pre-condition for girls to improve their learning. The most effective mechanism to do so was the payment of school fees, which parents previously struggled paying. Coupled with the provision of specialised materials, this fostered an environment where girls could more easily be included in the classroom. However, fee payments provided by the project were seen by many case study primary research respondents as unsustainable by design, with cost-sharing arrangements deemed a potential alternative that could have led to less dependency on the part of parents.

Additional detail is available in [Annex H \(CSU \(Uganda\) Case Study\)](#).

Girls' income generation to develop employability and entrepreneurship

Interventions that aimed to support girls' transition to income-generating activity rather than education were also prominent across the GEC-T Window. Projects sought to develop girls' employability and entrepreneurship skills. Training on business skills, vocational skills (such as tailoring, beauty, carpentry, plumbing), and financial literacy aimed to help girls both access economic opportunities and create their own businesses. Similarly, some projects provided income-generating support (such as financial literacy training and loans) to girls' families. Projects additionally provided support to help girls get started in their businesses, this included micro-loans, cash transfers, and starter packs of materials.

IO3: Improved teaching - Improvements in the quality and effectiveness of teaching, facilitation and support to learning

The GEC-T Window aimed to enhance teaching quality through targeted professional development and inclusive methodologies. By prioritising continuous professional development (CPD), these initiatives empowered educators to

create equitable learning environments. Key interventions included training and a focus on inclusive and gender-responsive education, equipping teachers to support marginalised groups and enhance disability inclusion, ensuring quality education for all learners.

Professional development for teachers

Improving teaching was a central focus of GEC-T projects. The majority of projects aimed to enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching predominantly through teacher training sessions. To ensure a consistent level of literacy and numeracy across GEC-T projects, teachers received training in both. Teachers received training sessions in child-centred pedagogy and the use of learner-centred approaches in the classroom. For example, they were trained to create lesson plans that incorporated interactive methods, such as smaller group discussions and hands-on activities, aiming to create a more engaging classroom environment for students. Linked to teacher training focusing on smaller groups and child-centred pedagogy, the introduction of homework tutorials in some schools contributed to this IO. Teacher-run tutorials aimed to provide tailored support to girls who were under-performing and targeted support in weaker areas of learning. To a lesser extent across the GEC-T Window, mentoring and coaching activities were undertaken by teachers alongside a focus on continued professional development (CPD) through teacher training. This intended to allow educators an opportunity to collaborate, share resources, and discuss challenges in a structured manner.

IE Study – [Teachers and Teaching for Marginalised Girls](#)

The study found the most common intervention implemented was teacher professional development, with most projects delivering classroom training, and other formats including mentoring, coaching, or peer learning. Most projects included a focus on gender-responsive, learner-centred, and inclusive pedagogic approaches.

Using teaching practice to improve inclusive and gender responsive education

Some projects in the GEC-T Window aimed to improve inclusive and gender-responsive teaching practices. In several cases, this included working at a central level with education ministries on the importance of inclusive education. At the school level, projects provided teachers with support for disability inclusion, built their capacity to screen students with disabilities, and to refer students to relevant services. Projects additionally supported and built capacity of gender focal points.

IO4: Effective management - Changes in leadership and management of formal and/ or non-formal learning spaces and engagement of governance structures such as Parent Teacher Associations, Boards Of Managements, School Management Committees

The GEC-T Window aimed to strengthen educational governance by establishing SMCs and offering targeted capacity-building initiatives. These SMCs empower local stakeholders to monitor attendance and support school improvement plans, while workshops for Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) enhance skills in strategic planning. Community engagement promotes inclusive management, and School Improvement Plans (SIPs) focus on addressing training gaps and improving infrastructure leading to better educational outcomes.

Use of school leadership bodies

SMCs were a key contributor to effective management and the most prominent contributor to IO4 across the GEC-T Window. SMCs were set up in both schools and community-based education settings. They served multiple functions including taking ownership of monitoring attendance and supporting school improvement plans.

Capacity-building workshops were tailored to the needs of the school leadership and governance bodies, such as PTAs, Boards of Management (BOMs), and SMCs. These workshops aimed to improve participants' skills in strategic planning, decision-making, and resource management. Training on gender-based violence (GBV) was given to school management and mechanisms for reporting were introduced in line with the FM's standard practices.

Community engagement through outreach initiatives contributed to creating more effective management. By involving local communities in the management of schools, GEC-T projects aimed to create a more inclusive approach to governance. Workshops and community meetings were organised to raise awareness about the roles of PTAs, BOMs, and SMCs, encouraging greater participation from parents and community members. This engagement aimed to build trust and encourage collaborative relationships between schools and their communities, leading to more effective management practices.

School Improvement Plans as a tool for positive change

Many projects used SIPs which sought to take a prioritised and structured approach to creating positive change within schools. Most SIPs focused on identifying training gaps, promoting attendance, understanding how to take girls' needs into account and attempted to implement general infrastructure improvements within schools.

Mercy Corps (Nepal) - Using SIPs to consider girls' needs and improve school infrastructure

The project aimed to work with schools to support the development of SIPs that considered girls' needs, and to improve school infrastructure. Evaluation reports point to improvements in school governance, coupled with continuing challenges, particularly in parental engagement and in the schools' environments. At midline, 50% of schools were found to have incorporated plans in their SIPs after assessing girls' needs. Activities included expanding girls' toilets and setting up Girls' Clubs.

Additional detail is available in [Annex F \(Mercy Corps \(Nepal\) Case Study\)](#).

IO5: Safer learning environments - Learning environments are safer and support girls' wellbeing, improved sexual and reproductive health and rights, reduced domestic violence

The GEC-T Window utilised various interventions to create safer learning environments for girls and promote their attendance. Schools developed and strengthened safeguarding mechanisms, including complaint response systems that allowed girls to report bullying and GBV. Training for staff, SMCs, and students ensured the effective implementation of these measures. Social and emotional learning initiatives, delivered through forums such as Girls' Clubs, provided safe spaces for discussions on wellbeing and health. Infrastructure improvements, such as upgraded classrooms and gender-sensitive facilities, further enhanced the learning environment.

Creating safer spaces

GEC-T projects used several strategies to create safer environments for girls' learning and to encourage attendance. Schools were mandated to develop zero-tolerance policies and codes of conduct. Projects worked to strengthen safeguarding reporting, referral, and response mechanisms. This included introducing complaint response mechanisms; allowing girls to report bullying incidents, GBV, and discrimination which make girls less likely to attend. Within school settings, projects provided relevant training and sensitisation for staff, SMCs and students to embed the mechanisms and ensure their use.

Contributing to safer learning environments, GEC-T projects identified holistic strategies that aimed to have a sustainable impact on addressing corporal punishment. This included conducting regular safeguarding refresher training; reviewing and updating codes of conducts; integrating positive discipline into teacher development training; increasing the level of community engagement and ensuring this was incorporated into workplans.

Many GEC-T projects focused on social and emotional learning to create safe and inclusive learning environments. This was delivered through targeted teacher training, peer training and mentoring, life skills training and through Girls' Clubs. As well as providing safe spaces for learning, Girls' Clubs were a critical method for promoting girls' wellbeing, learning about sexual and reproductive health, and raising awareness around gender-based violence. Girls' Clubs allowed for a female mentor or peer leader who received additional training to have interactive peer-to-peer discussions and provide social and emotional learning rather than using a teacher-centred method of delivery.

Infrastructure improvements to create an environment conducive to learning

Some GEC-T projects created safer physical learning environments by upgrading infrastructure, building new classrooms, providing specific learning facilities such as information and communications technology (ICT) suites and libraries. Where appropriate, projects conducted comprehensive school safety and welfare audits to assess the physical safety of environments and check for the availability of fire exits, fire extinguishers, and medical treatment facilities. Improvements were made to upgrade toilet facilities in schools and learning centres, prioritising single-sex facilities to encourage attendance by adolescent girls. Provision of menstrual hygiene products by GEC-T projects additionally contributed to this intermediate outcome.

HPA (Rwanda) – Gender-responsive school infrastructure critical for girls' attendance and self-esteem

HPA (Rwanda) supported improvements in the learning environment through the building of ECOSAN toilets, improvements to school roofs and other physical infrastructure, and the introduction of girls' changing rooms. In some schools, income from school businesses was used to support infrastructure improvements. New water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities were safer, as they were divided by gender. The Girls' Rooms introduced in

schools came out strongly from the case study research as beneficial for girls. Caregivers, teachers, and girls spoke at length about these facilities, where information sharing and the availability of menstrual kits for girls was supporting their ability to remain in school and reducing absenteeism. Health corners in schools also allowed girls to access SRHR information and support, leading to improved knowledge of reproductive health and improvements in self-esteem. There remained some challenges despite these improvements; namely, respondents shared that more Girls' Rooms would be needed to meet school needs.

Additional detail is available in [Annex G \(HPA \(Rwanda\) Case Study\)](#).

IO6: Empowering girls - Changes in girls' self-esteem, self-efficacy, confidence and a sense of agency and empowered to make good choices for herself

GEC-T projects focused on empowering girls and enhancing their self-esteem, confidence, and sense of agency. Mentorship opportunities paired girls with role models, creating open dialogue and support. Girls' Clubs were a key intervention used under this IO. Empowerment workshops provided a safe space for girls to discuss their aspirations and challenges while addressing societal norms that impact their lives. Interactive activities, such as role-playing scenarios, helped cultivate a positive self-image and belief in their potential to effect change. Collectively, these interventions have contributed to the personal development of girls, leading to improvements in their self-esteem and academic motivation.

Training and workshops

GEC-T projects aimed to empower girls through a number of activities to enhance their self-esteem, self-efficacy, confidence, and sense of agency. A key component of this was the organisation of empowerment workshops tailored to the needs of girls. The workshops provided a safe and supportive environment where girls could engage in discussions about their aspirations, challenges, and societal norms that affect their lives. For instance, girls participated in interactive activities such as role-playing scenarios that addressed issues like peer pressure and gender stereotypes. This approach not only encouraged a sense of belonging but also helped cultivate a positive self-image among participants, allowing them to see themselves as capable individuals with the potential to effect change.

GEC-T projects focused on life skills training as a key intervention, including sessions on decision-making, problem-solving, and assertiveness. Activities such as group discussions on personal finance and health education (including sexual health) further contributed to their sense of empowerment, enabling them to make informed choices regarding their wellbeing and future. For instance, financial literacy sessions taught girls how to budget and save, intending to contribute to a sense of control over their financial futures.

The use of role models

Another key intervention was providing mentorship opportunities for girls by pairing them with peer role models, mentors from the community, and the wider business sector; providing guidance, support, and a source of inspiration. Mentoring sessions allowed for open dialogue, where girls could discuss their ambitions and seek advice on overcoming obstacles. Similarly, community engagement was a prominent aspect of GEC-T projects delivering empowerment-related activities to girls. By involving parents and community members in discussions about girls' empowerment, projects sought to create a supportive environment that reinforced the messages conveyed in workshops and mentoring sessions.

Girls' Clubs to promote empowerment

Many projects used mechanisms such as Girls' Empowerment Forums (GEFs) and Girls' Clubs to promote girls' empowerment. Activities within the GEFs and Girls' Clubs included workshops on life skills, self-advocacy, and public speaking, which were designed to empower girls to take ownership of their education. For example, girls participating in GEF activities reported increased confidence in their ability to engage in classroom discussions and school governance. This peer-to-peer interaction not only enhanced their confidence but also created a more inclusive learning environment where girls felt empowered to express their needs and concerns.

HPA (Rwanda) – Promoting girls' empowerment in Rwanda

The [HPA \(Rwanda\)](#) project delivered several interventions to empower girls. This included creating Girls' Clubs and Mother-Daughter Clubs and providing family planning services to create behavioural change. Secondary research, and the case study primary research point to considerable changes in girls' self-esteem, confidence, ability to speak in front of others and participate in school. Improvements in reading were both a cause of, and a result of the increase in confidence: improving their skills also led to improved self-perception, and motivated girls to continue

studying and practicing. Some case study respondents reported that improved motivation and self-esteem was linked to increased likelihood to transition into secondary school.

“Since she joined this club and started studying in the fourth grade, I can tell you that it has greatly improved her confidence. She learned about three times and immediately said, I have really become confident in reading; I am no longer afraid to read and practice”. (FGD with parents)

Additional detail is available in [Annex G \(HPA \(Rwanda\) Case Study\)](#).

IO7: Continued attendance - Changes in girls’ attendance at opportunities for learning made available to them

A mixture of direct and indirect interventions contributed to continued attendance across the GEC-T Window. As increased attendance is closely linked to other IO areas, many of these activities have been mentioned in previous sections. Direct interventions that aimed to encourage girls to attend school included conducting house visits. At the school level, regular monitoring of girls (by SMCs, project staff, and teachers) helped track and support attendance.

GEC-T projects also demonstrated the importance of engaging communities to drive girls’ continued attendance at school. As well as contributing to IO1 (changing community attitudes and norms), sensitisation activities improved girls’ parents and local community leaders’ understanding of the importance of regular school attendance, which improved as a result. Financial interventions linked to IO2 (reducing financial barriers) greatly improved attendance.

Physical infrastructure improvements to schools through the creation of safe spaces and conducive environments for learning improved attendance, these were also linked to IO5 (safer learning environments). Some schools built segregated bathrooms for girls, which improved attendance for adolescent girls in particular. The provision of girls’ changing rooms with appropriate sanitary facilities also made a significant impact on attendance; reducing absenteeism during menstruation.

Activities also falling under IO6 (empowering girls) additionally contributed to continued attendance, for example, peer mentorship was intended to encourage girls to regularly attend school. Health education and menstrual hygiene interventions such as the provision of menstrual hygiene products and awareness campaigns also contributed to continued attendance.

CSU (Uganda) – Reducing financial barriers to increase attendance

The provision of school fees and transport; distribution of materials (uniform, school materials); and medical treatment were all linked to some improvements in attendance on the [CSU \(Uganda\)](#) project. The IE team found data quality issues related to attendance in project reporting. However, case study primary research suggests there were improvements in attendance – at least in the short-term – mostly due to the reduced cost of schooling. Several respondents highlighted that being in school enabled girls to learn; however, teaching quality remained an issue and girls’ learning results were overall poor. Attendance improvements appear to have been short-lived: a large increase in drop-out was reported when CSU’s financial support stopped at the end of the project.

Additional detail is available in [Annex H \(CSU \(Uganda\) Case Study\)](#).

How has the LNGB delivered its intermediate outcomes?

IO1: Changing community attitudes and norms – Changes in attitudes and perceptions towards girls and girls’ education among male and female family and community members, educators, boys, government officials

Projects across the LNGB Window delivered activities that engaged communities and families through tailored strategies, including sensitisation sessions, vocational training, and dialogues that addressed cultural barriers, facilitated gender equality, and created sustained support networks for girls’ education. Projects employed a range of strategies to engage communities and families, with the aim of developing a supportive environment for girls’ education. These efforts were tailored to address the specific cultural, social, and economic barriers that perpetuated traditional norms.

Community engagement and sensitisation sessions

Community engagement and sensitisation sessions formed the foundation of most project’s approaches. These sessions engaged community leaders, educators, and families in open discussions about the value of educating girls. By using accessible spaces and culturally relevant messaging, these sessions helped build trust and facilitate

collaboration, leading to increased participation and understanding. Influential local figures were also often recruited to enhance credibility and leverage their status to encourage broader acceptance of the importance of girls' education. This is corroborated by *IE Study - Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling*, which stated that the engagement and sensitisation of parents and community members was an important part of communicating the importance of girls' education, as well as delaying early marriage and pregnancy.

ACTED (Pakistan) – Community mobilisation driving strong support for girls' education

Endline evaluation data showed that 90% of parents were strongly in favour of girls' education, and community mobilisation activities ensured consistent attendance and reduced absenteeism. In addition, men and boys' engagement sessions increased understanding and support of girls' education, with a significant number of men (208% of the target) expressing positive views on girls' educational and economic participation.

Inclusion of men and boys as change agents

The inclusion of men and boys as community change agents was an important part of project design across the LNGB Window. Through workshops and peer-led initiatives, men and boys were engaged in discussions about gender equality and the importance of supporting girls' education, even if they were not fully enrolled in project activities as learners. These sessions encouraged men and boys to become advocates, addressing societal barriers and promoting shared responsibility for girls' empowerment. As described by the *International Rescue Committee (IRC) (Pakistan)* Implementing Partner, including men and boys in community engagement activities brought multiple benefits:

"We also established community support groups. Women and men groups. Men groups were instrumental in continuing man and wife engagement and bringing transformative change. Over the 5-year project we had so many opportunities to connect with communities again and again. To further empower community groups and make sure men were involved in addressing risk faced by girls, we train them to do the risk identification. Helped them to develop community safety action plans and provided resources to help them implement these plans." (IRC (Pakistan) IP KII)

Facilitating community dialogues to address harmful practices

Many projects facilitated community dialogues that brought together stakeholders from across generations, genders and societal groups to address issues such as early marriage and gender-based violence. Delivered through interactive methods like storytelling and visual aids, these discussions created actionable commitments to fostering supportive environments for girls. Projects would simultaneously look to establish support networks, such as community action groups and mentoring programmes to sustain the momentum. These groups monitored progress, provided practical solutions, and reinforced the importance of girls' education. As explained by the CARE (Somalia) Implementing Partner, successful community involvement had a self-sustaining ripple effect that helped reinforce the project's message:

"At the start of the project, we identified key community/religious leaders who had influence. There were 10 religious leaders per state who were briefed about the project and played the role of ambassadors. They would talk about the project at their community meetings, encourage the parents to enrol their girls into the project, besides that, the girls' empowerment forums were conducting community outreach in their villages, explaining about the importance of girls' education, benefits and encouraging other girls who were still at home to come to school." (CARE (Somalia) IP KII)

IO2: Reducing financial barriers – Changes in financial barriers that improve the chances of girls participating in learning

As found in as *IE Study – Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling*, economic barriers i.e. girls being unable to afford schooling or being required to work were among the most common reasons for girls being unable to access formal schooling. This is why projects across the LNGB Window aimed to reduce financial barriers by integrating direct financial support, vocational training, and financial literacy education, empowering participants to overcome immediate economic challenges while building sustainable skills and confidence for long-term progress. These activities were tailored to address immediate economic challenges while simultaneously building the capacity and confidence of participants to sustain their progress in the longer term. Projects across the LNGB Window addressed financial barriers through a range of targeted activities designed to enable girls to access education and economic opportunities. Initiatives focused on providing direct financial support, vocational training, and financial literacy education, delivered through community-centric and participatory approaches. *IE Study – Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling* found that

the proportion of girls identifying economic costs as a barrier to participating in education fell from around half before their enrolment in the LNGB project to around one-fifth when participating in the LNGB project.

Providing direct financial support

Direct financial support was fundamental for most projects who worked towards this Intermediate Outcome, largely in the form of providing start-up funds and material resources to facilitate transitions into education or income-generating activities. These funds were typically distributed in a structured manner, often following workshops or sensitisation sessions to ensure participants understood how to effectively utilise the support. Materials such as tools, equipment, or starter kits complemented the funds, equipping beneficiaries with tangible resources to initiate small businesses or pursue vocational training. These activities were typically administered through partnerships with local facilitators or organisations, ensuring efficient and culturally sensitive delivery.

PLAN (Zimbabwe) – Indirect and direct financial assistance alleviating economic barriers to education

Interventions such as the provision of free learning materials and direct financial assistance aimed to alleviate financial barriers to education. Secondary evidence sources describe how the provision of textbooks and sanitary products helped to lower the cost of schooling for many participants. Community-led savings schemes were another critical component, equipping families with financial literacy skills to manage resources effectively. Such initiatives were particularly impactful in rural areas, where economic pressures often resulted in early marriage or school dropout.

Additional detail is available in [Annex K \(Plan \(Zimbabwe\) Case Study\)](#).

Financial literacy education to build long-term confidence

Financial literacy education was also frequently interwoven into project delivery, offering participants the knowledge and skills to manage their finances effectively. Life skills classes often incorporated modules on money management, savings strategies, and basic numeracy, which were delivered through interactive and participatory methods. Facilitators would typically employ real-world examples and practical exercises, such as budgeting tasks, to help participants apply these concepts to their daily lives. Group-based discussions further reinforced the learning, facilitating peer support and collaborative problem-solving.

IO3: Improved teaching – Improvements in the quality and effectiveness of teaching, facilitation and support to learning

LNGB projects enhanced teaching quality through continuous professional development (CPD), inclusive methodologies, peer networks, and contextualised resources, empowering educators to create equitable and engaging learning environments tailored to diverse student needs. Projects typically targeted CPD for educators through a comprehensive suite of training sessions designed to enhance teaching skills. These sessions tended to emphasise the value of adopting inclusive and gender-sensitive methodologies including workshops on creating equitable classroom environments, addressing the needs of marginalised groups, and integrating child safeguarding practices. Educators were encouraged to view their roles as facilitators, fostering participation and collaboration among students rather than relying on didactic instruction.

ActionAid (Kenya) – Catch-up Centres (CuCs) fostered a supportive and interactive learning environment

The girls participating in the case study primary research cited the CuCs as helping to foster a supportive and interactive learning environment, which was crucial for improving educational outcomes. Respondents were also positive about the level of teaching, saying that educators were well-trained to address the needs of all learners, including those with disabilities, and employed engaging teaching methods that made learning enjoyable. The quote below summarises how girls feeling positive about the learning environment helped to improve attendance and learning:

"The girls were frequenting the learning spaces as often as possible. It was accommodative. It was interactive. It was a family place where the girls felt free and accommodated. So, they were yearning to learn more" (Community Member KII)

Additional detail is available in [Annex I \(ActionAid \(Kenya\) Case Study\)](#).

Continuous professional development for educators at learning centres

In addition to formal training, many projects provided additional support to educators through structured monitoring and observation. Education officers and project staff conducted regular visits to classrooms, offering real-time coaching and feedback. These visits provided opportunities to observe teaching practices, assess adherence to pedagogical strategies, and suggest improvements. Multiple projects facilitated peer-to-peer networks and educator learning circles to facilitate collaborative learning among educators. The intention of these networks was that educators would exchange ideas, discuss challenges, and collectively develop solutions to enhance their teaching practices.

Contextualised teaching resources

Many projects across the LNGB Window made significant efforts to ensure that teaching was aligned with local contexts, with an emphasis on adapting and translating curricula into regional languages and, wherever possible, ensuring accessibility for diverse student populations. These adaptations included condensing learning materials to fit accelerated learning programmes while ensuring compliance with national education standards. Educators were frequently actively involved in the development of these resources, which were tailored to meet the needs of learners with different educational needs. There were also multiple examples of projects utilising innovative lesson delivery methods, such as radio lessons and digital content, particularly during Covid-19 or when including students situated in remote or disaster-affected areas. These resources were often complemented by colourful, engaging learning materials, with the intention being that they enhanced the teaching and learning experience. The quote below from the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) (Nepal) Implementing Partner reflects the impact of educator training:

“Educator trainings on learner-centred pedagogy, inclusive education, gender-responsive teaching, and child safeguarding practices helped improve the overall teaching quality in the project schools. The trainings equipped educators with the skills to create inclusive and safe learning environments.” (VSO (Nepal) IP KII)

IO4: Effective management – Changes in leadership and management of formal and/or non-formal learning spaces and engagement of governance structures such as Parent Teacher Associations, Boards of Management, School Management Committees

The LNGB Window strengthened the management and governance of learning spaces by training local committees, promoting community involvement, integrating safeguarding policies, and implementing monitoring systems to ensure effective administration and shared accountability. Projects delivered a variety of activities aimed at strengthening the management and governance of learning spaces. Central to this approach was the training of governance bodies such as SMCs, PTAs, and BOMs. These training sessions covered critical aspects of school management, including fundraising, inclusive education, child protection, and general governance practices. By equipping committee members with the skills needed to address administrative and structural challenges, projects empowered these groups to play a more active and informed role in managing learning spaces effectively. Typically, delivery of these sessions would be tailored to local contexts, ensuring that training materials and methods were relevant to the specific challenges faced by each community.

Strengthening governance structures

Most projects emphasised the importance of involving local communities in the governance of learning spaces. This was achieved through outreach and awareness campaigns designed to mobilise community support for education. By engaging local stakeholders, projects cultivated a sense of shared responsibility for the success of educational initiatives. Additionally, the integration of safeguarding policies and governance protocols into local frameworks provided a structured approach to managing learning spaces. These policies were introduced through workshops and collaborative discussions, helping to align community practices with broader governance objectives.

PLAN (Zimbabwe) – Hub Development Committees fostered accountability and collective ownership

Learning hubs were effectively managed through Hub Development Committees (HDCs), composed of parents, educators, and community leaders. These committees oversaw education hub operations, addressed absenteeism, and resolved conflicts. The following quote reflects the key role HDCs, and volunteers played in the success of the project:

“At the hub, volunteers were recruited to instruct the students, collaborating closely with the hub committee, which ensured active community involvement. The committee served as a representative of the community, facilitating a holistic management approach that included contributions from community members, SAGE, educators, and the

students themselves. Furthermore, the project involved local leaders who played a crucial role in driving the initiative forward.” (Non-Formal Education Buddy KII)

Evaluation reports state that the involvement of local governance structures fostered accountability and encouraged collective ownership. HDCs collaborated with communities to implement sustainability projects, such as small businesses that generated funds for the hubs’ upkeep. Despite occasional challenges, such as disputes over resource allocation, clear communication and defined roles helped mitigate conflicts. These efforts ensured the hubs’ functionality and longevity.

Additional detail is available in [Annex K \(Plan \(Zimbabwe\) Case Study\)](#).

IO5: Safer learning environments – Learning environments are safer and support girls’ wellbeing, improved sexual and reproductive health and rights, reduced domestic violence

Projects across the LNGB Window created safer learning environments by prioritising safeguarding education, inclusive infrastructure, sexual and reproductive health training, and community-level initiatives to reduce harmful practices and foster collective responsibility for girls’ wellbeing. Girls received comprehensive training on their rights, including how to recognise and report abuse. Delivery methods included facilitated workshops and interactive sessions led by trained facilitators and community professionals. Reporting mechanisms were made accessible, with contact numbers for key support figures provided and awareness campaigns delivered to both learners and community members. These sessions typically addressed child protection and encouraged a culture of safety within schools and communities, embedding these principles in teaching curricula as well as extracurricular activities.

Enhancing physical and social environments

Efforts to enhance physical and social environments were an integral component of LNGB projects. Schools were supported to develop accessible and inclusive infrastructure, ensuring safe and welcoming spaces for all students, including those with disabilities. Many projects attempted to ensure that wherever possible, learning spaces were constructed or renovated to be close to students’ homes, reducing travel-related risks. Amenities such as clean drinking water and hygienic toilets were also consistently included in these upgrades. Additionally, projects usually ensured that school improvement plans were developed collaboratively with SMCs and PTAs, aiming to embed safety standards into infrastructure and governance. The VSO (Nepal) IP explained the key role played by SMCs in improving the learning environment as follows:

“The project worked closely with SMCs and PTAs to develop SIPs that promoted inclusive practices and infrastructure. By the end of the project, 45% of the schools had developed accessible infrastructure for children with disabilities. The project also supported SMCs and PTAs in formulating and implementing child safeguarding policies to create a safe environment in schools.” (Empowering a New Generation of Adolescent Girls with Education (VSO (Nepal) IP KII)

Sexual and reproductive health and rights education

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) education was delivered through life skills classes and group discussions. Girls were educated on family planning, adolescent health, menstruation and hygiene management, the latter of which [IE Study - Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling](#) found to be particularly important in mitigating barriers to attending learning centres during girls’ menstrual cycles. These sessions aimed to provide a platform for open dialogue, equipping participants with the knowledge and confidence to engage in broader community conversations. Trainers would typically incorporate interactive methods to ensure the information was accessible and relevant, better enabling girls to take a greater degree of informed autonomy over their health.

ActionAid (Kenya) – Safer travel to and from school through a collaborative approach

Tangible security improvements were made, particularly in relation to travel to and from school, largely due to collaboration with local authorities and community leaders helping to enforce safety protocols. The case study primary research corroborated this, with most girls saying that they felt an increased level of safety when traveling to and from the Catch-up Centres, with community efforts, such as enlisting boda boda drivers as advocates, contributing to this. Cultural leaders also played a role in encouraging safe practices, such as returning home early, to protect girls from risks.

Additional detail is available in [Annex I \(ActionAid \(Kenya\) Case Study\)](#).

IO6: Empowering girls – Changes in girls' self-esteem, self-efficacy, confidence and a sense of agency and empowered to make good choices for herself

LNGB projects fostered girls' confidence, self-esteem, and agency through life skills training, social-emotional learning, mentorship, and vocational education, equipping them with the tools to advocate for themselves, build resilience, and make independent economic and personal decisions. Life skills training was a foundational component of projects across the LNGB Window, designed to build girls' confidence, self-esteem, and agency, as demonstrated by [IE Study - Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling](#), where one third of girls interviewed mentioned how life skills training increased their self-confidence and equipped them with practical skills for their daily lives. Sessions focused on developing critical personal and interpersonal skills, such as self-awareness, communication, and decision-making. Projects would typically also address gender-specific challenges through modules on sexual and reproductive health, menstrual hygiene, and safety. Practical training methods, such as role-playing and group activities, were used to engage participants and enable them to practise new skills in real-world contexts. There was also a strong emphasis on girls' learning about their rights and responsibilities, which helped them to develop a stronger sense of self-worth and the confidence to advocate for themselves in their communities.

ActionAid (Kenya) – Training in life skills, literacy, and vocational skills to improve confidence and agency

Significant improvements in girls' self-esteem, confidence, and sense of agency were evident in the secondary research and case study primary research. Girls reported feeling more assertive, especially in household decision-making, and were better able to express themselves in their communities. Training in life skills, literacy, and vocational skills enabled girls to become more financially independent and socially active. They gained the confidence to speak in public, take leadership positions, and engage in community discussions.

Additional detail is available in [Annex I \(ActionAid \(Kenya\) Case Study\)](#).

Social and emotional learning

Many projects delivered modules on social and emotional learning, which were integrated into the curriculum to support girls in managing emotions, setting goals, and cultivating resilience. These sessions emphasised self-reflection and relationship-building, creating opportunities for girls to articulate their feelings and develop independence. Facilitators, who were often recruited from the girls' own communities to help build trust, tried to develop an empathetic and supportive environment where girls felt safe to share their experiences. The peer group discussions and activities conducted by many projects provided a platform for girls to learn from one another and build confidence through mutual support.

Mentorship for personal growth

Mentorship was a key element in building a sense of agency among participants for many projects. Mentors, selected for their community ties and training in safeguarding, offered guidance and a trusted point of contact for the girls. They would typically facilitate sessions that encouraged girls to articulate their aspirations and explore pathways to achieve them. Safe spaces would be established to provide an environment where girls could express themselves freely, engage in learning, and build networks of support. The aim for these projects was that these spaces would become hubs for personal growth and empowerment. The following quote reflects the achievements and impact of effective peer-to-peer groups:

“The GEE (Girls Economic Empowerment) groups actually did a significant work in terms of peer-to-peer mobilisation, peer to peer outreach. This group was critical in terms of following up and finding out where the girls were. They were instrumental in terms of identifying some of the challenges that were affecting them. After identifying them, they reached out to key actors who could advise them on addressing these challenges. This group was critical in terms of creating linkages between the girls and other service providers because this group could network with ministry of youth who were running youth centres. (CARE (Somalia) IP KII)

IO7: Attendance – Changes in girls' attendance at opportunities for learning made available to them

Projects across the LNGB Window removed barriers to girls' attendance by engaging communities, creating accessible and gender-sensitive learning environments, and providing practical support measures like flexible schedules, transportation, and childcare, fostering inclusive and supportive educational opportunities. It was common that community engagement would play a key role in efforts to reduce cultural and social barriers to attendance. Regular meetings with parents, caregivers, and local leaders helped change perceptions around girls' education, engendering wider acceptance and encouragement for their participation. Community action groups and oversight

committees would be established or reinvigorated so that attendance could be monitored, and absences addressed. These groups would usually engage directly with families to resolve issues preventing attendance, such as domestic responsibilities or employer conflicts. The use of community-based champions and role models also helped to promote positive attitudes towards education, particularly in regions with entrenched cultural resistance.

Creating accessible learning environments

Many projects placed great focus on providing physical learning environments that set out to meet different needs of their beneficiary girls, as focused on in *IE Study – Educating Girls with Disabilities in GEC II*. Learning spaces were frequently relocated closer to communities to reduce travel distances, helping to address safety concerns and logistical challenges. Flexible scheduling was also introduced by many projects to accommodate seasonal activities like farming and water collection, as well as household responsibilities. Classes would often be held at unconventional times, such as early mornings or evenings, ensuring girls could balance education with domestic and personal responsibilities. Additionally, the creation of safe, gender-sensitive environments, including the provision of hygiene facilities and female facilitators, made attendance more comfortable and accessible for both girls and their families.

Providing practical support

Practical support measures were also identified by projects as being important to removing financial and logistical barriers, as *IE Study – Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling* examined through its focus on how and to what extent LNGB projects mitigated the barriers the most marginalised girls face in education. Scholarships, transportation aids such as bicycles, and dignity kits were provided to ease the financial burden on families. For young mothers, childcare services were often available, allowing them to attend classes while their children were cared for nearby, with remedial classes supporting girls who missed sessions due to unavoidable responsibilities. The quote below reflects how flexible scheduling greatly helped girls from different communities attend more frequently:

“Really analysing the barriers and trying to overcome every single barrier. E.g., in one region there are coffee field everywhere so during harvest all girls are harvesting so we adjusted the school areas so girls can do both as we can’t ask them not to take part in the harvest. We negotiated with local leaders and adapted the learning schedule to accommodate for this. This kind of understanding and analysis of barriers and finding a way to overcome them was extremely important.” (PIN (Ethiopia) IP KII)

ActionAid (Kenya) – How provision of supplies and resources increase attendance

Primary respondents put the relatively high attendance across the project down to several factors, including the provision of essential supplies (e.g., sanitary towels), childcare support, and flexible class schedules. They reported that these provisions were critical in reducing absenteeism, particularly among young mothers. The quote below demonstrates how the provision of childcare helped young mothers to attend lessons more regularly:

“What improved their attendance is the motivation that I talked about. When they came, they were given milk to give the children, and some were coming with the children. Some had 2 to 3. We accommodated from 0 to 2 years. So, you find that some had two kids, and the childminders could also take care of them when they were in classes. That is the children were being taken care of outside the classroom. This could give them time to attend the classes properly” (Transition Support Staff KII)

Additional detail is available in [Annex I \(ActionAid \(Kenya\) Case Study\)](#).

Annex P: What worked well/ less well and why?

Introduction

This annex presents an in-depth analysis of how the interplay of different factors either contributed to or did not contribute to success. That is, what worked well in driving change, what worked less well and what were the reasons behind this? It is a synthesis of findings that draws on the desk-based review of project external evaluation reports, project monitoring documentation, FM learning products, FM and FCDO programme management information, secondary data, contextual information, IE studies; interviews with IPs and strategic stakeholders, and the primary qualitative research (i.e., KIs and FGDs) conducted for the six project case studies.

The annex is composed of four sub-sections:

- 1) What intervention types worked for different types of projects?
- 2) To what extent and how did contextual factors for different projects influence their performance?
- 3) What were the implementation factors behind GEC-T projects' success or lack of success?
- 4) What were the unexpected or unintended results across the two windows.

For each of these sub-sections, results are presented by individual factor (e.g., community outreach) followed by discussion of how that specific factor worked in the context of GEC-T projects and how it worked in the context of LNGB projects. While most factors were applicable to both windows, this was not wholly the case – for example, 'vocational skills' only has an LNGB Window discussion, as there was not sufficient evidence to support a discussion for the GEC-T Window.

What types of intervention worked for different projects?

Improved teaching quality

GEC-T Window

The use of child-centred, engaging, and interactive methods in the classroom across the GEC-T Window increased the interest and engagement of learners, supporting their learning and likelihood of remaining in school. Teacher training and support were found to be effective at improving learning with some caveats. The extent to which improved teaching methods (such as interactive and innovative learner-centred pedagogies) could be implemented is discussed below.

ChildHope (Ethiopia) – Improved teaching practices

Project evaluation reports pointed to the positive effects of teachers checking students' learning and providing formative feedback. [ChildHope \(Ethiopia\)](#) also reported that a higher number of teachers demonstrated the use of lesson plans and of improved instructional practices.

Across the GEC-T Window there were examples of learner-centred approaches generally supporting learning gains. VIVA (Uganda) reported that teachers were delivering more engaging and more interactive lessons as a result of the training received. Endline reports from AFK (Afghanistan) similarly reported that group-based activities employed by teachers supported learning, particularly in maths lessons.

CSU (Uganda) – The impact of teacher training on learners

The primary research for the CSU (Uganda) case study highlighted some positive changes in the classroom following teacher training, such as the use of quizzes, remedial classes and interactive methods as being effective in accommodating and including children with disabilities in learning activities. The CSU project noted that the use of child-centred approaches was beneficial but appeared to decrease as children progressed and lessons became more advanced.

Additional detail is available in [Annex H \(CSU \(Uganda\) Case Study\)](#).

At the same time, teachers frequently faced challenges in implementing methods they were taught in training. In some cases, this was linked to contextual factors such as school infrastructure or large class size. Projects also reported that teachers struggled with some aspects of the new methodologies, including the use of groupwork or the use of

improvised materials. Many projects reported that teacher training was not sufficient to overcome low baseline teaching capacity. For instance, Mercy Corps (Nigeria) reported that some teachers had low subject matter competency, especially in numeracy content and phonology awareness.

Mercy Corps (Nepal) - Challenges implementing engaging methods

IE primary research found that, in the case of [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#), although teachers appreciated the more interactive and engaging methodologies, they were not able to implement them in formal classes due to strict curriculum requirements as mandated by the Nepali government. Training provided by the project seems to have been insufficient to lead to lasting changes, particularly in the context of challenging classroom conditions and low baseline teaching capacity. In particular, it was pointed out that teachers would have required more practical support and examples that they could integrate in their teaching:

“Potential improvement to teacher training would have been to include more to support their motivations and examples to improve their teaching. Therefore, the training was seen as needing to be more extensive.” (KII with teachers/ headteachers)

Additional detail is available in [Annex F \(Mercy Corps \(Nepal\) Case Study\)](#).

The extent to which teachers were able to implement specifically inclusive education practices is similarly unclear from the GEC-T Window level analysis. For example, Link Community Development (Kenya) reported that despite a positive change in attitudes towards inclusion, teachers in lower primary lagged behind in terms of being able to explain adaptations they made for children with disabilities in the classroom. This was echoed in the case study primary research for CSU (Uganda), highlighting that despite teachers reportedly being more aware and interested in inclusive education, the majority lacked the practical skills to implement inclusive education practices. Importantly, teachers would have required even more support in terms of training and follow-up to foster a more inclusive learning environment and include children with more severe disabilities in the classroom.

IE Study - Teachers and Teaching for Marginalised Girls

Many projects reviewed as part of the study focused on improving aspects of pedagogy, such as encouraging gender-responsive, learner-centred, and inclusive pedagogies, although there was limited detailed information about teaching practices in the project documentation. However, IPs did not appear to be routinely assessing teachers' knowledge, skills, or competencies, or linking this evidence to girls' learning needs, as a basis for designing and delivering targeted professional development activities to improve teaching quality, and subsequently girls' learning outcomes. The study was unable to identify how effective the support provided to improve teaching quality has been in improving girls' learning outcomes.

LNGB Window

Across the LNGB Window, enhanced educator training and support mechanisms, such as peer-to-peer learning, monitoring and feedback have consistently shown success in improving teaching quality across diverse educational settings. Subject-specific training, especially in literacy and numeracy, used evidence-based methodologies such as phonics for reading and problem-solving approaches for numeracy, helping to improve the efficacy of lessons. For example, the Link (Malawi) project addressed the transition to English as the medium of instruction through comprehensive educator training. These sessions enhanced educators' pedagogical and language skills, equipping them to deliver lessons effectively in English.

CARE (Somalia) – The impact of educator learning circles

The use of educator learning circles in the [CARE \(Somalia\)](#) project facilitated peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and continuous professional development. Over 20% of educators received systematic coaching from district education offices, leading to sustained improvements in teaching standards. This model also highlighted the importance of localised capacity building to ensure scalability and sustainability.

Several projects across the LNGB Window demonstrated the critical role of learning support educators deployed within schools. By focusing on student-centred approaches and integrating differentiated instruction, these educators helped to meet diverse learner needs. In addition, educator retention strategies, including housing support and salary subsidies, addressed attrition issues, fostering stability within schools.

While educator training initiatives demonstrated significant successes, certain aspects of projects such as insufficient follow-up support and ineffective mentoring were less effective in achieving their objectives, which limited the long-term impact of training sessions. For example, IE Case Study primary research demonstrated a lack of coordination between educator coaches and school administration in the Plan (Zimbabwe) project, resulting in inconsistent application of new teaching methodologies.

Additionally, in several LNGB projects, the rapid rollout of English as a medium of instruction overwhelmed educators, particularly those with limited prior proficiency in English. This led to reduced confidence and, in some cases, a reliance on rote methods of teaching. The absence of adequate resources, such as textbooks aligned with the new language policy, compounded these issues and hindered the implementation of the training.

Small group learning

GEC-T Window

Small-group environments were supportive of learning and other IOs. In the GEC-T Window, small group learning was implemented in both the classroom (through the use of group-based activities), through mentoring, and through child clubs. Smaller group environments worked as girls benefited from focused attention in smaller groups, felt more confident participating and were more engaged. For example, the [ChildHope \(Ethiopia\)](#) endline evaluation report found that small group homework tutorials were statistically significant predictors of girls' English oral reading fluency, numeracy, and self-esteem. Smaller learning environments were also linked to being supportive of girls' learning through the use of flexible schedules. As there were fewer girls, the timetable did not need to be followed as rigidly and could be adjusted to suit girls' competing responsibilities inside and outside of the home. For example, Mercy Corps (Nigeria) found that flexible schedules supported girls' attendance as participation could be more easily combined with existing responsibilities in childcare, housework, farmwork, Islamic classes, as well as regular school lessons.

HPA (Rwanda) – Creating a supportive learning environment through study groups

Primary data from the case study indicates that taking part in Community Study Groups helped improve girls' learning by allowing them to go over concepts they did not understand in class and study together in groups. Remedial Classes were also described as helpful by the case study respondents, especially as they allowed the project to reach more vulnerable students. Peer-to-peer learning and support in both types of sessions were described as particularly helpful by project staff. As highlighted by respondents:

“Before, I didn’t understand anything. However, the programme’s weekend sessions for revising our studies were very helpful. Sometimes, we would be asked to go to the chalkboard and read to our classmates. The teacher would encourage us to read as we understood, and if we made mistakes, she would correct us”. (FGD with in-school girls over 18)

Additional detail is available in [Annex G \(HPA \(Rwanda\) Case Study\)](#).

Mentoring supporting learning in small groups

Focused attention on girls' learning was also provided through the use of mentors. The role of mentors was important to improving attendance and learning as well as other IOs. Evidence from endline evaluation reports across the GEC-T Window demonstrated peer mentoring has been a particularly successful intervention for: increasing girls' self-efficacy; motivating girls to stay in school, learn and develop life skills; and encouraging girls to seek pathways to financial independence. For example, the [Link Community Development \(Kenya\)](#) project reported that family outreach by male mentors led to improved attendance.

Evidence from the Campaign for Female Education ([CAMFED](#)) ([Tanzania/ Zambia/ Zimbabwe](#)) projects found that marginalised girls reported being more self-confident, as well as enjoying school more and engaging with learning better as a result of peer mentoring. The impact of peer mentoring on successful transition outcomes was demonstrated by the [VSO \(Nepal\)](#) project, *Sisters for Sisters' Education*, with the majority of girls who took part in Big Sister-Little Sister mentoring transitioning to the next stage of education or employment. There was also strong evidence that mentoring improved girls' ability to decide on key life decisions, such as continuing school, when to get married, whether to work after completing their studies, and the type of work to opt for.

Girls' Clubs

Across the GEC-T Window, many project endline reports reported that Child Clubs were successful interventions across contexts, both in the case of girl-specific clubs and mixed gender clubs. Girls' Clubs were described as

supporting girls to remain in school and transition to secondary education, and as being effective in supporting marginalised children, including children with disabilities. Mercy Corps (Nepal) reported that Girls' Clubs worked because of their highly interactive nature and the smaller class size increased participation and allowed girls to ask more questions. The GEC Learning Brief *A space of their own: What we have learned about Girls' Clubs* also outlines how Girls' Clubs can support learning as content covered within GEC girls' clubs tends to respond to gaps in girls' knowledge or skills that are not met elsewhere at home or at school. Many clubs also have a specific learning or skill focus such as literacy, numeracy, ICT and finance.

ChildHope (Ethiopia) – Girls' Clubs supporting attendance

The [ChildHope \(Ethiopia\)](#) endline report found that Girls' Clubs contribute to regular attendance at school and improve motivation. Furthermore, it also reported that Girls' Clubs acted as a safeguarding function in which the project could intervene in cases where girls were going to get married.

Endline evaluations confirmed that girls attending Girls' Clubs showed improvements in self-confidence, self-esteem and life skills. For example, Avanti (Kenya) endline reports showed that Girls' Clubs improved girls' self-esteem, life skills, and knowledge of health and sanitation. These findings were corroborated by KIIs with the EDT (Kenya) team who noted that Girls' Clubs empowered girls to speak up, lead others, express their ideas and generally enhanced their self-worth. In terms of decision-making, the project staff member noted that girls reported feeling more in control of their future and highlighted setting more academic and personal goals as a result.

Mercy Corps (Nepal) – Girls' Clubs supporting learning

IE primary research case study on Mercy Corps (Nepal) found Girls' Clubs to be particularly supportive of girls' learning. The small group environment of Girls' Clubs strongly supported their participation in lessons, allowed them to ask questions and receive more individualised support from teachers. Being in girl-only spaces helped girls feel more comfortable to participate in the classroom. Teachers were also able to implement more engaging techniques, thanks to the smaller group sizes and greater freedom from curriculum constraints. The case study found strong links between Girls' Clubs and improved literacy and numeracy, mainly due to the interactive nature of the sessions.

Additional detail is available in [Annex F \(Mercy Corps \(Nepal\) Case Study\)](#).

LNGB Window

For projects across the LNGB Window, small group learning initiatives, such as catch-up and 'bridge' classes, have been instrumental in addressing the educational needs of the most marginalised and struggling students. In the VSO (Nepal) project, bridge classes successfully reintegrated out-of-school girls into mainstream education. Educators employed tailored instructional strategies using workbooks and reading materials specifically designed to address learning gaps. Endline evaluations revealed a 30% increase in literacy proficiency among participating girls, showcasing the effectiveness of this targeted approach. Similarly, in the World Education Inc. (Ghana) project, after-school clubs offered a structured environment where external evaluators found that girls not only enhanced their English and numeracy skills but also engaged in life skills training, facilitating holistic development.

Plan (Zimbabwe) – The effectiveness of the Accelerated Teaching and Learning approach

The Accelerated Teaching and Learning approach, taught in small groups and targeted towards girls coming from a low educational baseline greatly improved participants' literacy and numeracy skills. Case study primary research respondents described how because of the effectiveness of literacy lessons, they managed to progress from recognising letters to constructing sentences and understanding comprehension passages. Numeracy improvements included mastering addition, subtraction, and profit-loss calculations. Evaluation reports found that the project's tailored modules and resources, including individual workbooks, flip charts, and group activities, created a conducive learning environment that was particularly effective for girls who had never attended school. The following quote reflects the significant real-life impact these new skills had for girls:

“As part of the project, we were taught basic numeracy skills, which enabled me to sell bananas more effectively at the market. I learned to manage my sales and calculate my profits.” (Beneficiary Girl FGD)

Additional detail is available in [Annex K \(Zimbabwe \(Plan\) Case Study\)](#).

Pivoting to small group learning during the Covid-19 pandemic

External evaluation reports found that the AKF (Afghanistan) project pivoted to small group learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, which involved home-based lessons delivered by visiting educators under the Afghan Girls Education and Empowerment initiative. These sessions provided personalised attention to learners, although cultural norms occasionally limited participation. Mobile classrooms in remote areas further expanded access to education, enabling marginalised learners to receive tailored support. Another notable example highlighted in the Endline evaluation report of the [CARE \(Somalia\)](#) project involved a mobile education unit, as part of the Educate Girls, End Poverty Programme, that combined literacy instruction with life skills training, helping girls who had dropped out of school to re-engage with education. These flexible models demonstrated the high value and potential of adapting interventions to contexts where it was difficult to educate larger groups of girls together, while maintaining a focus on learner-centred approaches.

Despite their successes, small group learning initiatives faced challenges in reaching the most marginalised populations, as evidenced in external evaluation reports. In the IRC (Pakistan) project, cultural norms restricted the participation of older girls in home-based learning groups, particularly in rural areas. In some cases, families were hesitant to send girls to sessions due to concerns about safety and community perceptions. In the [Link Community Development \(Malawi\)](#) project, the limited availability of trained facilitators led to inconsistencies in the quality of instruction within catch-up classes. Some facilitators lacked the skills to manage diverse learning needs effectively, resulting in disengagement among students. The lack of adequate monitoring mechanisms to track progress in small group settings further undermined the effectiveness of these interventions, particularly for girls who required more intensive support.

Changing community attitudes and norms

GEC-T Window

Evidence from project endlines and [IE Study - Sustaining Changes in Community Attitudes and Norms to Improve Girls' Education Outcomes](#) suggests that interventions aimed at changing community attitudes and norms were effective in some cases across the GEC-T Window. These initiatives created the necessary conditions for girls to attend educational settings, facilitating their learning and transition.

Changing attitudes to increase girls' attendance

The success of community interventions stemmed from their ability to encourage school attendance by reducing the stigma associated with girls' education. Additionally, they raised awareness among caregivers and the wider community on the benefits of girls attending school, creating a more supportive environment for their education. This was demonstrated across projects and contexts. For instance, [World Vision \(Zimbabwe\)](#) endline reported that they engaged parents and community leaders in discussions about the value of educating girls. This helped to shift perceptions and encourage families to prioritise their daughters' attendance at school as well as decreasing the acceptability of early marriage. The [ChildHope \(Ethiopia\)](#) endline report recognised the importance of opening a space to discuss positive masculinities and gender. Good Brothers Clubs in Ethiopia included discussions around what it means to be a boy, a brother, or a male partner – and to identify inequalities in the experiences of girls and boys and plan how to address them. This led to boys taking concrete actions, such as dividing up household chores equally with their sisters, allowing an enabling environment for girls' learning.

Mercy Corps (Nepal) – Changed attitudes leading to behaviour change

The Mercy Corps (Nepal) project used awareness raising among communities and caregivers as a central part of implementation. This was done both through targeted household visits and three-day Family Dialogues, and community-level events, including theatre. The case study primary research found that following awareness raising, there were changes in parental attitudes to girls' education, particularly in terms of allowing further time for studying, reduced housework commitments and increased engagement with girls' schools. Although, overall, girls continue to have higher domestic burdens and household responsibilities remain gendered, some respondents confirmed that following awareness raising, housework was divided more equitably among boys and girls. Most frequently, caregivers reduced girls' housework responsibilities and allowed them additional time to study as part of weekend Girls' Clubs. The case study primary research also suggests that girls delaying their marriage was a result of awareness raising efforts; however, the link to specific project activities is less clear. Decisions to delay marriage could be linked to girls' improved self-esteem and self-efficacy, as well as improved academic performance.

Additional detail is available in [Annex E \(Mercy Corps \(Nepal\) Case Study\)](#).

Similarly, [EDT \(Kenya\)](#) successfully demonstrated the link between community awareness and improved attendance; by conducting workshops that educated parents about the benefits of girls' education, the project promoted a supportive environment that encouraged families to send their daughters to school rather than engaging in early marriage as demonstrated in their endline. The emphasis on life skills and confidence-building also contributed to girls feeling more empowered to attend school regularly. Echoing these findings, the IE primary research KIs conducted with [VSO \(Nepal\)](#) project staff highlighted the success of community awareness activities that tackled socio-cultural norms which prevented girls from attending school. The project mobilised 'Big Sisters', who conducted door-to-door campaigns targeting parents and organised orientation programmes. Both activities were found to encourage girls to attend school.

Barriers to attitudinal change

Despite the improvements made in community attitudes, creating a supportive environment to allow girls to attend school was not enough to overcome other structural barriers. Examples from across the GEC-T Window highlighted that although projects were able to facilitate attitudinal change, without other necessary support the gains made may not be sustained. While [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#) aimed to raise awareness about the importance of girls' education, the project faced challenges in translating community awareness into tangible changes in attendance, particularly at times of the year when girls' workloads were at their highest due to farming activities. Despite efforts to engage communities, socio-economic factors and the lingering effects of Covid-19 school closures impacted girls' motivation to return to school. This highlighted that while community awareness is crucial, it needs to be accompanied by support to address the practical and economic barriers that prevent girls from attending. Despite reporting improvements in life skills and community awareness regarding education for girls with disabilities, [Promoting Equality in African Schools \(PEAS\) \(Uganda\)](#) struggled to translate these improvements directly to changes in learning outcomes or attendance rates. This indicates that although awareness-raising interventions were successfully implemented, the lack of measurable impact on attendance suggests that additional strategies were needed to reinforce the importance of education within the community.

CSU (Uganda) – Deep rooted community and caregiver attitudes in Uganda

The primary research case study from [CSU \(Uganda\)](#) confirmed the importance of awareness-raising activities in the context of strong negative social norms and limited focus on disability in other education initiatives. Girls, caregivers, and teachers all reported that the project changed attitudes in their community, which led to increased access to education for children with disabilities. However, the lack of economic support and pervasive belief that parents saw education as too expensive for children with disabilities (due to perceived limited academic and employment prospects) meant that in practice, increases in attendance were limited and often short-lived. In addition, while one of the strengths of the project was attitudinal change among parents, community attitudes and school-based bullying proved harder to shift, with cases of discrimination continuing to be reported during IE case study research.

Additional detail is available in [Annex H \(CSU \(Uganda\) Case Study\)](#).

Overall, community awareness-raising interventions had varying degrees of success in promoting girls' attendance at school. While some projects effectively engaged communities and shifted perceptions, others faced challenges in translating attitudinal change into behavioural change, highlighting the need for complementary support alongside awareness-raising initiatives.

LNGB Window

For many LNGB projects, community engagement has been pivotal in reshaping perceptions of girls' education and developing supportive environments. Many projects collaborated with religious leaders and senior community figures to promote girls' education. For example, in the [AKF \(Afghanistan\)](#) project, external evaluators found that the framing of formal education as complementary to Quranic studies helped the project gain broad acceptance, facilitating transitions from Quranic to formal education; training Quranic teachers to support this transition ensured continuity in learning, while also addressing cultural resistance.

In the [World Education Inc. \(Ghana\)](#) project, community events were leveraged to engage local leaders and raise awareness about the importance of girls' education. The external evaluator's midline evaluation report found that this approach doubled the rate of community leaders publicly endorsing education by the mid-point in the project. In the [Plan \(Zimbabwe\)](#) project, mother-daughter clubs further exemplified the transformative power of grassroots initiatives. These clubs facilitated discussions on sensitive topics such as SRHR and early marriage prevention, with IE Case Study primary research respondents describing how they significantly altered entrenched cultural norms. The inclusion of boys as allies strengthened these efforts, fostering a community-wide commitment to gender equality. By

actively involving all stakeholders, these projects demonstrated that sustained engagement is critical to driving lasting social change.

ACTED (Pakistan) – Tangible project benefits create self-perpetuating positive perception

The project successfully mobilised communities to support girls' education, with SMCs comprising local community members playing a key role in ensuring enrolment, attendance, and the establishment of safe learning spaces, which facilitated the consistent educational engagement of pupils. The case study primary research demonstrates that effective community mobilisation and awareness campaigns also increased support for girls' education, transforming previous resistance into acceptance. Endline evaluation reports found that parents who were initially hesitant became more open to sending their daughters to school as the benefits of doing so became more apparent. This was at least in part due to educators and community leaders engaging directly with families and active community participation in door-to-door advocacy campaigns. This helped create a ripple effect, with primary respondents reporting that younger girls felt inspired to pursue education with the increased support of their families. The project also encouraged a shift towards delaying marriages, as families began to see the benefits of girls completing their education before marrying. The following quote reflects how learning achievements have helped to change families' perceptions of the importance of education:

"Sir, one day I was doing some calculations, and my daughter was sitting with me. I forgot something in the middle, and she pointed out that I was wrong. She took out a page and pen, did a detailed calculation, and showed me the correct figures. When I checked again, I realised the mistake was mine. There's now a difference between our education and theirs." (Beneficiary Parent KII)

Additional detail is available in [Annex J \(ACTED \(Pakistan\) Case Study\)](#).

Some LNGB projects encountered significant resistance to their initiatives during implementation. This was demonstrated through the IE case study primary research for the ACTED (Pakistan), Plan (Zimbabwe) and ActionAid (Kenya) projects, which found that community mobilisation efforts often encountered resistance, especially in contexts where deep-rooted cultural beliefs and practices conflicted with the perceived ethos of the project, such as the Apostolic community's attitudes towards girls' education and gender roles in the Plan (Zimbabwe) project's areas of operation. In another example, the CARE (Somalia) project's advocacy efforts by female champions were sometimes met with hostility, particularly in conservative communities, which limited the reach and effectiveness of the campaigns.

ActionAid (Kenya) – Ongoing cultural resistance to girls' education initiatives

External evaluation reports show that some community members remained sceptical about older girls' education, particularly in more rural, conservative regions such as Isiolo, where girls reported facing public ridicule and stigma for attending school. Insults and social stigma, especially around basic literacy education for adult women, discouraged attendance and diminished morale for some participants. While resistance decreased over time as the benefits became more apparent to the community, the initial scepticism toward the project's female-only focus remained, reflecting ongoing cultural biases. The case study primary research supported this finding, with respondents describing how some parents and wider community members were reluctant to support the project, revealing a need for early and ongoing advocacy to promote gender-equal values and increase community acceptance of women-focused educational interventions. The following quote reflects some of the ingrained cultural barriers faced by women and the project:

"So, this is something that did not go well. "Why are you taking my wife to school?". At times, it will bring conflicts at home. So, it had to take the engagement of the women's rights network to engage the community, because, at times, the husband would not be willing to let the wife go. So, I would say that those are some of the things that are really a hindrance to the activities of the project and of the girls and that will discourage a girl to feel like. "I want to go." And also, it will be like, "Why should my wife go? She is already my wife, I am providing. So why should I even allow her to go back to school?" (Project Staff KII)

Additional detail is available in [Annex I \(Kenya \(ActionAid\) Case Study\)](#).

Infrastructure and resource provision

GEC-T Window

Across the GEC-T Window, there were many successful examples of infrastructure and resource provision interventions in promoting girls' education in varying contexts. While many projects successfully improved learning

environments and provided essential materials, challenges remained in ensuring that these improvements translated into increased attendance and improved learning outcomes.

Improving infrastructure to encourage attendance

Equipping schools with basic infrastructure, toilets, and WASH facilities promoted girls' attendance across the GEC-T Window. Specialised laboratories or materials were shown to be important in increasing learners' interest in school. For example, the [AKF \(Afghanistan\)](#) endline evaluation reported that government schools were supported with school improvement plans and provision of science laboratories and libraries, which helped girls learn in practical ways and increased their interest in school. The [Avanti \(Kenya\)](#) endline reported that accessing ICT labs and being able to use computers led to improvements in girls' self-esteem, their ability to express themselves, as well as their digital competencies and digital literacy. Having access to computers was described as giving girls more knowledge and awareness of the outside world, while they had previously felt quite isolated. Avanti (Kenya) additionally reported that the use of computers was beneficial for teachers, making classes more engaging, providing teaching aids, and reducing preparation time. [PEAS \(Uganda\)](#) upgraded classrooms and provided essential learning resources which their endline credited with creating a more conducive atmosphere for learning; encouraging girls to attend school. Despite this, the project faced challenges in concretely attributing infrastructure improvements to increased attendance. Beyond learning facilities and materials, [World Vision \(Zimbabwe\)](#) constructed separate washroom facilities for girls. By improving hygiene and privacy, the project created a supportive environment that encouraged girls to attend school regularly, particularly during menstruation, which was previously a barrier to attendance.

Mercy Corps (Nepal) – Infrastructure improvements creating a learning friendly environment

The primary research on the [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#) case study found the project effectively implemented improvements in school infrastructure, leading to a more positive and girl-friendly learning environment. The case study reported improvements to WASH facilities, classroom infrastructure and broader school resources. The case study primary research respondents spoke positively about the building of girls' toilets and new facilities, such as libraries and computer labs. Despite these positive improvements in infrastructure, they produced mixed results, with some girls reporting that use of computer labs and the capacity of teachers to integrate ICT into learning were also limited. Case study respondents also shared that not all these facilities continued to be used after the project's end, usually due to lack of specialised staff that could run them.

Additional detail is available in [Annex F \(Mercy Corps \(Nepal\) Case Study\)](#).

IE Study – Educating Girls with Disabilities in the GEC II

The study identified inaccessible infrastructure as a key barrier to children with disabilities. An interview conducted with [PEAS \(Uganda\)](#) highlighted that though *'it's often sort of forgotten or overlooked because it feels so obvious,'* welcoming infrastructural spaces plays a role in the decision-making process of sending children with disabilities to school. From interviews conducted as part of the study, the most commonly mentioned adaptations to learning spaces included widening the doorways, providing ramps, constructing disability-friendly toilets and ensuring adequate ventilation/light.

Providing learning materials

Providing learning materials directly to students was also an important motivational factor. The case study primary research for [HPA \(Rwanda\)](#) found that the provision of school materials, such as books for Kinyarwanda, English and Math, as well as notebooks, was frequently mentioned in data collection with boys and girls, as well as community members. Receiving school materials was described by students as being a crucial motivational factor, both for themselves and for parents. Overall, receiving materials enabled children to focus on their studies and do well in school. [EDT \(Kenya\)](#) reported that the success of their infrastructure and resource provision intervention was due to its emphasis on not just providing resources, but also training teachers to effectively use them. This dual approach ensured that the new materials and upgraded classrooms were integrated into the teaching process, enhancing the overall educational experience for girls. Outside of formal education contexts, the provision of startup kits for vocational training was demonstrated to be successful by the [Mercy Corps \(Nigeria\)](#) endline evaluation because it empowered girls with practical skills and resources. The use of a targeted outreach approach ensured many girls benefited from kits and was found to boost both economic independence and girls' confidence.

CSU (Uganda) – Supporting girls’ attendance through medical treatment and assistive devices

The case study primary research for the [CSU \(Uganda\)](#) project identified the provision of medical treatment and assistive devices (such as glasses, hearing aids, crutches and medicine) to be an effective form of support. As illness and lack of assistive devices were major barriers to going to school, support provided by [CSU \(Uganda\)](#) was reported to increase girls’ life quality considerably through not only access to education but also improvements in health, wellbeing and perceptions in the community.

Additional detail is available in [Annex H \(CSU \(Uganda\) Case Study\)](#).

LNGB Window

Across the LNGB Window, improving educational infrastructure and resource availability proved an important component in the effort to reduce barriers to learning. For example, multiple projects facilitated the provision of gender-segregated washrooms and changing rooms which were equipped with sanitary facilities and significantly improved attendance among adolescent girls. In the Link Community Development (Malawi) project, endline evaluation reports found that hygiene kits being distributed reduced absenteeism during menstruation, with attendance rates rising by 7% within the intervention period.

To varying degrees of coverage and success, many projects also focused on providing assistive devices for students with disabilities, including hearing aids and braille materials. These measures, where devices and materials were consistently available, enabled improved participation in classroom activities and contributed to higher retention rates among girls with disabilities. Similarly, in the CARE (Somalia) project, the provision of tablets and interactive instructional materials reduced the student-to-textbook ratio, which external evaluators found helped lead to a more engaging learning environment. Educators highlighted the transformative impact of these resources, which supported differentiated instruction and interactive pedagogy.

ACTED (Pakistan) – The impact of free school supplies and short travel distances to learning centres

Primary and secondary research sources both noted that the project effectively provided essential educational resources, including free stationery and learning materials, which alleviated some of the financial burdens on the poorest families. Establishing schools and learning centres closer to communities also improved accessibility, ensuring more girls could attend regularly in the absence of distance-based, safety and travel cost-related barriers. Primary respondents appreciated these efforts, noting the benefits of receiving necessary supplies and having schools within their reach.

Additional detail is available in [Annex J \(ACTED \(Pakistan\) Case Study\)](#).

Investments in school libraries and learning centres created well-resourced environments that boosted literacy and numeracy outcomes, as described in external evaluator reports for multiple projects across the LNGB Window. For example, in the [ACTED \(Pakistan\)](#) project, as described by IE Case Study primary research participants, SMCs received training to maintain and expand these facilities, increasing the likelihood of long-term sustainability. Collectively, these initiatives demonstrated that addressing practical barriers is essential for creating equitable and effective learning environments.

While infrastructure improvements addressed significant barriers in many projects, some initiatives were less successful in achieving equitable access or providing longer-term sustainability. For example, in the CARE (Somalia) project, schools faced difficulties in sustaining newly constructed facilities due to inadequate funding for repairs, highlighting the need for comprehensive planning to ensure the affordability of infrastructure investments in the long term. Additionally, hygiene kits provided under certain projects were insufficient in quantity or quality, leading to inconsistencies in their impact on attendance.

Plan (Zimbabwe) – The impact of delayed learning infrastructure

Evaluation reports show that while many learning hubs were upgraded, delays in securing building materials hindered the timely completion of renovations in some communities. Case study primary research respondents reported that in some cases, girls had to learn in unfinished classrooms or without sufficient furniture, compelling learners to sit on the floor during lessons which impacted their comfort and engagement.

Additional detail is available in [Annex K \(Plan \(Zimbabwe\) Case Study\)](#).

Vocational skills

LNGB Window

Projects across the LNGB Window employed vocational training initiatives as a powerful tool for empowering girls, providing them with pathways to economic independence and self-reliance. [IE Study – Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling](#) examines this in detail, assessing various vocational pathway options, barriers to transition and the extent to which LNGB projects influenced girls' progression following training.

Link Community Development (Malawi) – The importance of tailored vocational training programmes

In the [Link Community Development \(Malawi\)](#) project, vocational training programmes were tailored to local market needs and focused on sustainable agriculture and food processing. These skills not only generated income but also addressed community food security. In addition, the integration of life skills and financial literacy into the curriculum ensured that participants could effectively manage their businesses.

In the [World Education Inc. \(Ghana\)](#) project, external evaluation reports describe how graduates of vocational programmes reported significant success in establishing small businesses such as tailoring and catering skills, which when combined with start-up funds and equipment, enabled beneficiaries to achieve financial stability, earning respect within their families and communities. Project evaluations found that 89% of participants in one programme noted increased earnings, highlighting the economic impact of these interventions.

Plan (Zimbabwe) – How local master craftsmen helped improve vocational training sessions

The Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOP) provided hands-on training in practical skills such as baking, dressmaking, and hairdressing, which were described by case study primary research beneficiaries as highly relevant to community needs. Partnerships with local craftsmen and community-based training ensured accessibility and cultural appropriateness, allowing married women to participate without disrupting family dynamics. Vocational certificates further boosted participants' credibility and employability within their communities and participants reported that they were able to secure educational placements, start small businesses or earn supplementary income using their new skills, supported by their official documentation. The following quote showcases the benefits brought by classes being taught by local craftsmen:

“Master crafts tutors (individuals experienced in a specific trade taught by the ISOP) would teach skills. For example, for our dressmaking class, the Fashion and Fabrics teacher at Mafarikwa secondary school assisted us while a local man who runs his own bakery taught baking. Everyone who participated in the SAGE project was highly skilled in what they did which made classes to be seamless.” (Community Educator KII)

Additional detail is available in [Annex K \(Plan \(Zimbabwe\) Case Study\)](#).

In several projects across the LNGB Window however, cultural barriers in some communities restricted women's participation in public-facing professions, limiting the scope of vocational training's impact. Insufficient follow-up support, such as access to start-up funds or mentorship, further curtailed the long-term sustainability of these initiatives. Other common issues that undermined the impact of vocational training schemes were logistical and supply problems. These included a scarcity of resources with which to practice new skills, a lack of financial capital to start businesses and limited duration of training, all of which presented challenges to participants and graduates of these programmes.

ACTED (Pakistan) – Contextual and implementation factors undermining the effectiveness of vocational training interventions

While vocational training was popular, economic conditions and logistical barriers limited some girls' access to advanced technical training. Evaluation reports found that although there was a strong desire to participate in income-generating activities, actual opportunities remained scarce, highlighting a need for stronger links with local markets and more robust employment support programmes. The lack of formal certification for vocational courses also hindered participants' ability to establish formal businesses, especially in sectors requiring recognised qualifications, such as in beautician work. There was also demand for more diversified vocational training that could broaden skill sets and improve employability across different fields, including healthcare and technical trades.

Additional detail is available in [Annex J \(ACTED \(Pakistan\) Case Study\)](#).

Empowering girls

GEC-T Window

Across the GEC-T Window, several types of interventions worked successfully to empower girls, including Girls' Clubs or Girls' Empowerment Forums, life skills training, and peer mentoring. Many different interventions had an impact on empowering girls and creating changes in girls' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and confidence. As a result, girls had a stronger sense of agency and felt more empowered to make positive decisions for themselves.

Empowering girls through Girls' Clubs

As well as being supportive of learning in some cases (see [Report Section 5.1.2.](#)), Child Clubs or Girls' Clubs were found to contribute to improvements in girls' confidence and empowerment. PEAS (Uganda) reported that Girls' Clubs were successful at building girls' confidence levels and their ability to engage in potentially income-generating activities such as crafts, weaving, and baking. The KIs with the [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#) team for the case study primary research found that Girls' Clubs were effective at empowering girls and giving them the confidence to speak up for themselves.

Similarly, increases in girls' confidence (and confidence in decision-making) were reported by Girls' Empowerment Forums (GEFs), unique to the [CARE \(Somalia\)](#) project. Through workshops on life skills, self-advocacy, and public speaking, girls gained the tools to express themselves and take ownership of their education. Participation in GEF activities led to increased confidence in engaging in classroom discussions and school governance, enhancing their sense of agency. KIs with the [CARE \(Somalia\)](#) team highlighted that girls became less tolerant of early marriage, GBV, and traditional gender norms. KI with the [EDT \(Kenya\)](#) project team highlighted the notable changes to girls' empowerment as a result of participation in Girls' Clubs:

"There were positive changes in how the girls feel about themselves. Some themes based on the feedback from the girls were confidence and self-esteem, even public speaking and leadership was coming out very well in their Girls' Clubs. In the Girls' Clubs, we had mentors who came from the secondary schools to talk to/mentor the girls. I want to believe in those mentorship programmes. The life skills, workshops and leadership activities, many girls felt empowered to speak up, lead others, express their ideas which greatly enhanced their self-worth. In decision making, most girls reported feeling more in control of their future as they set academic and personal goals which was a good thing." (KI with EDT project staff member)

Life skills to improve self-esteem

Life skills training was also demonstrated across the GEC-T Window to have a positive impact on girls' empowerment. The case study primary research for CSU (Uganda) demonstrated that activities including life skills, counselling, and health education led to important changes in girls' self-esteem and self-perception. The CSU case study findings on learning outcomes however portrayed a mixed picture, but improvements in self-esteem were broadly linked to improvements in attendance, participation, motivation to study, aspirations, and interest in learning. Similarly, the case study primary research for the HPA (Rwanda) project noted that improvements in reading were both a cause of, and a result of the increase in confidence. Primary respondents additionally reported that improved motivation and self-esteem was linked to increased likelihood to transition into secondary school. The combination of life skills training, vocational skills training, and the provision of start-up kits was demonstrated by Mercy Corps (Nigeria) endline report to empower out-of-school girls, encourage economic independence, and boost self-efficacy. Girls developed a sense of agency, allowing them to make confident choices in their personal and professional lives.

HPA (Rwanda) – Life skills improving confidence and transition

Changes in children's life skills and confidence was frequently reported by parents, girls, and teachers in primary research. Girls reported becoming more outspoken, confident, and less afraid of interacting with others as a result of the project. This increased confidence and participation in class supported students to transition to secondary education. Students reported becoming more interested and outspoken in school in general:

"[Before the project] if students would reach the topic of reproduction, many would bend their heads down. However, because of the discussions and the courage they had to learn things well [...] they were curious and became attentive to the extent you would tell them that would learn other things in secondary but prompt you with questions to explore more." (KI with stakeholder)

Additional detail is available in [Annex G \(HPA \(Rwanda\) Case Study\)](#).

Peer mentoring contributing to girls' agency

Many projects have provided evidence across the GEC-T Window of the efficacy of peer mentoring. Multiple [CAMFED \(Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe\)](#) projects reported increased self-confidence as a result of participating in peer mentoring schemes. WUSC (Kenya) demonstrated a positive trend in self-efficacy which was credited to peer mentoring. [VSO \(Nepal\)](#) found that peer mentoring improved girls' ability to decide on key life decisions such as continuing school, when to get married, whether to work, and what type of work to transition to. These findings were also supported by the GEC Learning Brief (*Lessons on peer mentoring from the GEC*).

LNGB Window

For projects across the LNGB Window, empowerment and life skills sessions have been central to developing self-esteem, confidence, and decision-making skills among girls. Girls' Clubs and mentorship programmes provided safe spaces for participants to explore their potential and develop leadership skills. For example, in the [VSO \(Nepal\)](#) project, external evaluation reports state that Girls' Clubs played a pivotal role in reducing early marriage rates. Participants learned negotiation and advocacy skills, enabling them to influence decisions within their families and communities.

ACTED (Pakistan) – Life skills improving confidence and self-esteem

Case study primary research and secondary research sources demonstrate that the education and training provided by the project successfully boosted the girls' self-efficacy and ability to manage responsibilities. Life skills and awareness of their rights empowered them to make informed decisions and assert themselves, contributing to personal growth and autonomy. Evaluation reports stated that education had also fostered greater awareness about rights, enabling girls to advocate for themselves and others within their communities.

Evidence from the primary case study research shows that the project also had a marked impact on participants' confidence and self-esteem. Through education and vocational training, girls learned to handle complex tasks, engage in financial transactions, and make independent decisions, also developing greater autonomy over the decision to delay marriage in favour of continuing their education. Life skills training, which covered safety, personal hygiene, and financial management, contributed to their assertiveness and active participation in community decision-making. The feedback below reflects the ambition of one of the life skills participants:

"I think my voice has a certain impact. This motivates me, and the desire to achieve something keeps a person going. What's the point of life if you have no goals? It's important to try to make your dreams come true." (Beneficiary girl FGD)

Additional detail is available in [Annex J \(ACTED \(Pakistan\) Case Study\)](#).

The Endline evaluation report for the Link Community Development (Malawi) project described how mother-daughter clubs addressed both confidence building and practical issues, such as menstrual health. These clubs improved school attendance and provided a platform for girls to discuss challenges and share solutions, facilitating mutual support. Peer mentorship programmes further enhanced girls' leadership capacities, as older participants supported younger ones in both academic and personal growth. These initiatives collectively demonstrated that fostering self-confidence and decision-making skills not only improved individual outcomes but also catalysed broader societal change.

Plan (Zimbabwe) – Effects of successful assertiveness and safeguarding training

Both case study primary research and evaluation reports state that the project greatly enhanced girls' confidence, communication skills, and decision-making abilities through life skills training, assertiveness modules, and a gender-focused curriculum. Case study participants reported improvements in self-presentation and hygiene, leading to positive shifts in parental and community attitudes toward girls' education, as they began to recognise the benefits of improved discipline, self-presentation, and communication skills.

This ripple effect of empowerment extended to broader community changes, supported by peer networks and the curriculum's focus on gender equality. The following quote reflects the significant positive impact on participant girls:

"I must say that the project has been a game-changer for our girls. Initially, we didn't know what to expect, but the various programmes within the project have helped our daughters develop invaluable skills. They've become more respectful, and their general hygiene has improved significantly. It's heartwarming to see them apply their newfound skills in their daily lives." (Female Parents/ Caregivers FGD)

Additional detail is available in [Annex K \(Plan \(Zimbabwe\) Case Study\)](#).

While empowerment initiatives achieved notable successes, certain challenges limited their broader impact. For some projects, mentorship programmes, while effective in building self-confidence, sometimes struggled with inconsistencies in mentor availability and commitment. In addition, across multiple projects a lack of integration between empowerment initiatives and broader community efforts limited their overall sustainability. For instance, in some contexts, empowered girls faced resistance when applying their new skills or asserting their rights, highlighting the importance of facilitating a supportive wider community environment alongside individual capacity building.

One example comes from the [ActionAid \(Kenya\)](#) project (see [Annex I: ActionAid \(Kenya\) Case Study](#)) – where IE primary research respondents stated that while the project raised awareness on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), cultural restrictions in particularly conservative project areas and policies restricting SRHR discussion in educational settings limited its impact, suggesting the need for greater community sensitisation around this topic. Evaluation reports described how girls often felt hesitant about contraceptive use and discussing SRHR due to societal norms, with resistance from some religious leaders further complicating the project's SRHR education efforts. This limited the effectiveness of life skills education within these regions.

To what extent and how did external and contextual factors for different projects influence their performance?

Covid-19

GEC-T Window

Covid-19 was a massive barrier to projects delivering their outcomes. Covid-19 did not just affect projects during school closures, but also when schools were re-opened with social distancing measures in place, challenging adjustments were required to teaching practices. Covid-19 had an immediate impact on many households and directly led to economic hardship for families in the short term and longer-term, which further hindered girls' education, exacerbating existing barriers associated with poverty. Psychological effects in the longer-term were also mentioned, with school closures described as having affected girls' confidence, motivation and interest in school, and longer-term aspirations. Predictably, this mix of factors was reported to result in learning losses.

The *IE Study - [Effects of Covid-19 on Access and Learning in the GEC II](#)* found GEC-T projects were broadly able to respond appropriately and adapt to school closures. However, portfolio wide annual reporting³ following Covid-19 noted that GEC-T projects had greater difficulties than LNGB projects in reaching all the girls who were in-school beneficiaries due to a lack of information on their personal circumstances outside of school, including addresses and contact information. This caused initial delays in providing support to large numbers of GEC-T girls. The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are categorised below.

IE Study – Teachers and Teaching for Marginalised Girls

The *IE Study - [Teachers and Teaching for Marginalised Girls](#)* found that the pandemic exacerbated key supply-side and demand-side constraints to girls' education. IPs conducted a situational analysis in the early months of the pandemic (June 2020), which highlighted that the time available to girls to learn was reduced due to an increase in domestic and/or income-generating duties and that Covid-19 adversely affected girls' psychological wellbeing. IPs used the disaggregated data they collected on the educational and wellbeing needs of different groups of marginalised girls to inform differentiated and gender-responsive interventions. All IPs adapted interventions related to teachers and teaching to provide not only remote education but monitoring of girls' wellbeing and health information and resources.

Learning losses as a result of Covid-19

Learning losses as a result of Covid-19 were widely reported across GEC-T projects and occurred for a number of reasons. The *IE Study - [Effects of Covid-19 on Access and Learning in the GEC II](#)* found that girls supported by the [EDT \(Kenya\)](#) and [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#) projects reported a lack of access to physical resources as a reason for their inability to continue studying during school closures. This included access to technology, learning materials, electricity, and equipment necessary for distance-learning. [World Vision \(Zimbabwe\)](#) reported that after Covid-19, teacher morale was lower due to the need to move classes outdoors in order to reduce congestion in schools. Outside

³ GEC Phase II Annual Review 2021

classes did not have boards, games, or necessary interactive resources, which limited teachers' ability to use engaging methodologies.

Similarly, [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#) reported that even after schools reopened, the project was running classes on an alternate day basis due to the need for more space for social distancing. In this context, teachers prioritised completing the curriculum over the use of different pedagogies, such as child-centred learning or interactive practice which were shown to be more effective, thereby inhibiting learning. [Avanti \(Kenya\)](#) reported that accessing computer labs was more difficult post-Covid 19, reducing the number of students who could access the labs and the tutor content accessible online due to restrictions on class size.

CSU (Uganda) – Covid-19 as an exacerbating factor

Uganda had the longest school closure in the world due to Covid-19, with long-lasting effects on education outcomes. Many pre-existing barriers to education worsened as a result of Covid-19. The case study primary research found that, because the project was targeting families with high vulnerability, their situation worsened considerably during and after Covid-19. There are reports that many in the project communities moved during the pandemic, including both students (who the project tried to follow-up with) and teachers – some of whom did not return. This heightened an already existing phenomenon whereby parents generally tended to move frequently, usually to find places with more affordable accommodation or better work opportunities, and as a result their children would change schools. Project staff reported that the project had to support an increasing number of schools – up to 300 schools by the end of the project; however, this could not be verified in the data.

In response to the school closures, [CSU \(Uganda\)](#) provided learning materials, including learning guides, and carried out small-group activities with girls. Importantly, other community stakeholders reported there was no support of this type. This inconsistency in reporting could indicate that the Covid-19 response varied across locations or that not all project participants were aware of it. Some research participants also pointed out that the interventions implemented during Covid-19 did not work well. In particular, a lot of children dropped out, including due to pregnancy, with some respondents saying that [CSU \(Uganda\)](#) did not do enough to keep in touch with children in this period.

Additional detail is available in [Annex H \(CSU \(Uganda\) Case Study\)](#).

Social norms

Harmful social norms and GBV reportedly increased due to Covid-19. [EDT \(Kenya\)](#) reported that GBV rates increased during lockdown, affecting project girls. The [ChildHope \(Ethiopia\)](#) project reported that because of Covid-19 some girls began to see marriage as their only option and that they faced peer pressure to skip school.

The [IE Study - *Effects of Covid-19 on Access and Learning in the GEC II*](#) reported that in Kenya and Nepal (as demonstrated on the [EDT \(Kenya\)](#) and [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#) projects), the most reported issue among parents, teachers and girls beyond effects on learning outcomes was the increased risk of transactional sex, early marriage, and pregnancy. The reasons for this included increased free time spent with boys to engage in sexual behaviour, and economic hardship. Some girls in the IE sampled schools in the Covid-19 study from [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#) who did not interact with the school or receive proper direction in learning, began considering marriage as a viable alternative. This was similarly found to be the case by the [CSU \(Uganda\)](#) project in which endline reports suggested that many girls dropped out of school during Covid-19 as a result of pregnancy.

Girls' motivation

With lengthy lockdown restrictions, worsening socio-economic contexts and a long absence from schools, some projects reflected on changes in girls' motivation and confidence in their learning abilities. For example, the [Plan \(Ghana\)](#) project reported decreases in girls' confidence in reading and doing maths in front of others between midline and endline, linking this to school closures due to Covid-19. The [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#) project also reflected on the loss of interest among girls in going to schools, with more than 70% of girls mentioning a reduced interest in education. The [ICL \(Kenya\)](#) endline evaluation reflected similar sentiments; many girls suggested they did not engage in learning during lockdowns despite being provided with materials. Girls also suggested that they felt they had slipped in their learning outcomes after returning to school and needed to re-motivate themselves to get back into learning and make up for any learning loss.

Mercy Corps (Nepal) – The effects of Covid-19 on girls in Nepal

The project aligned with the Nepali government response to the pandemic through the provision of online classes. As reported by [UNICEF \(2020\)](#), the government's transition to remote learning was largely unsuccessful; particularly in rural areas due to limited digital access. This was found to lead to a widening in the gaps in learning opportunities

across socio-economic groups. Other project activities in the period included radio programming, training for teachers for the post-school closures period, and rapid telephone check-ins with girls to assess their health, wellbeing, and life goals. In practice, there were numerous challenges that the project was not always able to address. For instance, student access to smartphones was limited, according to both project documentation and IE primary research. Respondents also mentioned teachers' limited skills in employing technology successfully. In terms of timing, the pandemic hit as the project was entering its final phase of implementation, leading to an early halting of lessons. Ultimately, there were considerable learning losses, a decrease in study time, and lower motivation among girls as a result of Covid-19.

Additional detail is available in [Annex F \(Mercy Corps \(Nepal\) Case Study\)](#).

Economic factors

Covid-19 had a negative impact on girls economically; directly through their own businesses and income streams, but also their households more broadly. Household economic hardship and difficulties were, in many cases, directly linked to Covid-19.

Economic hardship affected projects where girls were directly involved in income-generating activities or savings groups. [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#) reported that girls who were not engaged in any work before Covid-19 particularly faced strong challenges in kicking-off their businesses in the longer term. The girls who were not employed before Covid-19 were also more negative about the future and perceived to have less resilience. The [Viva \(Uganda\)](#) endline evaluation report reflected on how the closing of markets, limited movement, and lockdowns affected novice entrepreneurs particularly strongly. [HPA \(Rwanda\)](#) reported that fewer girls were able to save between baseline and midline, reflecting increased economic hardship in the period, especially given that the project was implemented in one of the poorest districts of Rwanda. Food insecurity and the low education level of caregivers were also reported by [Plan \(Sierra Leone\)](#) respondents with reports of hunger increasing during the Covid-19 period.

Both [EDT \(Kenya\)](#) and [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#) endline evaluation reports reported that girls started to engage in work outside of the home, either to relieve them of boredom or because they needed to financially support their families. The [ChildHope \(Ethiopia\)](#) endline evaluation also reported that girls felt pressured to make money and complete household chores instead of being in school due to increased poverty. Many projects in the GEC-T Window reported that girls increased time spent on work within or outside of the household, which impacted time spent on schoolwork. As part of [IE Study - Effects of Covid-19 on Access and Learning in the GEC II](#), [EDT \(Kenya\)](#) and [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#) reported an increase in the burden of household chores and income-generating activities such as the need to fetch water or support with farm work as factors that prevented them from studying.

LNGB Window

The Covid-19 pandemic profoundly disrupted projects across the LNGB Window, and its effects were acutely felt in myriad ways. School closures, remote learning limitations, and socio-economic upheavals combined to exacerbate existing inequalities in access and quality of education, particularly for the most marginalised groups.

ActionAid (Kenya) – The severe and wide-ranging impact of Covid-19 on implementation

External evaluators found that the Covid-19 pandemic had a severe negative impact on project implementation, despite the project successfully putting in place mitigation and adaptation measures, such as meetings with parents and spouses to maintain engagement and providing double the amount of start-up capital provided to girls.

Among the most damaging effects were an exacerbation of access challenges, with the closure of all Catch-up Centres and the discontinuation of face-to-face learning disrupting education and leaving girls with limited resources and minimal engagement at home. Evaluation reports also found that girls who had chosen the entrepreneurship pathway were unlikely to use the economic support provided by the project for their small enterprises, but rather to ease household economic pressures, despite the project's best efforts.

Additional detail is available in [Annex I \(ActionAid \(Kenya\) Case Study\)](#).

Economic instability and drop-out

As was common across the LNGB Window, for the [Street Child \(Nepal\)](#) project, external evaluation reports found that prolonged school closures led to a marked rise in dropout rates, with economic pressures pushing families to prioritise subsistence over education. Many parents resorted to marrying their daughters early, viewing marriage as a practical solution in uncertain economic times. For the [PIN \(Ethiopia\)](#) project, prolonged school closures meant that many girls took on increased household responsibilities, with some becoming caregivers or engaging in income-generating

activities to support their families. This shift significantly disrupted their education and undermined their academic progress. The [Link Community Development \(Malawi\)](#) project experienced a similar confluence of challenges, with food insecurity compounding the pandemic's effects. Many families withdrew their children, especially girls, from schools to focus on agricultural labour or domestic responsibilities.

The resulting exacerbation of economic instability because of the pandemic, a pervasive theme across all projects, compounded these barriers. The [Plan \(Zimbabwe\)](#) project experienced disruptions to entrepreneurial ventures and educational hubs due to pandemic-induced lockdowns. In the [ActionAid \(Kenya\)](#) project, IE primary research respondents described how mobility restrictions and reduced community engagement led to fewer girls returning to school once restrictions were lifted, as families sought more immediate solutions to economic hardships.

Insufficient digital infrastructure

The [IRC \(Pakistan\)](#) project faced significant barriers due to the severe digital divide. External evaluators found that fewer than 10% of girls had access to mobile phones, restricting their ability to participate in online learning. Educators found it challenging to monitor student progress remotely, and many students in rural areas were left without meaningful engagement. These disparities widened the gap in educational attainment between urban and rural learners. Similarly, in the [Link Community Development \(Malawi\)](#) project, educators noted that limited access to technological tools such as mobile phones and internet connectivity left most students unengaged during school closures, with learning losses disproportionately affecting girls. These findings align with research produced by the [IE Study – Teachers and Teaching for Marginalised Girls](#), which described how the [IRC \(Sierra Leone\)](#) project paused official learning activities in response to difficulties with facilitating home-based learning for the out-of-school girls, due to a lack of access to digital platforms hindering the use of individual learning.

Psychological impact on girls

Plan (Zimbabwe) – Effective adaptation to learning during the Covid-19 pandemic

The [Plan \(Zimbabwe\)](#) project employed remote and multimodal learning strategies to sustain progress. Phone-based lessons, door-to-door teaching, and printed self-study materials were distributed to mitigate the impact of prolonged school closures. Evaluation reports highlighted how these adaptations helped maintain engagement among girls, with educator training playing a critical role in ensuring the success of these approaches. Additional detail is available in [Annex K \(Plan \(Zimbabwe\) Case Study\)](#).

The Covid-19 pandemic also had a considerable psychological impact on learners. For example, external evaluators of the [PIN \(Ethiopia\)](#) project reported a rise in mental health challenges among girls, driven by the stress of academic disruptions and the added burden of domestic responsibilities. In the [Link Community Development \(Malawi\)](#) project, many girls who were unable to access education during lockdowns experienced feelings of isolation and anxiety, further hindering their ability to re-engage with schooling once restrictions eased. The IE case study primary research community health volunteer and educator facilitator respondents for the [ActionAid \(Kenya\)](#) project noted that many girls lacked consistent access to counselling or mental health resources. The [Plan \(Zimbabwe\)](#) project Endline evaluation report highlighted that girls without foundational skills for independent learning were particularly disadvantaged during remote education efforts, as they lacked both the resources and the confidence to keep up with academic demands on their own.

Despite these challenges, projects demonstrated remarkable adaptability in maintaining educational continuity during the pandemic, with educators providing vital socio-emotional support to girls, as found in the [IE Study – Teachers and Teaching for Marginalised Girls](#). The [IRC \(Pakistan\)](#) project implemented home-based learning where educators conducted small group sessions and distributed printed materials. These efforts were supplemented by lessons broadcast by radio community-based mentoring. In the [PIN \(Ethiopia\)](#) project, mentors conducted door-to-door visits to provide personalised support, ensuring girls stayed engaged with their studies even under restrictive conditions. Similarly, the [ActionAid \(Kenya\)](#) project leveraged SMS platforms to deliver short lessons and critical information to students.

Creative community engagement strategies also emerged. In the [VSO \(Nepal\)](#) project, the project team collaborated with parents and local leaders to emphasise the importance of girls' education, counteracting pressures to withdraw them for economic reasons. In the [Link Community Development \(Malawi\)](#) project, resilience planning included the distribution of hygiene kits and educator training for distance learning methods. The [Plan \(Zimbabwe\)](#) project incorporated mental health and psychosocial support to address the stress and anxiety caused by the pandemic, creating a holistic framework to support learners.

IRC (Sierra Leone) – Providing psychosocial support for out-of-school girls during Safe Space Closures

The *IE Study – Teachers and Teaching for Marginalised Girls* found that the IRC (Sierra Leone) project officially paused all in-person learning activities during the Safe Space closures due to logistical difficulties in providing remote or home-based learning. However, female mentors often assumed an informal support role, providing home-based learning and social and emotional support for learners.

Interviews with key implementing and consortium partner staff, as well as mentors and facilitators, indicated that the community-based model – where mentors and facilitators were recruited locally and were often embedded in the same villages or communities as beneficiaries – encouraged this informal, relationship-based support.

Mentors were also central in maintaining beneficiaries' motivation and morale during safe space closures, sometimes travelling long distances to inform girls about the plans for the project to resume after the closures. The project also set out an intention to develop resources for mentors to provide psychological first aid to girls and act as a 'Safe Person'.

Conflict, security, safety**GEC-T Window**

Conflict, security, and safety were key constraints across the GEC-T Window and predominantly hindered the ability of girls to access education, although impacts were wide ranging.

Safety and security as a barrier to attendance

Security concerns were both specific to girls on their way to school or in school (with the second being much more limited), and in the broader project area. *EDT (Kenya)* reported that girls in urban areas of Kenya were at risk of violence when leaving their homes before sunrise to go to school. As a mitigation strategy, some girls would choose to travel later in the day, resulting in a shorter amount of time spent in school. *Viva (Uganda)* also reported safety concerns on the way to school, which reportedly increased by midline, which could be attributed to increased awareness, or due to worsening security conditions during Covid-19. The case study primary research for the *CSU (Uganda)* project additionally reported that girls felt unsafe on their way to school.

The *VSO (Nepal)* project reported that parents were reluctant to allow girls to spend time outside the home or to relocate for work or studying opportunities because of safety concerns. The *World Vision (Zimbabwe)* midline evaluation reported safety on the way to school being a major barrier to girls' attendance and transition. World Vision reported that this issue is often related to long commutes to school for secondary girls, who report young men in their community frequently "wait in the road" to harass them and that boys "won't take no for an answer". The fear of sexual harassment and gender-based violence was cited by girls as a reason to avoid school or drop out.

Political conflict as a barrier

The wide geographic spread of GEC-T projects meant that many projects were touched by broader political conflict. The *AKF (Afghanistan)* project recognised insecurity and the presence of the Taliban as a significant deterrent to education. Despite the 2021 Taliban takeover happening following the close of the project, AKF reported concerns related to random attacks or harassment (especially for girls) including kidnapping, sexual abuse, bullying, and harassment by men and boys from the Taliban during implementation. The AKF project reported that conflict was the second most impactful reason for girls' lack of attendance, after Covid-19. Conflict and political instability in the DRC were reported as significant barriers to girls' education in the *Save the Children (StC) (DRC)* endline evaluation report. StC reported that the conflict produced predominantly economic consequences, for instance, the loss of parents who could raise money for school fees, and the inability of households to earn a viable living. The *StC (DRC)* project also reported that despite some learning gains, conflict remained a barrier to education and teachers reported that students from conflict areas were unable to study as well.

Ethnic clashes and conflicts impacting attendance

GEC-T projects in Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Somalia reported ethnic clashes and conflicts impacting girls' attendance. *EDT (Kenya)* reported an increase in ethnic clashes and conflicts over land and cattle as reducing girls' access to school in the project implementation period. The *ChildHope (Ethiopia)* project reported that civil unrest in the Oromia Region may have contributed to low attendance rates at endline. The *Mercy Corps (Nigeria)* project reported on increased instability due to national and state elections in Nigeria.

The *CARE (Somalia)* project reported in their endline evaluation that they similarly suffer from inter-clan conflict in many areas of programme implementation, which was reported to have significant effects on girls' attendance. In

terms of broader impact, schools in affected areas could not be assessed at endline due to accessibility and security reasons. In addition to this, many [CARE \(Somalia\)](#) project schools are in border regions partly disputed with the government of Puntland and with areas seeking independence. After the 2017 elections, tensions between clans led to conflict, which was continuing at the time of reporting. The project also reported that Al Shabaab has significant influence in some project areas.

LNGB Window

Conflict, insecurity, and political instability severely disrupted projects across the LNGB Window, compounding existing barriers for marginalised girls. Armed conflict, displacement, and safety concerns often led to school closures, loss of resources, and reduced participation. More broadly, across the LNGB Window, conflict and insecurity frequently interrupted supply chains for educational materials, making it difficult for projects to deliver resources on time. Educators and facilitators faced safety risks when travelling to remote areas, further limiting the scope of interventions. These factors, combined with reduced community engagement and heightened dropout rates, undermined the sustainability of many initiatives.

External evaluators of the [PIN \(Ethiopia\)](#) project described how the two-year conflict in Tigray and Amhara devastated educational infrastructure with many learning centres destroyed, while widespread violence forced families to flee their homes, resulting in mass displacement and significantly reduced enrolment. Similarly, in the [CARE \(Somalia\)](#) project, the Endline evaluation report noted that militant violence caused widespread insecurity. In regions with ongoing clan-related conflict, schools struggled to operate safely and tensions between communities occasionally erupted into violence, leading to temporary closures of learning centres and reducing engagement among both students and parents.

WUSC (Afghanistan) – Ongoing conflict and political instability forced projects to pivot to informal learning

Fund Manager risk documents demonstrate that the educational landscape in Afghanistan was profoundly affected by ongoing conflict and political instability. The 2021 Taliban takeover led to the nationwide closure of secondary schools for girls, effectively barring them from formal education.

In addition to the policy barriers, the volatile security situation hindered project implementation. Regular armed clashes, displacement, and economic collapse exacerbated existing inequalities, leaving many families unable to prioritise education. Supply chain disruptions delayed the distribution of essential learning materials, and the lack of safe transportation further restricted access for both students and educators.

Despite these challenges, some successes emerged. Local partnerships and reliance on community-based mentors allowed projects to maintain limited engagement with learners. Psychosocial support programmes were also integrated to address the trauma experienced by students, fostering a degree of resilience amidst pervasive instability.

Projects demonstrated resilience and adaptability in navigating the challenges posed by conflict and insecurity. Community-led approaches, strong partnerships, and flexible interventions proved critical in sustaining education for marginalised learners in these volatile contexts.

For example, external evaluation reports for the [PIN \(Ethiopia\)](#) project describe how they successfully facilitated mobile learning units and temporary classrooms in safer regions, which allowed education to continue to an extent for displaced children. Partnerships with humanitarian organisations facilitated the provision of emergency aid, including food and safety nets for vulnerable households, ensuring students remained engaged despite severe external pressures.

In the [CARE \(Somalia\)](#) project, collaboration with local leaders and community groups enabled projects to build trust and operate in high-risk areas. Learning centres were designed with input from local stakeholders to ensure they addressed safety concerns and were in secure areas. Psychosocial support programmes, tailored to both students and educators, helped mitigate the emotional toll of prolonged exposure to conflict. Facilitators were trained to recognise and respond to signs of trauma, creating a supportive environment that encouraged learning. These adaptive measures not only mitigated immediate challenges but also strengthened the long-term resilience of education systems in conflict-affected regions.

Natural disasters

GEC-T Window

Similar to conflict, another detrimental contextual factor or external shock that was reported by a small number of GEC-T projects was linked to natural disasters; namely, drought in the Horn of Africa. [EDT \(Kenya\)](#) reported that drought in the arid and semi-arid land region heightened the risk of GBV, sexual exploitation and abuse hindering access to education. Drought also resulted in an increase in extreme poverty and humanitarian emergency. In the [CARE \(Somalia\)](#) project, participants saw drought as a driver of low enrolment, high drop-out rates and poor attendance, but not specifically of poor learning.

Inextricably linked to this, pastoralist communities and households in Kenya and Somalia migrating in search of better economic opportunities also led to some challenges in girls' education. For example, [EDT \(Kenya\)](#) mentioned that movement in search of livelihoods was a barrier to reaching all targeted learners, especially during Covid-19 school closures. Girls from pastoralist communities were described as likely to need further support as they faced more acute challenges during school closures.

LNGB Window

Natural disasters posed significant challenges to projects across the LNGB Window, disrupting infrastructure, attendance, and learning outcomes. Recurring events such as floods, droughts, and cyclones demonstrated the fragility of education initiatives in disaster-prone regions, particularly for the most marginalised groups.

Pakistan experienced widespread flooding in 2022, which displaced over 3.5 million children from their education⁴. In this context, for the [ACTED \(Pakistan\)](#) project, IE Case Study primary research respondents reported that many learning centres were repurposed as shelters, delaying the resumption of classes. Extensive damage to infrastructure, including collapsed boundary walls and destroyed classrooms, left learning centres unable to accommodate students safely. In remote areas, a lack of safe drinking water and sanitation facilities compounded these challenges, creating unsafe and unhygienic conditions that deterred families from sending their children back to school.

Plan (Zimbabwe) – Severe impact of natural hazards

Adverse weather events, such as Cyclone Idai, destroyed infrastructure like roads and bridges, further isolating remote communities and preventing access to learning hubs. Droughts worsened food insecurity, forcing learners to prioritise subsistence farming over education. These challenges highlighted the need for additional logistical support and satellite hubs, though resource constraints limited their feasibility. The following KII captures the difficulties presented by climate events:

“Our area is highly affected by climate induced negative effects of El-Nino. Against this background, water has been scarce in the area leading to some students being given slots to water their crops in nutritional gardens. This presented a challenge to the project as some students needed to balance watering the garden and attending lessons. Some students would choose to water their crops which in most cases were their sources of livelihood and the next meal thereby affecting their attendance.” (Non-Formal Education Buddy KII)

Additional detail is available in [Annex K \(Plan \(Zimbabwe\) Case Study\)](#).

The repeated nature of these disasters strained project resources, forcing teams to divert funds from planned activities to immediate relief efforts. Limited funding for long-term recovery exacerbated delays in rebuilding schools and resuming regular educational activities. These events highlighted the urgent need for systemic investments in disaster-proof infrastructure and comprehensive recovery strategies.

Project adaptability and resilience

Projects across the LNGB Window demonstrated adaptability and resilience in responding to the challenges posed by natural disasters, leveraging community partnerships, disaster response plans, and multi-sectoral approaches to sustain educational access.

The endline evaluation report described how the [VSO \(Nepal\)](#) project's collaboration with local governments in Madhesh Province led to the integration of disaster preparedness into project frameworks. Temporary learning spaces were quickly established using portable classroom kits and tarpaulins, while learning centres doubled as community

⁴ <https://www.redcross.org.uk/stories/disasters-and-emergencies/world/climate-change-and-pakistan-flooding-affecting-millions>

hubs, providing essential resources such as food and water alongside education. These efforts ensured continuity in learning and stabilised affected communities during crises.

The [Link Community Development \(Malawi\)](#) project's partnerships with other humanitarian organisations ensured displaced families received support, enabling children to return to school more quickly. Disaster response materials, including learning resources and personal protective equipment, were distributed to affected areas. The [ActionAid \(Kenya\)](#) project provided mobile education services to reach children in migration-affected areas, minimising dropout rates and sustaining engagement.

Across the LNGB Window, the integration of disaster preparedness plans into project designs proved invaluable, whether they were present from design, or developed in response to specific events. These plans enabled teams to respond quickly, adapt to evolving challenges, and build resilience within affected communities. By prioritising flexibility and collaboration, projects not only mitigated immediate disruptions but also laid the groundwork for more sustainable recovery and continuity in education.

Economic factors

GEC-T Window

Economic barriers to education across the GEC-T Window were substantial and only increased as a result of Covid-19. Despite this, only a small number of projects reported having provided financial support to families. Economic barriers affected girls directly through their own businesses and income streams, families' inability to pay for school fees, and more broadly at the girls' household level.

The difficult economic context rendered many financial-related interventions ineffective and posed major challenges to their sustainability. There were also issues in aligning the intervention with the context. [Viva \(Uganda\)](#) reported that the closing of markets, limited movement, and lockdowns particularly affected novice entrepreneurs. [HPA \(Rwanda\)](#) reported that fewer girls were able to save their income between the baseline and midline evaluations, reflecting increased economic hardship in the period, especially given that the project was implemented in one of the poorest districts of Rwanda. In Rwanda, financial hardship and reports of hunger increased during the Covid-19 period. Similarly, both [EDT \(Kenya\)](#) and [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#) reported that financial hardship for families was an impact of Covid-19 directly reported by girls.

Mercy Corps (Nepal) – Increasing levels of poverty in Nepal

The economic situation in project communities in Nepal was characterised by high levels of poverty affecting households reached by the project. Poverty affected both the direct, immediate costs of education, as well as girls' aspirations and opportunities for the future. The midline evaluation report found an increase among households that reported being unable to meet basic needs, affected by poor agricultural years in the 2017-18 period. The situation continued to worsen in the post-covid period, as evidenced in the case study primary research.

The economic context and employment opportunities also directly affected the effectiveness of interventions with out-of-school girls. Several respondents shared that girls who trained in embroidery or as beauticians were not able to start their own businesses or find work. Although, this could be linked to low demand for this type of business in girls' communities.

Additional detail is available in [Annex E \(Mercy Corps \(Nepal\) Case Study\)](#).

Financial hardship also had an important effect on education; school fees were found to be one of the main barriers to education. The [Opportunity \(Uganda\)](#) project reported that student attendance increased when households had access to more income. It was reported that most households used any profit from income-generating activity to cover education costs and student attendance increased. [CSU \(Uganda\)](#) implemented financial support to families to help afford schooling costs which was found to be a successful, but unsustainable strategy. The [Avanti \(Kenya\)](#) project introduced microloans to encourage and enable families to send their children to school. While this improved attendance, there have been some issues in repayment, especially in the challenging economic context since Covid-19.

CSU (Uganda) – Economic barriers in Uganda

The project targeted girls from low-income families and was implemented in a context of high poverty and challenging economic conditions, including a worsening economic climate and cost of living increases as a result Covid-19. High poverty in project areas was mentioned by many case study primary research respondents.

In this context, the project faced challenges to sustainably support girls and their families to improve their economic prospects. According to the End of Project Review Study, girls' transition into employment was limited by their inability to be absorbed into the job market due to their young age, lack of work experience, lack of start-up capital, and unsupportive parents. According to the midline evaluation report, higher successful transition rates were observed among those learners with disabilities who were relatively better off, and not among extremely poor families. This suggests that the economic support activities were more successful with families above a certain income level but were insufficient for girls from households experiencing extreme poverty.

Additional detail is available in [Annex H \(CSU \(Uganda\) Case Study\)](#).

LNGB Window

Wider macro-economic pressures were a common and severe obstacle for projects across the LNGB Window, exacerbating existing barriers to education and disproportionately affecting the most marginalised girls. Issues such as hyperinflation, unemployment, food insecurity, and poverty created a cascading effect, disrupting attendance, limiting resources, and reducing the overall effectiveness of interventions.

In the [Plan \(Zimbabwe\)](#) project, IE Case Study Primary Research respondents described how hyperinflation led to a sharp increase in the cost of educational resources such as books, uniforms, and transportation, rendering them unaffordable for many families. Volunteer incentives for Community Educators also lost significant value, undermining motivation and retention among key stakeholders. Rising costs pushed families to prioritise immediate income over long-term educational goals, with many girls leaving school to work as domestic helpers or street vendors. Migration driven by economic hardship compounded these issues, as families frequently relocated in search of stability, disrupting students' attendance at learning hubs.

ACTED (Pakistan) – Economic hardship led to increased drop-out rates

High poverty rates (around 39.5%) and income inequality meant that many families could not afford indirect schooling costs such as transportation and educational materials. Economic hardships forced many families to prioritise immediate financial needs over education. In districts like Kashmore and Jacobabad, case study primary research respondents described how overwhelming poverty meant that families often withdrew their daughters from the project's learning centres so they could participate in income-generating activities or manage household chores. Similarly, external evaluation reports demonstrate that economic pressures led to child labour, especially in agricultural sectors, where girls were often considered additional labour to support family income.

Additional detail is available in [Annex J \(ACTED \(Pakistan\) Case Study\)](#).

Across the LNGB Window, economic pressures affected the sustainability of project activities. Rising costs forced many projects to reallocate funds from planned activities to immediate relief efforts, such as providing food or transportation allowances. This shift often delayed the implementation of key interventions and strained resources, reducing the long-term impact of projects. For girls who completed education or vocational training, limited job opportunities in many regions left them disillusioned, as economic conditions often diverted focus from further education to immediate income-generating activities. In cases where girls attempted to start small businesses, challenges such as insufficient infrastructure, family reprioritisation of resources and girls' time, and a lack of financial resources hindered their success.

Plan (Zimbabwe) – The impact of effective economic empowerment initiatives

The Plan (Zimbabwe) project's concurrent economic empowerment initiatives, such as micro-loans provided by the Women's Affairs Department, enabled families to initiate small businesses. This additional income often translated into improved educational attendance, as families faced fewer financial pressures. Community-based initiatives encouraged families to pool resources and establish informal safety nets, ensuring children could remain in school despite economic hardships.

Additional detail is available in [Annex K \(Plan \(Zimbabwe\) Case Study\)](#).

Innovative strategies addressing economic barriers to education

Despite these challenges, projects across the LNGB Window implemented innovative strategies to address the economic barriers to education, often leveraging community partnerships and integrating livelihood support into their programming.

External evaluation reports show that the [PIN \(Ethiopia\)](#) projects partnered with humanitarian organisations to link vulnerable households to food aid programmes and cash transfers. This direct support alleviated immediate financial pressures, enabling families to prioritise their children's education to a greater extent. The [ActionAid \(Kenya\)](#) project developed economic resilience strategies such as developing partnerships with local community groups to address resource gaps. For example, initiatives provided support for household livelihoods, reducing the burden on children to contribute financially. Additionally, targeted support for girls, including sanitary products and reduced transport costs, helped mitigate economic barriers to attendance.

The [World Education Inc. \(Ghana\)](#) project's Endline evaluation report describes how partnerships with local businesses were developed, who then provided additional resources including subsidised transportation allowances and school supplies. Flexible fee structures in some projects reduced the financial burden on families, improving retention rates among learners. Multiple projects also incorporated vocational training for older students, equipping them with marketable skills so they could contribute financially to their households and offset economic pressures.

Across the LNGB Window, the integration of livelihood support and financial assistance into project design played a critical role in sustaining access during economic crises. These measures demonstrated the importance of addressing systemic economic challenges alongside educational goals to improve learning outcomes and ensure long-term project sustainability.

Cultural and social norms

GEC-T Window

Pervasive cultural and social norms continued to affect girls' education across project contexts despite some positive attitude shifts reported at all levels, particularly in the wider community (as reported in *Section 5.2.3.* above).

Early marriage and pregnancy leading to drop out

Projects frequently mentioned issues of early marriage and pregnancy as leading to girls' dropout, worsened by the economic impact of Covid-19. Early marriage was mentioned by projects across the GEC-T Window, including [Mercy Corps \(Nigeria\)](#), [AKF \(Afghanistan\)](#), [ChildHope \(Ethiopia\)](#), [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#), [WUSC \(Kenya\)](#) and [Avanti \(Kenya\)](#). Early marriage as a barrier to education is prevalent across all contexts targeted, particularly among marginalised communities targeted by GEC-T projects (e.g. pastoralists, girls with disabilities). Despite some progress in this area, it was largely seen as remaining a prevalent and difficult social norm to change.

Girls who were married were reported to have to seek husbands' approval to attend school. This was particularly noted by the [Mercy Corps \(Nigeria\)](#) project, who carried out awareness raising sessions with husbands to encourage them to allow their wives to be educated. In Northern Nigeria, Mercy Corps also reported that girls often move when they get married, which leads to them dropping out.

Stigma against pregnant girls and girls who have given birth was also mentioned as a major barrier to girls' enrolment, attendance, and transition. [World Vision \(Zimbabwe\)](#) reported pregnancy and motherhood as significant predictors of failed transition outcomes. Projects across the GEC-T Window mentioned working with schools and communities to encourage re-enrolment of girls who have dropped out due to pregnancy, however, as with early marriage, Covid-19 was detrimental to gains made before 2020. Recommendations for overcoming the barrier of pregnancy and parenting are outlined in the GEC Portfolio in Practice Brief - *Five Ways to Support a Pregnant Or Parenting Girl To Thrive In School*.

Mercy Corps (Nepal) – Social stigma and norms

Stigma and social norms affected girls during and even after project implementation; several case study primary research respondents mentioned social stigma related to girls returning to school after a certain age, often leading to them being mocked within their communities. Married girls are ten times more likely to not be in school than their peers, according to [UNICEF \(2017\)](#). At midline, the evaluation found some signs of positive attitudes towards early marriage; parents reported that an appropriate age for marriage would be around 22 years old, higher than the legal age of 20. At endline, less than 10% of sampled caregivers would have wanted their daughters to get married. Despite this, primary research respondents shared that drop-out in Grades 10 or 11 continued to be an issue for some girls.

Additional detail is available in [Annex E \(Mercy Corps \(Nepal\) Case Study\)](#).

Harmful social norms

A harmful social norm mentioned by GEC-T projects across Kenya was the prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM). This was reported by [Avanti \(Kenya\)](#) to affect girls' school attendance. Similarly, [ICL \(Kenya\)](#) reported that FGM affects girls' attendance as once they have undergone the procedure, they are more likely to drop-out of school to get married.

Housework and support to families continues to limit girls' ability to attend school and study at home. [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#) mentioned that girls tend to be absent from school in peak plantation periods to support their family and in harvesting periods. In some cases, housework responsibilities were seen as having increased during Covid-19. For example, in the [Care \(Somalia\)](#) project, girls became more responsible for housework responsibilities during lockdown.

CSU (Uganda) – Influence of gender norms

The midline evaluation report found that girls with a heavier chore burden experienced lower transition rates. However, housework in general was not reported frequently as a negative influence from the discussions with caregivers or children.

Other social norms affecting girls were mentioned more frequently and by numerous respondents, especially girls. Early pregnancy and marriage were the most frequently mentioned. There were also some mentions of girls being tempted to have older boyfriends who would support them financially and losing their interest in school as a result. The same report highlights that having a disability increases the likelihood of child marriage or early pregnancy. In project areas, pregnancy rates reportedly worsened after Covid-19, leading to drop-out among girls. As a response, the project carried out sensitisation on safeguarding and social inclusion, but the barrier appears to have persisted.

Additional detail is available in [Annex H \(CSU \(Uganda\) Case Study\)](#).

LNGB Window

Deeply ingrained cultural and social norms posed significant challenges to the implementation and success of projects across the LNGB Window, particularly in limiting access to education for girls. This corroborates the finding from [IE Study – Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling](#) that one of the most common barriers to education was gender social norms, resulting in early marriage and motherhood.

Link Community Development (Malawi) – How community norms create barriers to girls' education

In the Link Community Development (Malawi) project, teenage mothers faced stigma and exclusion from formal education. Many communities regarded these girls as unfit for continued schooling, while gender-based violence and safety concerns further discouraged parents from re-enrolling their daughters. The expectation that girls take on domestic responsibilities or contribute financially to the household further entrenched these barriers.

In the [ACTED \(Pakistan\)](#) project, for example, IE Case Study primary research respondents described how tribal customs in rural Sindh and ex-Federally Administered Tribal Areas mandated male chaperones for girls' travel, severely restricting their mobility and access to education. Early marriage, viewed as a cultural safeguard for girls' futures, remained widespread, with significant dropout rates among adolescent girls. As was common across multiple projects, parents often prioritised boys' education, seeing girls' schooling as a lesser investment with limited returns, particularly in conservative rural communities. Similarly, in the [CARE \(Somalia\)](#) project, external evaluators found that patriarchal attitudes and a prioritisation of boys' education were pervasive, particularly in rural regions. Case studies highlighted how early marriage and traditional gender roles left girls with limited opportunities to continue schooling. Misconceptions about education programmes, such as fears that they would erode traditional values or disrupt household dynamics, also generated resistance among some male community members.

In the [Plan \(Zimbabwe\)](#) project, IE Case Study primary research respondents described how conservative religious groups, such as the Apostolic communities, resisted empowerment initiatives, fearing they would disrupt traditional household structures. Early marriage and the prioritisation of boys' education were widespread, and misinformation about project goals created mistrust in certain communities. In rural farming areas, limited attendance at community dialogues and resistance from influential individuals undermined equitable participation in education.

ActionAid (Kenya) – Community attitudes and resistant to prioritise girls' education

Case study primary research and external evaluation reports demonstrated that cultural attitudes that prioritise boys' education over girls' education persisted across communities, particularly where gender biases relegated girls to roles supporting household income or early marriage.

Stigma against returning students, particularly young mothers, further exacerbated attendance challenges, as community members frequently ridiculed or discouraged their efforts to resume schooling. Some husbands and family members also resisted girls' schooling, fearing that education might disrupt family dynamics, and in extreme cases, even resorted to actions like destroying school materials to deter attendance.

Case study respondents and evaluation reports both stressed that cultural practices, including early marriage and FGM, further limited educational opportunities for girls in certain communities, where these practices were still seen as part of a girl's transition into adulthood. Additional detail is available in [Annex I \(ActionAid \(Kenya\) Case Study\)](#).

Across the LNGB Window, these harmful social norms often devalued education for girls, resulting in high dropout rates, low enrolment, and entrenched gender inequities. Misinformation, mistrust, and a lack of transparency in how and why project participants were enrolled by the project also compounded these challenges, limiting project effectiveness.

Despite these challenges, targeted interventions leveraging community engagement, advocacy efforts, and cultural sensitivity played a critical role in overcoming barriers and improving project performance. For example, in the [Street Child \(Nepal\)](#) project, mothers' groups championed efforts to reintegrate girls into schools, challenging long-standing norms around child marriage. Through community workshops and targeted advocacy, these groups effectively raised awareness of the benefits of girls' education, resulting in higher re-enrolment rates. Partnerships with local radio stations helped amplify messaging, addressing cultural attitudes in remote areas.

Plan (Zimbabwe) – Communities practically contributing to project achievements

Case study respondents highlighted that the project's success was greatly enhanced by active community contributions, including donations of labour and materials for constructing learning hubs. Local craftsmen volunteered to improve vocational training infrastructure, while parents made financial contributions to fund infrastructure improvements such as classroom renovations and toilet construction. In addition, schools external to the project provided resources like furniture and training equipment for vocational training of sewing and baking. This collaboration demonstrated the community's commitment to the project's success and scalability. The following KII provides an example of how community involvement assisted the project's infrastructure development:

"The Hub has been renovated and a toilet has been constructed with the help of community members who donated rivers and, pit sand and bricks to aid the renovation and construction process." (Community Leader KII)

Additional detail is available in [Annex K \(Plan \(Zimbabwe\) Case Study\)](#).

Learning environment**GEC-T Window**

Several contextual factors were reported at the school level. Those most prominent with the greatest impact on girls' learning and attendance were distance from school and infrastructure and resource constraints, namely large class sizes. Please note that an equivalent LNGB section has been included under implementation factors ([Section 5.3](#)), rather than contextual factors ([Section 5.2](#)) because unlike the GEC-T Window, projects in the LNGB Window established their own learning centres and were therefore directly responsible for providing a suitable, safe learning environment.

Distance from school

Distance from school was cited as a reason for girls' lack of or limited attendance by multiple projects. Distance was also noted as a key consideration for projects involving children with physical disabilities.

The [ICL \(Kenya\)](#) project reported that children who lived far away from schools started school later in order to walk the long distance to school. Many of them drop out as they are adolescents by the time they are in grade 3 or 4. Distance to school was also cited by all [World Vision \(Zimbabwe\)](#) key stakeholders as a major barrier to attendance and transition. World Vision noted the compounding effect distance had on other barriers such as chores, vulnerability to abuse or dangers on the road to and from school, motivation to attend, and punishment at school. [HPA \(Rwanda\)](#)

reported distance from school as a limiting factor for attendance, compounded on the project by a lack of adequate transportation.

CSU (Uganda) – Distance from school limiting attendance

Long distances to school and a lack of money for transportation were mentioned frequently in the [CSU \(Uganda\)](#) case study primary research as continuing to affect children's access to education, and particularly access for children with disabilities. Even though the project provided support with transportation, research participants frequently reported that children prefer boarding schools – rather than government schools – to avoid security issues, long commutes, and traffic. Overall, the inability to afford the cost of transportation to school was mentioned by numerous respondents, particularly caregivers, as a reason for children's drop-out from school after the end of the project.

Infrastructure and resource constraints

Despite some progress across the GEC-T Window, infrastructure barriers continued in project schools. For many projects, a lack of resources was a key barrier to the sustainability of their activities. Many schools did not have sufficient funds to continue providing learning materials or making physical infrastructure upgrades once GEC-T project funding stopped. [World Vision \(Zimbabwe\)](#) noted that this was a particular concern for the sustainability of their project. [StC \(DRC\)](#) reported continued infrastructure barriers, noting that schools lack not only basic classroom infrastructure but also toilet facilities. Of key concern was the lack of separate toilet facilities for boys and girls. This was recognised as a specific gendered barrier that continues to affect girls' education: menstruation kits were insufficient to support their attendance, in the absence of safe WASH facilities. This challenge was similarly reported in the [VSO \(Nepal\)](#) endline evaluation report, but additionally, girls reported a lack of locks meaning that girls had to use toilet facilities in pairs to ensure privacy.

Mercy Corps (Nepal) – Compounding barriers to education

The strongest barriers noted by case study primary research respondents related to the low quality of schools, in terms of teacher capacities, motivation and interest, as well as limited resources and infrastructure. Large class sizes, with classes of up to 100 students, was a major barrier to implementing student-centred methods in the classroom. In terms of follow-up and support, one respondent reported limited interest in monitoring students' performance, and perhaps linked to this, a worsening quality of education. It was also reported that the government education curriculum does not encourage the use of the teaching techniques advocated by the project. Other barriers to teaching quality include persistently low budgets for infrastructure. The Nepali Government allocated less than 1% of the education budget to capital expenditure between 2011/ 12 and 2019/ 20, indicating limited direct funding for school facilities and resources.⁵

Additional detail is available in [Annex E \(Mercy Corps \(Nepal\) Case Study\)](#).

Large class size

Many projects across the GEC-T Window reported that large class size was a negative contextual factor, with the majority reporting the size hindering the ability of teachers to implement methods they had been trained in.

AKF (Afghanistan) – Overcrowding in classes

IE primary research KIs with [AKF \(Afghanistan\)](#) project staff noted that teacher training showed limited success due to overcrowded classes of 40-50 students meaning that more effective student-centred methods were difficult to implement.

Large class size mentioned in the [HPA \(Rwanda\)](#) project limited teachers' ability to deliver not only the curriculum in their settings of operation, but new and innovative participatory methodologies to engage students. The issue of class size was stated in both HPA project reports and consistently throughout case study primary research (most often by teachers and headteachers) often reportedly with two grades in the same classroom.

[Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#) reported that large class size, with classes of up to 100 students, was a major barrier to implementing student-centred methods in the classroom. Similarly, for children with disabilities, [CSU \(Uganda\)](#) reported that large class size is a major contextual barrier, hindering the ability of teachers to implement inclusive education practices.

⁵ See: <https://www.unicef.org/nepal/media/13271/file/Education%20-%20Budget%20Brief.pdf>

In some cases where resources have been provided or infrastructure has been built as part of the project, large class sizes inhibited its effectiveness. For instance, [Avanti \(Kenya\)](#) reported that large class sizes inhibited the ability of children to use the computers provided by the project.

CSU (Uganda) – Infrastructure as a barrier

Large class size hindered the ability of teachers to implement inclusive education practices, as confirmed by the case study primary research:

“The teaching quality is good, but the only challenge is that there is always a high number of students in each class, for example, 100 students, which makes their handling difficult. Children with disabilities always require a lot of attention from teachers in order to understand what is being taught, which is not applicable to a class of 100 students. It doesn’t stop them from coming to school, but it leaves a gap in their understanding level.” (FGD with parents)

School infrastructure was mentioned extensively in the case study data, and non-inclusive infrastructure was seen as a key barrier to children with disabilities’ attendance in school. Some issues with the maintenance of facilities were mentioned by respondents, as well as water availability in schools, that led to the toilets provided by the project not being used. Other school stakeholders mentioned that there are remaining unmet infrastructure needs in the schools, particularly as the number of learners has increased and government support is very limited. Despite improvements, some hindering factors remained for children with disabilities, including non-inclusive school physical infrastructure, as well as long distances to school. Some of the schools visited as part of the case study were physically inaccessible e.g., lacking ramps.

Additional detail is available in [Annex H \(CSU \(Uganda\) Case Study\)](#).

What were the implementation factors behind GEC-T projects’ success or lack of success?

Partnerships

GEC-T Window

Supporting government partnerships

Across the GEC-T Window, collaboration with ministries, the broader education sector, and government partnerships were predominantly seen as a positive or supportive implementation factor. GEC-T projects were able to develop and sustain relationships with both local and national governments to align best practices and influence national education policy, aiming to support the wider sustainability of GEC-T interventions. In some cases, these partnerships have been key to the sustainability of GEC-T interventions, in which activities were scaled or replicated by governments.

There are many examples of specific GEC-T tools or approaches that have been adopted by project country governments. For instance, modules from the [CARE \(Somalia\)](#) project’s inclusion strategy were adopted by the Ministry of Education’s pre-service teacher department. Kenya’s Ministry of Education sought to adopt the School-Based Inclusion Team approach in the [Link Community Development \(Kenya\)](#) project. Similarly, the [ICL \(Kenya\)](#) project’s teacher coaching model was selected for national rollout by the Teachers’ Service Commission in Kenya. The [CAMFED \(Tanzania\)](#) Learner Guide Programme was officially recognised by Ministries. In Uganda, [VIVA \(Uganda\)](#) collaborated with the Kampala Capital City Authority to ensure registration of children with disabilities to national examinations. CSU (Uganda) also worked with the Kampala Capital City Authority to help set up an Inclusive Education Desk Officer, to increase capacity on inclusive education within the institution. [VSO \(Nepal\)](#) established a community level network: the Sister Education Network and Girls and Inclusive Education Network, which aims to promote equitable access to education for girls. Since the project closed, Girls and Inclusive Education Network’s ownership has been transferred to the government and the network model has been circulated to international organisations, local and municipality level government to request the formation of more.

Government investment in scaling up activities

Other activities that have been replicated or scaled up include peer mentoring, teacher training for non-formal education, safeguarding, and reporting mechanisms. There has been strong government investment in Nepal in previous GEC projects, and [CAMFED \(Tanzania\)](#) project’s ‘Girls Learn, Succeed and Lead’ intervention was fully adapted and is integrated at the Government level in Tanzania. [PLAN \(Sierra Leone\)](#) worked closely with the government at the district level and the project was credited with mainstreaming children with disabilities into the government’s agenda. [Mercy Corps \(Nigeria\)](#) was successful in getting safeguarding referral protocols adopted by the

four state governments in which they were working. The project also contributed to the adaptation of a code of conduct that provides guidelines for the behaviour of teachers and students in both formal and non-formal education. [VIVA \(Uganda\)](#) had similar success in aligning with government and were commissioned to deliver training to family court magistrates and judges nationwide on safeguarding awareness.

Overcoming challenges with government collaboration

The importance of building relationships and understanding with relevant ministries was key to encouraging sustainability efforts. Some GEC-T projects were able to leverage these relationships in order to overcome challenges with implementation as a result of lack of understanding from government counterparts.

The [CSU \(Uganda\)](#) project faced resistance for its reproductive health education component from the Ministry of Education as the ministry was against engaging children in sex education. The project was unable to obtain information from the ministry to help with harmonising education content. Despite these challenges, CSU continued to provide practical support to girls, such as sanitary products. The IE primary research KII with [AKF \(Afghanistan\)](#) project staff member highlighted how they faced initial resistance with the Ministry of Education, which saw the project's CBE classes as competing with government schools. Field visits with Ministry officials to remote CBE classes transformed their understanding of the programme's importance and ultimately led to the Ministry including CBE in the national education strategic plan.

In addition to government partnerships functioning as a generally supportive implementation factor, positive results observed may be linked to contextually relevant overarching government policy. Evaluation reports from across the GEC-T Window point to the importance of the policy and political environment as well as individual project's relationships and collaborations with local and national authorities. For instance, the [EDT \(Kenya\)](#) endline evaluation reported government policy providing county bursaries and paying for school fees through the National Government Constituencies Development Fund, which may explain the positive results observed in Turkana County.

CSU (Uganda) – Collaboration with Kampala Capital City Authority to increase inclusive education

[CSU \(Uganda\)](#) reported improvements in local and national education policy, with increased efforts for inclusive education and successful engagements with the Kampala Capital City Authority, as well as the Ministry of Education and Sports. At the same time, the project also reflected that funding limitations at the government level, as well as continuing negative attitudes towards inclusive education risked limiting the sustainability of these efforts. Establishing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Kampala Capital City Authority led to successful collaboration in several activities, including teacher training, supervision, and accessibility improvements, which also included Kyambogo University and Coordinating Centre Tutors. The Kampala Capital City Authority also provided technical experts to support the project. It was reported that working with government led to recognition and more interest in the trainings and the activities on the part of parents and schools.

Additional detail is available in [Annex H \(CSU \(Uganda\) Case Study\)](#).

LNGB Window

Partnerships with a range of different organisations helped LNGB projects to bring in specialist expertise and resources to improve their initiatives, making their operations more comprehensive, coherent and resilient to external influence.

Plan (Zimbabwe) – The value of strong partnerships with specialist organisations

Evaluation reports underline the importance of collaboration between the project and organisations such as the Apostolic Women's Empowerment Trust and Christian Blind Ministries, which improved project outcomes. The Apostolic Women's Empowerment Trust's outreach targeted marginalised groups, notably girls from the Apostolic community, and included culturally sensitive dialogue sessions to mitigate resistance. Meanwhile, Christian Blind Ministries' provision of assistive devices like glasses and hearing aids enabled learners with disabilities to better engage in educational activities, reducing barriers and promoting inclusivity. The following quote reflects the crucial role Plan's partners played:

"We received valuable support from Christian Blind Mission, which assisted in working with individuals with disabilities. They provided assessments and guidance, ensuring that the needs of people with disabilities were adequately addressed. Additionally, sector-specific partners like the Apostolic Women's Empowerment Trust played a crucial role in supporting sexual health education, contributing to the effectiveness of those sessions." (Community Educator KII)

Additional detail is available in [Annex K \(Plan \(Zimbabwe\) Case Study\)](#).

Facilitating curriculum alignment and transition

Partnerships with education authorities helped improve transition between project initiatives and formal education. In the [ACTED \(Pakistan\)](#) project, IE Case Study primary research respondents reported that partnerships with provincial education authorities ensured alignment between the project's curriculum and government standards. This collaboration enabled girls to more easily transition into formal schools through government-mandated admission tests upon graduation from the project. Local organisations brought expertise in informal education by developing educator training materials and conducting consistent evaluations of learning outcomes. These joint efforts addressed the specific needs of remote communities, making education more accessible and relevant. Additionally, the integration of government-mandated assessments ensured that the curriculum met national standards, facilitating a smoother transition for learners.

Adaptive approaches in crisis management

IE Case Study primary research demonstrated that the [ACTED \(Pakistan\)](#) project's collaboration with the Sindh Education Foundation facilitated a greater likelihood of sustainability of project initiatives by transforming Accelerated Learning Programme spaces into Sindh Education Foundation learning spaces at the end of the project. This allowed beneficiary girls to access post-primary curricula, minimising interruptions to their education. Other partnerships, including those with the Provincial Disaster Management Authority and the National Commission for Human Development, enabled literacy and numeracy spaces to remain operational during crises such as the severe flooding of 2022 and Covid-19 disruptions. Engagement with local NGOs also provided logistical support, such as delivering educational materials to remote areas and coordinating emergency responses during natural disasters.

Challenges with consortium capacity

Some consortium-led projects experienced difficulties managing partnerships. For instance, in the [Plan \(Zimbabwe\)](#) project, the Endline evaluation report found that capacity-building efforts for smaller organisations like the Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust initially required additional resources to align with consortium operations. These capacity gaps highlighted the need for stronger mechanisms to ensure equitable and effective collaboration within project frameworks from the beginning. In some cases, these smaller organisations lacked the administrative capacity to manage their roles effectively, causing delays in implementation and reporting.

Insufficient engagement with key stakeholders

For the [Link Community Development \(Malawi\)](#) project, external evaluators found that a lack of sufficient consultation with provincial authorities early in the project's design phase limited the integration of educational programmes into existing government systems. This gap affected the project's scalability and sustainability, illustrating the importance of early and sustained stakeholder engagement. Additionally, limited dialogue with community leaders in certain districts resulted in a lack of local ownership, which affected attendance and retention rates among target groups.

Project management/ monitoring systems

GEC-T Window

The use of monitoring systems was seen by several projects as supporting effective implementation across the GEC-T Window. However, there were limited examples of this across the GEC-T projects.

Using monitoring effectively to inform project adaptations

[VIVA \(Uganda\)](#) mentioned regular catch-ups, project monitoring, and close collaboration with the FM as supporting positive results. Some projects noted that regular project monitoring fed into their adaptive management systems, [CSU \(Uganda\)](#) reported using monitoring data to inform adaptive management and highlighted a specific example of success. In response to a finding that headteachers were not taking part in training, the project developed a Trainer of Trainers model in which headteachers were trained by a specialised agency working on inclusive education. [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#) demonstrated making several adaptations to their teaching and learning approach based on monitoring and evidence from their midline evaluation which found learning gaps in their writing and analytical skills. They responded by tailoring teacher training and workshops to focus on this area and succeeded in improving subject-specific knowledge and the pedagogical approaches of teachers. The [PEAS \(Uganda\)](#) project, similarly, made adaptations based on continuous assessment of teachers' and learners' needs in the classroom. [AKF \(Afghanistan\)](#) noted engaging School Management Councils in regular monitoring of classes and in following up on student attendance; while [Avanti \(Kenya\)](#) reported that attendance monitoring (e.g. attendance cards) was a motivating factor for students to attend.

Challenges with levels of reporting requirements

There was, however, a disconnect between what was found in the secondary research and the evidence collected through IE KIs with regard to the use of monitoring systems. Project staff from the [CARE \(Somalia\)](#) project noted that gathering monitoring data and using it to feed into implementation was very challenging in practice. This was partially due to a new monitoring framework being introduced halfway through implementation and the challenge posed by data collection as the project was being implemented in several very remote and isolated locations. [AKF \(Afghanistan\)](#) project staff reported challenges with the level of monitoring expected of them. [VIVA \(Uganda\)](#) similarly struggled with the volume of monitoring required from them and reported that this was a hindrance to implementation.

These sentiments were corroborated by IE KIs with the FM who reported that some projects struggled with the level of effort required for reporting to the FM. The level of information required and structured templates were unfamiliar for some IPs. This, however, did result in a push from the FM to increase the capacity of partners' reporting capabilities. The primary research case study for [CSU \(Uganda\)](#) found that the project team reported that the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) support and the time spent in person to strengthen the team's capacity in both delivery and monitoring, evaluation and learning was very helpful for implementation. Similarly, the [WUSC \(Kenya\)](#) project faced initial challenges with successfully implementing monitoring systems, but the FM supported capacity building and invested in the development of monitoring and evaluation systems, project level capacity and evidence generation. This enabled WUSC to make design adaptations to its cash transfer and scholarship components based on evidence generated.

LNGB Window

Effective project management and monitoring systems showed that they could enhance project outcomes by enabling data-driven decision-making, facilitating collaboration and ensuring adaptability in the face of challenges.

Adaptability through real-time data collection and flexible resource reallocation

The Endline evaluation report for the [PIN \(Ethiopia\)](#) project found that it effectively used mobile data collection tools to provide timely insights into attendance and learning trends. During drought periods, the system tracked attendance fluctuations and informed rapid interventions, such as food distribution, which prevented dropouts. This approach not only stabilised attendance but also supported learning continuity, with nuanced data enabling tailored adjustments to teaching methods. Additionally, the integration of attendance data with local governance allowed proactive resource allocation, such as deploying additional educators to areas experiencing high dropout risks.

Data-driven improvements

Fund Manager reports show that the [IRC \(Pakistan\)](#) project conducted regular milestone reviews and adaptive feedback loops allowed for responsive project management. One notable instance involved the redesign of financial literacy curricula based on early assessments. Girls initially struggled with abstract financial concepts, leading to the inclusion of practical, scenario-based exercises that improved comprehension and application. This iterative approach enhanced the relevance and effectiveness of the curriculum. To support this, community feedback mechanisms ensured that these revisions reflected local cultural contexts, leading to better engagement from learners and their families.

Collaborative monitoring for sustained impact

The [Street Child \(Nepal\)](#) project developed and implemented collaborative monitoring systems involving local stakeholders, government representatives, and project staff, helping to increase the likelihood of sustained impact. Monthly meetings were held to evaluate progress against key indicators, enabling timely adjustments to project strategies. For example, discrepancies in attendance data were identified early and addressed through targeted outreach to communities, resulting in improved retention rates. This was underpinned by real-time dashboards which provided stakeholders with transparent updates on project performance, helping to facilitate accountability and trust. Another example, as cited in the [IE Study – Value for Money of Educating the Most Marginalised Girls through the GEC](#), came from the [PIN \(Nepal\)](#) project, where it was found of the three case studies, the project had the strongest and most accurate data overall, including on the types and degrees of marginalisation and student completion rates. This corresponded with its stronger overall performance and likely reflected a better ability to track and respond to ongoing issues. As was evident for several projects that inefficient project management and monitoring practices could hinder progress, leading to inefficiencies, delays, and a failure to address key challenges effectively.

ActionAid (Kenya) – Tangible impact of poor project management

Evaluation reports stated that towards the end of the project, inconsistent communication and management practices became apparent. Issues such as non-attendance at key meetings and delays in responding to emails disrupted

planning and coordination, particularly concerning the final budget revisions. These project management issues suggested a need for stronger communication protocols to ensure continuity and efficient closure. Without clear channels for timely updates, project stakeholders experienced setbacks that affected the smooth transition of responsibilities and resources. For instance, case study respondents reported delays in disbursing funds for educator salaries and start-up kits led to frustration and, in some cases, participant dropout, undermining the project's retention efforts and overall momentum. The following quote reflects how prolonged management procedures affected girls' vocational progress:

"So, you will find that a girl is transitioning. She has finished the Catch-up Centre; she wants start-up capital. We were supposed to give the start-up capital of KES 12,000. This one wants to go to this level for review. That review is done. The second level of approval takes another two weeks. The third approval takes another two weeks. The final approval takes another two weeks. So, you will find that a girl has finished, and you have not supported her for a month. What does that mean to that girl?" (Project Staff KII)

Additional detail is available in [Annex I \(Kenya \(ActionAid\) Case Study\)](#).

Administrative overload

Case study primary research respondents described how during the [Plan \(Zimbabwe\)](#) project, the extensive approvals required for modifying project activities constrained the project's responsiveness to high dropout rates. For example, the process of adding additional cohorts to mitigate attendance losses was delayed by four months due to administrative bottlenecks, negatively impacting the project's ability to address urgent challenges. Overly complex reporting requirements also strained field staff, detracting from their ability to focus on direct implementation efforts. Such delays highlighted the need for more streamlined decision-making processes.

Plan (Zimbabwe) – Logistical problems impacting participation

In the [Plan \(Zimbabwe\)](#) project, community members expressed dissatisfaction with time management and session scheduling, which impacted participation rates. Delays in starting sessions caused frustration among participants and reduced overall engagement. These logistical shortcomings demonstrated the importance of planning, resource allocation, and communication with stakeholders. For instance, scheduling conflicts between community leaders and facilitators led to repeated cancellations, disrupting learning schedules and reducing momentum.

Additional detail is available in [Annex K \(Plan \(Zimbabwe\) Case Study\)](#).

Data collection discrepancies

External evaluation reports show that inconsistencies in the [IRC \(Sierra Leone\)](#) project's data collection methodologies across partners caused significant delays in reporting. Attendance tracking systems differed, leading to confusion during quarterly evaluations and undermining the reliability of monitoring outcomes. These discrepancies hindered the ability to make timely, evidence-based decisions, reducing the project's overall effectiveness. The lack of standardised templates and clear data-sharing protocols further exacerbated this issue, resulting in fragmented insights.

Inadequate M&E capacity

External evaluation reports found that insufficient M&E capacity among the [AKF \(Afghanistan\)](#) project staff resulted in missed opportunities for timely adjustments. Challenges in consolidating data from multiple regions led to fragmented data and insights, slowing decision-making and reducing the project's ability to respond effectively to evolving needs. The lack of training and tools for staff further exacerbated these issues. For example, gaps in understanding key indicators meant that some critical metrics, such as long-term learning outcomes, were underreported.

Staff capacity and availability

GEC-T Window

Teacher training across diverse projects and contexts

The GEC-T Window consisted of very diverse projects and contexts. The FM reported⁶ that the initial model of cascading teacher professional development, in which centralised training is given to select teachers, and they then cascade knowledge, had limited success. The FM further reported that the cascading of training to schools did not happen as intended. In some cases, it did not happen at all, and in others the quality of the training was

⁶ https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/dodb2fx2/gec_pip_4_self_assessment_tools_final.pdf

compromised. A lack of quality control, a lack of support from management, or a lack of allocated time and resources were all reported as issues. In response, the FM moved to roll out individualised approaches to teacher professional development which allowed all teachers to gain support rather than a select few and try out new methodologies in the classroom. However, the extent to which these methods could actually be implemented was limited by contextual factors (see above). The case study primary research for [CSU \(Uganda\)](#) highlighted the challenges in teacher training the project faced resulting in continued low teaching quality in project schools.

CSU (Uganda) – Challenges with teacher training and quality

The case study found numerous challenges linked to teacher training and teaching quality. Despite some improvements in inclusive pedagogy, non-inclusive teaching practices continued. According to the End of Project Review, this mostly affected untrained or inadequately trained teachers, indicating limitations in the training activities implemented by the project. The case study primary research identified several issues with the support provided to teachers. Teacher training was considered insufficient, with teachers requiring continuous follow-up to support the implementation of new methods. A lack of follow-up reportedly decreased teacher morale. It was reported that there were issues with government supervision structures, which were insufficient to provide support to teachers. The project team interviewed as part of the case study primary research highlighted that teacher manuals were not provided during training: as a result, each teacher taught based on their own understanding, which caused a lack of consistency. Teachers also reported that they did not receive materials, which limited the impact of the training and the level of interest of participants.

Additional detail is available in [Annex H \(CSU \(Uganda\) Case Study\)](#).

HPA (Rwanda) – Challenges with teachers implementing their training

Although teachers appreciated the training, they reportedly would have needed more time and opportunity to practice what they had learned to be able to implement it effectively in the classroom – together with the limitations in infrastructure and materials. [HPA \(Rwanda\)](#) additionally reported issues with the training itself. According to HPA's evaluation reports, due to resource constraints, it was also reported that not all school stakeholders took part in activities and the message may have been somewhat lost or changed in the process. As trainings included a mix of primary and secondary teachers; the training content was focused on literacy teaching methodology at the primary level, and on English rather than maths which partially led to mixed results observed in girls' maths skills at different grade levels.

Additional detail is available in [Annex G \(HPA \(Rwanda\) Case Study\)](#).

Teacher absenteeism and incentives

Teacher absenteeism and turnover, linked to both education policy and teacher incentives has an important influence on learning outcomes. On the [STAGES \(Ethiopia\)](#) project, teacher absenteeism was found to be a statistically significant predictor of language scores in both English and local languages.

Redeployment and movement of teachers was reported by different projects. This affected projects through attrition of trained teachers, as mentioned in Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria. On the [WUSC \(Kenya\)](#) project, attrition of teachers was found to be higher in arid and semi-arid counties, leading to further educational marginalisation in these areas. In the [Avanti \(Nigeria\)](#) project, the team attempted to mitigate this issue by engaging with the government to encourage teacher transfers to other Avanti schools rather than outside project schools.

PEAS (Uganda) – Mitigating against high attrition rates

There are very few examples of projects mitigating against high attrition rates. However, the [PEAS \(Uganda\)](#) project recognised investments made in teachers' professional development and prioritised retention by continuing to pay 80% of teachers' salaries during Covid-19, resulting in a much less disrupted teaching workforce than other contexts.

Projects across the GEC-T Window struggled with teacher incentives and support; which were not always sufficient to meet their needs. The increase in expectations following teacher training in some cases meant a higher workload. The [HPA \(Rwanda\)](#) project recognised that further incentives were needed for teachers in the long-term to provide remedial lessons as these represented a higher workload for teachers. Similarly, IE KIs with [PEAS \(Uganda\)](#) project staff members noted that a key challenge was teacher retention. The IP highlighted the issue of high teacher turnover as the project was unable to match government rates which meant when recruitment for government schools was

opened up, the project lost a number of teachers. Although PEAS attempted to mitigate this by improving teacher housing facilities and created an agreement in which teachers were shared across PEAS project schools and government schools, the success was limited. The [PEAS \(Uganda\)](#) project endline evaluation recommended exploring the possibility of financial incentives and increased teacher salaries to match government schools.

CSU (Uganda) – Teacher availability and quality

The case study primary research for the [CSU \(Uganda\)](#) found numerous issues relating to teacher availability and quality. These were reportedly due to teacher absenteeism, strikes and transfers, and all linked to low teacher salaries. Compounding this was the very limited pre-existing capacity at the school level to support children with disabilities, while teachers also had low pre-existing knowledge of inclusive education. This was found to be a particularly strong challenge in the case of teacher turn-over. Loss of institutional memory as teachers left project schools was reportedly a challenge according to both secondary and primary data.

Additional detail is available in [Annex H \(CSU \(Uganda\) Case Study\)](#).

LNGB Window

Effective, capable staff and effective deployment of personnel was a hallmark of many successful projects across the LNGB Window, driving project success by ensuring well-trained, locally knowledgeable staff were in place to understand the demands of the community and achieve the goals of the project.

Comprehensive capacity building of project staff and educators

Regular capacity-building initiatives were a cornerstone of project success. The Endline evaluation report describes how in the [AKF \(Afghanistan\)](#) project, quarterly training sessions enhanced staff competencies in financial management and gender-sensitive teaching practices. Finance staff participated in workshops on budget forecasting, reducing errors in expenditure tracking, and ensuring more effective resource allocation. Simultaneously, gender-inclusivity training for educators fostered safer classroom environments for girls, leading to improved attendance and engagement. Similarly, in the [Street Child \(Nepal\)](#) project, the inclusion of diverse experts – spanning youth empowerment, education, and community engagement – enabled the creation of comprehensive solutions to multifaceted challenges. Mentorship programmes for junior staff ensured the retention of institutional knowledge, strengthening team resilience over time. In addition, targeted coaching sessions for senior staff facilitated smoother transitions during project scale-ups.

Collaborative and inclusive training approaches

IE Case Study primary research show that collaborative training initiatives in the [ACTED \(Pakistan\)](#) project brought together educators, community leaders, and government officials to address educational barriers collectively. Sessions focused on conflict resolution, gender sensitivity, and curriculum adaptation, facilitating a unified approach among stakeholders. Community engagement further bolstered these efforts, with local leaders participating in activities that reinforced trust and accountability. For instance, community members were invited to inspect learning spaces, fostering ownership and changing perceptions about girls' education. These collaborative efforts also included the co-design of educator manuals and teaching aids, ensuring alignment with local contexts and needs.

Comprehensive child protection training

The [Link Community Development \(Malawi\)](#) project delivered extensive training on child protection to equip educators and community leaders to address issues such as bullying, corporal punishment, and gender-based violence. External evaluation reports demonstrate that clear reporting mechanisms were established, enabling community members to raise concerns confidently and ensuring swift resolution of safeguarding issues. For example, the introduction of anonymous reporting boxes in schools significantly increased the reporting of incidents, allowing timely interventions. Regular refresher training for staff and community leaders further reinforced safeguarding awareness and skills, ensuring sustained commitment to child protection.

Plan (Zimbabwe) – Why high turnover of educators caused difficulties

Case study primary research respondents cited the issue of high turnover among Community Educators, many of whom were awaiting formal teaching appointments, which disrupted project continuity. Educators often left without notice on receiving government postings, leaving gaps that were difficult to fill. The recruitment of less qualified replacements, while necessary, required additional induction and training, which strained resources and delayed

implementation. This issue underscored the need for stronger retention strategies, such as competitive incentives and long-term contracts. The following quote reflects the difficulties caused by high staff turnover:

“This cycle of turnover was particularly pronounced in remote areas, where education is often not prioritised. As a result, qualified educators were difficult to retain, and those who were available frequently sought employment in more accessible locations. The lack of stability in staffing made it challenging to implement consistent teaching methods and support for students.” (Project Staff KII)

Additional detail is available in [Annex K \(Plan \(Zimbabwe\) Case Study\)](#).

Staff turnover and recruitment challenges

Retaining skilled staff was a persistent issue across several projects in the LNGB Window. In the [PIN \(Ethiopia\)](#) project, burnout due to understaffing, particularly during peak implementation periods, impacted productivity and morale. In the [World Education Inc. \(Ghana\)](#) project, delays in hiring technical experts during critical curriculum development phases created significant gaps, forcing existing personnel to fill roles they were not adequately trained for. In the [ActionAid \(Kenya\)](#) project, IE Case Study primary research demonstrated that competition for skilled personnel within the local development sector exacerbated recruitment challenges. For instance, the departure of three senior field coordinators within six months disrupted community outreach activities, negatively affecting enrolment rates. Moreover, the lack of competitive compensation packages often made retention of high-performing staff unsustainable as they looked for more permanent, better-located or better-paid teaching roles elsewhere.

Resistance to externally recruited staff

In the [ACTED \(Pakistan\)](#) project, IE Case Study primary research respondents described how resistance to educators recruited from outside communities highlighted the importance of culturally sensitive staffing approaches. While efforts were made to offer salary increases and transport allowances, these measures were insufficient to fully address the challenges of recruiting qualified educators in remote areas. Heavy investments in training local educators helped mitigate these issues, but the underlying challenge of limited local educational infrastructure persisted. In some cases, externally recruited staff faced social ostracism, further complicating integration into the community.

Budget and financial management

GEC-T Window

Reductions in budgets in most cases across the GEC-T Window resulted in a scaling down of project activities and ambition. The GEC-T Window was subject to budget cuts following the effects of Covid-19 on the UK economy and reduction in ODA spend from 0.7 percent of Gross National Income in 2020 to 0.5 percent in 2021 ([FCDO, 2024](#)). Following the announcement of a reduction in the ODA budget, the FM implemented a 20% reduction to the FY 2021-22 forecast from £73 million to £58.4 million for the fiscal year. The FM communicated the budget reductions to GEC projects in June 2021 (UKAID, 2024).

Covid-19 related budget cuts

IE KIIs with project staff, FM, and FCDO staff members all report the impact of the post-Covid-19 2021 budget cuts which had a profound impact on delivery. The lack of available budget meant that the intended achievement was not met. The lack of delivery during Covid-19 coupled with projects receiving reduced funding was detrimental to the results of the majority of projects affected. Limited data was available at the window level in relation to project budgets and trends.

LNGB Window

Robust, flexible budget and financial management practices underpinned the successful implementation of projects across the LNGB Window, enabling efficient resource allocation, adaptability, and accountability.

Adaptable budget allocation

Effective budget management and flexibility from donors was critical in ensuring project resilience and adaptability. Following the severe flooding in 2021, external evaluation reports describe how the [VSO \(Nepal\)](#) project swiftly reallocated project funds, enabling the rapid repair of learning centres which minimised the disruption to educational activities. This proactive response not only restored infrastructure but also maintained community trust in the project's ability to adapt to unforeseen challenges. Similarly, the [PIN \(Ethiopia\)](#) project's strategic leveraging of existing infrastructure, such as repurposing under-utilised facilities for educational purposes, significantly reduced costs. These savings were redirected toward capacity-building initiatives, amplifying the project's overall impact. In one

instance, savings from infrastructure costs allowed for the procurement of additional teaching aids, enhancing classroom delivery.

Emergency contingency funds

External evaluators reported that in the [Link Community Development \(Malawi\)](#) project, the establishment of contingency reserves acted as a financial safety net during emergencies such as drought. These funds provided food rations at community hubs, addressing both attendance challenges and immediate nutritional needs. By mitigating the impact of external shocks, the project demonstrated its ability to maintain stability in service delivery. For example, during one drought period, contingency funds were used to distribute food and water, ensuring that learners could continue attending classes without interruption. This approach also ensured that attendance rates remained consistent, even during periods of heightened food insecurity.

ACTED (Pakistan) – Adaptable financial management in the face of external crises

In response to disruptions, such as the disastrous flooding of 2022, ACTED secured a no-cost extension and developed a resource package to try to mitigate against learning losses. The secondary research indicates that this proactive measure allowed for a more flexible and adaptive response to unexpected challenges, ensuring the relative continuity and success of the Accelerated Learning Programme. Case study primary research respondents described how when floods damaged learning centres, the team arranged alternate funding sources to repair and rehabilitate these spaces, demonstrating resilience and resourcefulness in maintaining educational activities despite financial constraints.

Additional detail is available in [Annex J \(ACTED \(Pakistan\) Case Study\)](#).

Collaborative financial oversight

IE Case Study primary research respondents stated that collaborative financial planning meetings between stakeholders in the [ACTED \(Pakistan\)](#) project enhanced accountability and reduced unnecessary expenditure. Regular sessions allowed partners to identify and address potential oversights in real-time, strengthening financial oversight. These meetings facilitated the successful implementation of key components such as educator training programmes and the development of culturally relevant educational materials. The project's transparent approach fostered trust among stakeholders and ensured that funds were utilised efficiently. Additionally, these sessions highlighted the importance of monitoring exchange rates during periods of currency fluctuation, helping to pre-emptively adjust budgets where possible and necessary.

ACTED (Pakistan) – How delays in payment undermined project achievements

Delays in educator payments and the resulting unplanned closure of learning centres due to strikes severely undermined the progress and achievements of the project. These disruptions eroded trust within communities, particularly among parents who had begun to see value in the project's activities. Gains in literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills were interrupted, leaving many learners without the means to consolidate their progress. Furthermore, the instability caused by payment delays and closures negatively affected community perceptions about the reliability of the project, reversing some of the social change the project had facilitated. The loss of continuity led to reduced access to education and vocational training, further entrenching existing barriers. Educators' morale and commitment were also severely impacted, as the delays created financial insecurity and dissatisfaction, which often translated to absenteeism and, in some cases, permanent departures from the project.

Additional detail is available in [Annex J \(ACTED \(Pakistan\) Case Study\)](#).

Learning environment

LNGB Window

Effective physical learning environments were integral to achieving educational success. Projects that invested in quality facilities, teaching aids, and infrastructure improvements demonstrated significant benefits. Please note that this section has been included under implementation factors ([Section 5.3](#)), rather than contextual factors ([Section 5.2](#)) because unlike the GEC-T Window, projects in the LNGB Window established their own learning centres and were therefore directly responsible for providing a suitable, safe learning environment.

Sanitation and hygiene facilities

The [PIN \(Ethiopia\)](#) project targeted investments in infrastructure, which addressed critical barriers to education by constructing gender-sensitive toilets and providing hygiene supplies. This initiative was particularly effective in improving girls' attendance, as it eliminated the stigma and challenges associated with menstruation. External evaluators found that schools equipped with proper sanitation facilities saw a 25% increase in attendance rates among adolescent girls, reinforcing the importance of adequate infrastructure in improving inclusivity.

Community collaboration for sustainability

In the [ACTED \(Pakistan\)](#) project, external evaluators describe how collaborative efforts with government ministries enabled the integration of infrastructure improvements into long-term sustainability plans. Local educators were trained to manage and maintain facilities, ensuring that schools remained functional and well-equipped. Refurbished classrooms with adequate ventilation and lighting supported better academic outcomes, as students could focus without the distractions of inadequate facilities. These collaborations facilitated the provision of solar panels in off-grid schools, ensuring reliable lighting for evening classes and further boosting accessibility.

Inclusive safeguarding policies

Many projects across the LNGB Window developed safeguarding policies tailored to children with disabilities, helping to create more inclusive learning environments. One example comes from the [PIN \(Ethiopia\)](#) project, where educators received training on recognising and addressing the unique risks faced by these children, such as neglect or exploitation. The establishment of safeguarding committees at the community level enhanced oversight and accountability, ensuring that issues were addressed promptly. Committees regularly reviewed safeguarding reports and facilitated workshops for parents on disability inclusion, leading to a more protective environment. The provision of accessible compliance mechanisms, such as toll-free hotlines, further ensured that safeguarding issues could be reported discreetly and addressed efficiently.

Gender-responsive action plans

One of multiple projects from the LNGB Window to develop and implement gender-responsive action plans was the [Street Child \(Nepal\)](#) project, where the measure proved instrumental in reducing incidents of school-related violence. One notable outcome was the reduction of harassment cases reported near learning centres, attributed to the active involvement of community leaders in monitoring activities. Additionally, some boys trained in SRHR became advocates for gender equity, promoting respectful behaviour within their peer groups.

Across the LNGB Window, inadequate learning environments hindered educational progress and exacerbated inequalities. Examples included inadequate WASH facilities excluding certain learners, overcrowded classrooms and disrupted learning progress.

Poorly maintained infrastructure

External evaluation reports highlight that during the [Link Community Development \(Malawi\)](#) project, poorly maintained infrastructure, including leaking roofs and broken desks, exacerbated the challenges faced by students and educators. During the rainy season, many classrooms became unusable, leading to frequent cancellations and disrupted learning schedules. In one instance, a school reported that lessons had to be conducted under trees for several weeks due to classroom flooding, significantly hindering academic progress. The lack of basic repairs also created safety hazards, with instances of collapsing ceilings reported in older school buildings.

Uneven resource distribution

Limited government funding and uneven resource distribution in several regions placed additional strain on already overburdened education systems. IE Case Study primary research respondents reported that in the rural areas in which the [PLAN \(Zimbabwe\)](#) project was operating, proposed satellite hubs aimed to address the challenge of long travel distances for students but remained underfunded. As a result, many girls faced significant barriers to attendance, due to the time, cost and safety risks associated with making the journey, which further disrupted learning continuity.

ACTED (Pakistan) – Poor learning environments impacting attendance

Many case study respondents cited a lack of basic facilities, such as clean drinking water, reliable electricity, and adequate classroom infrastructure, underlining the unequal levels of the learning centres. These infrastructure issues were particularly prevalent in rural areas, where resources were already scarce. These resource gaps affected attendance and engagement, especially during extreme weather conditions. While there were attempts to address these issues by securing additional funding from other sources in the form of solar-powered fans and water systems,

the uneven distribution of these resources led to dissatisfaction among participants. Efforts to improve the learning environment, while helpful, were insufficient to fully address these systemic challenges. The following quote describes some of the facility challenges experienced by the project:

"There are other problems like the lack of cold drinking water and electricity. The solar system is not sufficient, causing students to be unhappy and parents to worry as students get sick from drinking hot water in hot weather" (School Management Committee member KII)

Additional detail is available in [Annex J \(ACTED \(Pakistan\) Case Study\)](#).

What were the unexpected or unintended results across the two portfolios?

GEC-T Window

Across the GEC-T Window, there was a mixture of unintended and unexpected results, which had a range of positive and negative consequences for girls' attendance and learning. In terms of positive unintended results, a small number of projects reported improvements in gender dynamics or community/ familiar attitudes to education, indicating positive spillover effects beyond the girls reached directly by the project. Some unexpected pathways to change were also reported by projects, particularly where positive results surpassed expectations in a particular area.

Positive unexpected or intended results

Surpassing project expectations

A small number of projects reported that their results surpassed their expectations. In contrast to the majority of GEC-T projects in the Window, the [EDT \(Kenya\)](#) project reported an unexpected recovery in learning losses following Covid-19 amongst intervention girls. Girls supported by the project were able to recover most of the lost learning experienced as a result of the pandemic and outperformed the control group. Remedial learning activities delivered by EDT supported girls to catch up with their learning; [IE Study – Effects of Covid-19 on Access and Learning in the GEC II](#) found girls who attended reading camps performed better in SeGRA and SeGMA tests than those who did not attend reading camps; suggesting these have been effective in helping girls to offset their learning loss. The [Avanti \(Kenya\)](#) project reported unexpected increases in girls' confidence due to using computers on their own; also reporting an increase in children's curiosity and attentiveness as a result of using digital resources such as projectors.

CSU (Uganda) – Higher than anticipated improvements in girls' self-esteem and self-efficacy

Respondents participating in the case study primary research noted that there were some better than anticipated results in certain areas. For example, project staff highlighted overall positive interactions of children with disabilities with other learners, as well as children with disabilities taking on positions of leadership within their schools. This type of change was linked with improvements in girls' self-esteem and self-efficacy. In terms of attitudinal change, the project team also reported higher than anticipated improvements in attitudes among family members and among teachers.

Evaluation reports highlighted that the project unexpectedly led to enrolment of other children with disabilities outside of direct project beneficiaries. Similarly, non-project schools in the area reportedly developed an interest in inclusive education. As mentioned by a project staff member:

"We had schools coming for guidance, like private schools seeking support on how to put a toilet or a ramp in their school so that if they have a child with a disability, they are comfortable. They finally did it after learning it from the training, which I think is amazing." (KII with project stakeholder)

It was also reported that some schools continued carrying out activities to support inclusive education, independently of the CSU project. An IP respondent mentioned that schools built ramps with their own budget, improved classrooms, and toilets to accommodate children with disabilities. Project staff members also reported that some schools reduced their school fees, enabling children to continue their education.

Additional detail is available in [Annex H \(CSU \(Uganda\) Case Study\)](#).

Gender dynamics/ interaction with boys

Several projects reported positive effects of interventions on girls' interactions with boys. On the Relief International (Somalia) project, the endline evaluation report noted an increase in collaboration between genders, notably during school competitions. While recognising that girls reportedly prefer single-gender activities, mixed gender groups such

as the Leadership Group were seen as having potential to be gender transformative. Relief International reported that this challenged the extent to which gender-segregated activities promote equality and compatibility between genders.

On the [HPA \(Rwanda\)](#) project, boys were aware of and positive about changes in the classroom environment and in the school infrastructure. The project had positive effects on boys' learning experience as well, indirectly reaching them through improvements in the school environment, and directly through their inclusion in activities such as Community Study Groups, school businesses and vocational training.

Positive spillover effects on the community

A number of projects explicitly reported that there were positive effects on the broader community as a result of GEC-T interventions. This occurred through GEC-T project beneficiaries sharing their knowledge with other community members outside of the project. For instance, the [Avanti \(Kenya\)](#) project reported that one of the greatest areas of impact was the increase in digital literacy. A secondary and unintended benefit of this was that respondents at the midline and endline evaluation stage reported that children were sharing their increased digital and ICT literacy not only with their families but wider community members. Similarly, the case study primary research for the [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#) project found that beneficiaries shared what they had learned; this included self-defence, life skills and practical skills (such as pad making), and academic skills. In some cases, girls were able to monetise these skills, for instance selling pads or working as tutors for other students.

A second and less widely reported mechanism for positive spillover effects was through community members adopting practices from schools in the community. This was demonstrated on the [CARE \(Somalia\)](#) project in which hygiene interventions in schools led to improvements in practices in the community. However, reports were unclear as to whether this may have been due to girls helping with cleaning in the community. The [IE Study - Lessons Learned Study](#) reported an increase in wider community vaccination rates as a result of the [ChildHope \(Ethiopia\)](#) project.

Negative unintended results

Exclusion of boys

The most frequently reported negative unintended consequence concerns the perceived and actual exclusion of boys. This was found across several projects in the GEC-T Window and was highlighted in all three case studies in Uganda (CSU), Nepal (Mercy Corps), Rwanda (HPA) and further corroborated by IE KII with other project staff members and key stakeholders.

Mercy Corps (Nepal) – Community perceptions of boys' exclusion

The majority of negative unintended effects reported in both evaluation reports and case study primary research concerned gender dynamics and the perceived exclusion of boys. It was highlighted by several case study respondents that boys face important barriers to their education in this context, especially linked to the need to pursue income-generation activities, migration to India, and low motivation to go to school. At endline, it had already been highlighted that there were boys in the community who would have needed support; more so than relatively well-off girls who were being supported by the project. Primary research strongly confirmed this perception. For example, one government respondent commented on boys' worsening situation, including because of increased drug use. According to several project stakeholders, boys would have wanted to be included in extra-curricular clubs but were not able to participate. Some teachers requested additional classes for boys, as reportedly girls were outperforming them. One community stakeholder also highlighted that vocational training would have been valuable to allow boys to pursue more profitable careers. For example, as mentioned by one respondent:

"I noticed boys increasingly dropping out of school. In terms of boys, they are often easily convinced by their friends to go to India to work. Boys also felt proud if they can earn money at a young age rather than attending school." (KII with community stakeholder)

Additional detail is available in [Annex E \(Mercy Corps \(Nepal\) Case Study\)](#).

Evidence from the [CARE \(Somalia\)](#) project endline reported that girls and boys were not being punished equally in the classroom as girls were considered to be more 'fragile' than boys. The project's endline evaluation report suggested that this was harmful in two ways: (1) it reinforced negative social norms around femininity and fragility; and (2) potentially led to resentment from boys in the classroom. The project additionally reported that girls were encouraged in class at the expense of boys. In some cases, this was seen as leading to a lack of motivation among boys and reinforcement of negative stereotypes – for example boys being seen as having negative behaviours such as chewing khat, and not being interested in school. The [PEAS \(Uganda\)](#) project similarly noted a decline in boys'

participation when undertaking classroom observations as a result of the increased focus on girls. These findings were also supported in the case study primary research for [Mercy Corps \(Nepal\)](#).

An IE KII with a project staff member on the [PEAS \(Uganda\)](#) project also noted that the focus on girls resulted in boys becoming uninterested and negatively impacting boys' retention in schools. The staff member also reported that boys were concerned that project schools were being turned into girls-only schools as infrastructure upgrades were taking place, suggesting an unintended effect of sensitisation and messaging around girls' education.

Other unintended effects

There were a small number of examples across the GEC-T Window of other unintended effects. First, some projects aiming to support transition into employment were not fully aligned with girls' needs or their economic environment. The [World Vision \(Zimbabwe\)](#) project reported that the TVET skills taught to girls were not aligned with the market in girls' communities. Girls who completed training in certain skill areas found that the market in their local communities was too small to support their business, resulting in a lack of demand for products, confirming key findings from [IE Study - Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling](#). The endline evaluation report showed that some girls had to travel outside of their communities to sell goods. This resulted in girls from the project travelling to illegal mining communities to do business, which put them at risk of GBV. Project reports from [BRAC \(Afghanistan\)](#) show that despite over 90% of girls suggesting they were able to use the skills they learned in their TVET course, only 7% found paid employment as a result. BRAC suggested that girls from big cities were unable to find relevant employment due to limited opportunities in their context. The lack of contextual relevance was also reported in the IE primary research in KIIs with [PEAS \(Uganda\)](#) project staff members. They reported that income-generating activity in schools were similarly not contextualised within the community:

"We fell short on the income generating activities in schools. They were not contextualised within the community. For example, you take a tomato growing projects in a dry, geographic area which doesn't see regular rainfall so there was a bit of a struggle with the technology around green houses. So, this was a lesson. A project has to come from within. The idea has to be born within. You don't impose it. Stemming from the context rather than beside it." (KII respondent)

LNGB Window

Across the LNGB Window there were limited references in evaluation reports and in the case study primary research to both unexpected/ unintended positive and negative results. Broadly speaking, projects successfully produced non-education-related outcomes (see [Section 4](#) Intermediate Outcomes). For example, several projects reported improved community cohesion or changing attitudes and norms regarding girls and women participating in education. For this report, achievements with these indirect beneficiaries are not treated as unexpected/ unintended and discussed under [Section 4](#) Intermediate Outcomes.

Positive unexpected or unintended results

Increased demand for programming amongst non-beneficiaries

Several projects reported that the demand to participate exceeded their initial plans and therefore the projects took on a greater number of beneficiaries. This contributed to projects exceeding their enrolment targets and therefore extending benefits to a larger-than-intended scale of beneficiaries. However, this also had a negative effect, as projects had limited capacity and therefore had to contend with some tensions among those in the community that could not be supported.

Additionally, projects reportedly incorporated non-beneficiaries (i.e., neither direct, nor indirect) in an informal beneficiary pool due to demand to participate. For example, [PLAN \(Zimbabwe\)](#) found that women outside of the target population, typically aged in their 30s, expressed a desire to participate in the project. These non-beneficiaries were allowed to participate (in affect becoming direct beneficiaries who would not be captured by formal reporting mechanisms). These women reportedly brought their own materials, such as books and pens, to engage in learning activities, and subsequently demonstrated learning gains.⁷

Programming extending outside of GEC II scope

Several projects reported that their projects had elements that continued outside of GEC II scope – either expanding to new geographies or continuing (in part) after the formal cessation of GEC II funding – with non-GEC funding sources. For example, [VSO \(Nepal\)](#) reported that the inclusive education model it employed was adopted by the local

⁷ [Annex K – Plan International \(Zimbabwe\) Case Study Report](#), pp 22.

government to create an accessible school infrastructure in a neighbouring district.⁸ The VSO project's mentoring component was also spun-off, in part, by the local government, and funded by the government to continue after the project ended. [LINK \(Malawi\)](#) achieved a similar unexpected outcome, where its beneficiaries formed youth clubs outside of the project and successfully lobbied for government support to its activities.⁹ [PLAN \(Zimbabwe\)](#) project beneficiaries formed child protection committees within apostolic churches, which was beyond the scope of the project.¹⁰

Negative unexpected results

Adaptation to include boys following community feedback

The LNGB Window by definition had an exclusive targeting strategy within communities, aiming to work with the most marginalised members of a geographic or demographic community. This reportedly created tensions in some communities as community members were excluded, despite the community members' perception that these excluded individuals should receive project support. This was particularly true for boys, with girls being perceived in some instances to be unfairly selected (i.e., the boys were perceived as more marginalised). As one interviewed Implementing Partner stated:

“One of the things we faced very strongly at the beginning was WHY only girls and not boys? We eventually went back to donor as this was a big question. It was so difficult. We used enrolment campaigns, education campaigns to talk about boy's opportunities so you don't create clear divide. We would tell them that we are offering for girls but there are providers offering for boys.” (KII, Implementing Partner)

It was partly for this reason that several projects adopted boys in their beneficiary groups, receiving the same type of programming support as girl primary beneficiaries (i.e., literacy and numeracy support). For example, [VSO \(Nepal\)](#) and [ACTED \(Pakistan\)](#) both included boys following feedback from the community and other stakeholders.

⁸ KII, implementing partner.

⁹ KII, implementing partner.

¹⁰ KII, implementing partner.