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

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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 ();
- Personnel recruitment and management.
- Performance Management and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

Simon Griffiths, Programme Director

Signature:

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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

Executive Summary

Introduction and background

The Girls' Education Challenge Phase II (GEC II) Programme, funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), aimed to improve educational access and outcomes for marginalised girls across 41 projects in 17 countries. The GEC II supported interventions through two primary funding windows: (1) the GEC-Transitions (GEC-T) Window; and (2) Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) Window.

This evaluation assesses the effectiveness of the GEC II portfolio implemented from the start of Phase II in 2017 up to March 2024. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the overall effectiveness of the GEC II portfolio to:

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

In 2020, the FCDO commissioned the 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 is the eighth out of nine studies delivered by the IE team.

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the evaluation approach and methodology, the GEC II outcomes that were delivered, and an assessment of what worked well and less well, why and with what effects on marginalised girls and their education. The findings, conclusions and recommendations outlined in this evaluation offer valuable insights for future education programming and policy development to ensure sustained progress in girls' education globally.

Evaluation approach and methodology

This evaluation design was framed by key evaluation questions (KEQs). These questions framed the scope and focus of the evaluation, data collection, analysis, findings and conclusions. The KEQs provided the structure for the research and analysis to ensure that the evidence (and data sources), analysis, and methods directly and efficiently responded to the evidence and learning priorities of the key stakeholder audiences, especially the FCDO. The evaluation primarily used an evidence synthesis approach involving reviewing the evidence reported in projects' external 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 was supplemented with primary research to provide additional evidence in response to the evaluation questions. This consisted of key informant interviews with IPs and strategic stakeholders at the portfolio level; and focus group discussions with beneficiaries and parents/ caregivers and key informant interviews with community leaders and other stakeholders for the six project case studies.

What outcomes did the GEC-T and LNGB Windows deliver?

Learning Outcomes

The GEC learning outcome results reported by the Fund Manager (FM) show that 806,412 girls from 24 out of 31 GEC-T projects (including two projects that were implemented in more than one country), and 154,443 girls supported by all 14 LNGB projects were able to demonstrate improvements in learning outcomes over the lifetime of GEC II (2017 – 2024). This amounted to 960,855 girls supported across the entire GEC II portfolio. This represents 101% of the total number of girls targeted across the GEC-T Window for 7 of the 24 projects with available records on cumulative targets from 2022; and 92% of the total number of girls targeted across the LNGB Window across all 14 projects. The FM calculated these numbers by taking, for each project, the greater of the midline or endline evaluation results. While this approach avoids double counting, it creates challenges for independent evaluation, as the methods to assess the number of girls with improved learning varied across the three FM Reporting Periods: (1) Pre-Covid (2017-2020); (2) During Covid-19 (2021); and (3) Post-Covid-19 (2022-2024). The approach taken by the FM treats equally project benefits measured through the use of comparison groups (during Reporting Period 1); with self-reported improvements (during Reporting Period 2); and quantitative assessments without standard tests or comparison groups (during Reporting Period 3).

Transition Outcomes

The GEC transition outcome results reported by the FM show that 175,115 girls from GEC-T projects and 127,620 girls from LNGB projects successfully transitioned. This amounts to a total of 302,735 girls across the GEC II portfolio over its lifetime (2017 – 2024). This figure includes 230,919 girls progressing through school, 36,861 transitioning to vocational skills training, and 55,769 moving into work or self-employment[1].

Aggregated quantitative measurement and reporting of transition was only introduced in 2022. Before 2022, transition was reported through qualitative evidence in 2021. During the Reporting Period 1 (2017-2020), transition was only reported at the project-level without any portfolio-level aggregation, due to "differences in what transition means and variations in context"[2].

Enrolment Outcomes

The GEC II enrolment outcome was introduced after Covid-19 to track the number of girls enrolled in project activities. Projects faced substantial disruptions during the pandemic and associated school closures, and they adapted quickly to meet the changing needs of girls. At the time, it was unclear when schools might reopen and what effect Covid-19 would have on girls' returning to schools and the projects' activities. The primary purpose of the GEC II enrolment outcome was to measure the cumulative number of girls enrolling in GEC-T project schools or centres and in LNGB project activities. The enrolment outcome did not measure active participation, completion or attrition from project activities. It measured those girls who started to engage in project activities. Individual project targets were adapted throughout implementation to respond to changing factors, especially contextual factors, that projects faced. Over four years (2021-2024), both the GEC-T and LNGB Windows exceeded their annual targets and exceeded the cumulative GEC II target by 7% reaching 1,696,719 marginalised girls.

What Immediate Outcomes did the GEC and LNGB portfolios deliver?

Intermediate Outcomes (IOs) were developed to: chart projects' progress towards achieving their outcomes; provide a more granular understanding about how GEC II outcomes were being delivered; and to demonstrate progress through projects' external evaluations (UKAID, 2024). The measurement and reporting of IOs evolved throughout GEC II. By 2022, seven IOs were consistently applied across the GEC-T and LNGB Windows: IO1: *Changing Community Attitudes and Norms*; IO2: *Reducing Financial Barriers*; IO3: *Improving Teaching*; IO4: *Effective Management*; IO5: *Safer Learning Environments*; IO6: *Empowering Girls*; and IO7: *Continued Attendance*.

Projects that were still active in 2022 overall scored highly on *Improved Teaching*, followed by *Changing Community Attitudes and Norms* and *Effective Management*. Projects made important gains in training teachers to use gender-responsive teaching methods, and in some cases, inclusive education practices. As mentioned in the FM Project Completion Report (PCR), projects that accompanied training with ongoing coaching and mentoring were more successful in making progress in *Improving Teaching*, although their ability to implement new teaching methods in the classroom and the impact on different types of learners varied across projects and contexts. According to *IE Study - Teachers and Teaching,* teaching-related interventions led to improvements in pedagogy, gender responsiveness in the classroom, and the safeguarding of learners. Progress was initially more limited in *Changing Community Attitudes* for LNGB projects, although changes in community attitudes take time and as such may require more time to take effect. However, the *IE Study - Sustaining Changes in Community Attitudes and Norms to Improve Girls' Education Outcomes,* found that sustained shifts in community attitudes and norms are key to contributing to the longer-term viability of education outcomes. GEC-T and LNGB projects also reported improvements in self-esteem, contributing to the *Empowering Girls* IO. The *IE Study – Value for Money of Educating the Most Marginalised Girls,* which focused on LNGB projects, found that improved self-confidence, self-efficacy, social networks and wellbeing were important effects of GEC II interventions and contributed to improvements in girls' learning. Projects fared relatively worse against the IOs relating to *Reducing Financial Barriers, Safer Learning Environments*, and *Continued Attendance*, which can be explained by challenging and worsening economic environments following Covid-19, seasonal employment, and entrenched gender norms.

[1] From PwC (2024) GEC II PCR Draft Report 2024. As for learning it is however unclear how overall total numbers were derived, as they do not correspond to the sum across different years or reporting periods.
[2] FCDO Annual Review of GEC II (2020).

What worked well/ less well and why?

GEC-T key findings

- **GEC-T projects were particularly effective at improving girls' self-esteem and confidence as a means to improving learning.** Small-group learning environments – e.g., through group work, mentoring, and child clubs – supported improvements in both self-esteem and learning.
- **Teaching training was effective when it focused on child-centred, engaging and interactive teaching methods.** Awareness raising among caregivers and communities, especially when working with boys and men, helped combat harmful gender norms and increased support for girls' education. Improvements to the learning environment through investments in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and learning materials also helped create a more positive learning environment.
- **GEC-T projects were constrained by contextual factors,** especially the long-term disruption caused by Covid-19, which had negative effects on girls' motivation, families' economic hardship and harmful social norms. Project schools also faced other important contextual barriers, including long distances to schools, large class sizes and poor infrastructure. These affected project results even where positive change was observed. Teachers often struggled to implement what they learned in training because of challenging school infrastructure, large class sizes and limited prior training. While community awareness was important, economic barriers continued to pose challenges to girls' education.
- **Partnerships with government and alignment with government policy enhanced the effectiveness of projects' activities and their sustainability.** GEC-T projects developed and sustained relationships with national governments and there was evidence of government investment in scaling up or continuing project activities after they closed.
- **An important limitation for some GEC-T projects was the exclusion of boys, whether real or perceived.** This led to resentment and community pushback in some contexts. The perception that girls were being encouraged at the expense of boys combined with the reinforcement of negative stereotypes about masculinity contributed to this pushback. In some cases, this led to a decrease in school motivation and participation among boys. Although many of the GEC-T projects attempted to include boys in their activity, this was often the result of adaptation rather than as an integral part of the project design.

LNGB key findings

- **Community engagement and cultural sensitisation were critical to success, particularly in culturally conservative contexts.** Developing strong relationships with community groups (e.g., women's groups) and community leaders (e.g., religious leaders) was essential to gaining support for projects. Culturally and contextually sensitive approaches to community-engagement were critical. For example, framing formal education as complementary to Quranic studies in Afghanistan. While community engagement helped facilitate activities targeting harmful norms, projects still faced persistent disapproval from certain segments within their communities.
- **Vocational training initiatives demonstrated mixed results.** While some projects reported success, other projects faced challenges with social norms inhibiting women's participation in public-facing professions; insufficient follow-up support; a lack of market alignment (i.e., not meeting market demand); and a lack of formal certification.
- **Infrastructure and resource limitations impacted project effectiveness.** Several projects faced challenges with inadequate WASH facilities, and a lack of safe drinking water and poor building infrastructure. For example, LINK (Malawi) reported that poorly maintained infrastructure led to class cancellations and disrupted learning schedules, particularly during the rainy season when classrooms would flood.
- **Strong partnerships with local government and community organisations proved essential for sustainability, while weak partnerships inhibited success**. Projects that were able to successfully engage stakeholders, including local organisations and local government, were able to lock in successes. Conversely, when projects did not form strong relationships with stakeholders or followed diverging agendas, they were unable to guarantee the longer-term viability of the changes they had delivered.
- **The LNGB Window's focus on girls caused tensions in some project communities who did not understand why boys could not also be supported.** LNGB projects targeted the most marginalised girls, which for some projects resulted in pushback within several projects' communities because they perceived that deserving boys were being excluded. Specifically, communities believed that some selected girl beneficiaries

were not more marginalised than some boys within the community. As a result of community consultations on these issues, several projects engaged boys as part of their primary beneficiary population.

To what extent and how did the LNGB portfolio reach and benefit the most marginalised?

The LNGB Window was created "*to fund targeted 'catch up' programmes providing literacy, numeracy, and skills for life and work for highly marginalised girls, particularly adolescent girls that have already dropped out or never attended school*" (FCDO, 2015, p.2). LNGB projects developed contextualised definitions of marginalisation and targeted highly marginalised sub-groups which they successfully reached, supported and benefited. LNGB projects largely recognised that beneficiaries experienced complex marginalisation factors. In response, LNGB projects used a range of intervention strategies – e.g., financial incentives, community engagement, inclusive support – to identify, reach and support their target beneficiaries.

Reach of the LNGB Portfolio

Projects in the LNGB Window reached over 250,000 primary beneficiaries, defined as girls enrolled in LNGB programming (UKAID, 2024). This fell short of the GEC Business Case II Headline Result (3) of 550,000. There is little information about why the LNGB Window did not achieve its headline result. However, in the key informant interviews (KIIs) for the *IE Study- Lessons Learned Study*, the FCDO explained that the Headline Result target for the LNGB had to be scaled back because during implementation, several LNGB projects realised that they could not reach the number of marginalised girls that they had planned to support partly because of the unanticipated cost and expertise needed to do so.

Benefits Realised by the Most Marginalised

LNGB beneficiaries widely realised both education and non-education benefits. The *IE Study - Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling*, found that beneficiaries realised considerable benefits from participating in LNGB projects. As all LNGB beneficiaries experienced at least one form of marginalisation, this suggests that LNGB projects extended benefits to marginalised girls in their target communities. LNGB projects did not use comparison groups in its evaluations, and so there is no definitive evidence to establish attribution. However, the *IE Study – Value for Money of Educating the Most Marginalised Girls* (focusing on the LNGB Window) found that it was highly plausible to assume that a substantive proportion of beneficiaries would not have enrolled in formal education and as such would not have achieved the substantial learning gains and benefits that were realised without the support of LNGB projects.

Conclusions

Outcomes and Intermediate Outcomes

GEC II represented a substantial effort to assess learning and transition outcomes for marginalised and vulnerable girls, including out-of-school learners, girls with disabilities, married girls, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. While GEC II contributed to improvements in literacy, numeracy, and school transitions, the extent of the progress varied across the portfolio. GEC II also delivered broader benefits for marginalised girls, such as an increased awareness of health and wellbeing, a greater self-confidence, a stronger sense of agency and ability to make decisions, and reductions in gender-based violence – all of which represent important achievements. These outcomes highlight the value of continuing to invest in girls' education to ensure lasting, positive impacts on their lives and their communities.

Learning gains were achieved but were uneven across projects, and evaluation limitations hindered insights on intervention effectiveness

The period prior to Covid-19 disruptions (2017-2020) offers the most reliable insights in terms of learning achievements across the GEC-T Window, as standardised assessments and difference-in-difference methodologies with a comparison group, showed statistically significant improvements primarily driven by a few large projects. The Covid-19 pandemic severely disrupted GEC-T project implementation and standard evaluation methods. During this reporting period (i.e., 2021), mixed-methods evidence suggested positive trends, yet these were contradicted by findings from IE studies indicating substantial learning losses, largely attributed to Covid-19-related school closures and disruptions in educational support. Differences in project evaluation methodologies further complicate efforts to establish a clear pattern of impact. In the final Reporting Period 3 (2022-2024), many projects reported achieving their

targets. However, variations in how learning was measured, combined with external factors, make it difficult to provide robust conclusions about the overall impact of GEC-T projects on learning.

Previous IE studies relating to LNGB projects provide strong evidence that suggests the provision of support for literacy and numeracy were highly effective and valued by adolescent girls; with many beneficiaries considering this type of support the most important aspect of their participation in projects' activities. Learning gains in LNGB projects were substantial, with case studies estimating progress equivalent to three to five additional years of schooling. These findings are particularly compelling given that the targeted girls were out of school and predominantly from households whose parents had little to no formal education, suggesting that these learning gains would not have been achieved in the absence of the projects' interventions.

Transition outcomes were mixed, short-term in scope, and did not account for high attrition rates

While some projects met or exceeded their targets, overall progress was mixed. During Reporting Period 1 (2017-2020), prior to the Covid-19 disruptions, GEC-T projects were not required to set transition targets. Despite this, most projects targeted an estimated increase of 5–8% over the comparison group. Despite the lack of clarity around what constituted success, evidence from this period indicated that about a quarter of projects were successful in supporting girls' transitions through school. However, over a quarter of projects struggled to effectively measure and track transitions. Attrition rates exceeded 40% at the portfolio level and were often not accounted for in project reporting, which meant that the transition status of a significant proportion of girls remained unknown.

By 2021, qualitative measures of transition indicated positive trends in all projects. IE case study primary research revealed that many girls still faced substantial barriers to successfully transitioning to the next phase of their education or employment. LNGB projects, which were primarily active after the Covid-19 disruptions, also experienced high attrition rates, with data from the IE studies showing similar attrition to GEC-T projects at around 40%. LNGB projects struggled to measure transition, opting instead to focus on other related indicators. The greatest impact was observed among younger girls, many of whom successfully transitioned into formal schooling. For older girls, skills training was concentrated in a limited number of vocations due to the wider economic environment. Achieving successful transitions into the workforce or entrepreneurship proved challenging. Continued support from LNGB projects after girls graduated from projects was identified as integral to girls' success in their transitions.

GEC II exceeded enrolment targets, successfully engaging girls after school closures due to Covid-19

Following Covid-19, an enrolment outcome was introduced to track girls' engagement in project schools, learning centres and other activities. This measure did not account for participation, completion, or attrition, but focused on overall enrolment figures counted cumulatively over time. Over four years (2021–2024), both GEC-T and LNGB Windows exceeded annual targets, surpassing the cumulative GEC II target by 7%, reaching 1,696,719 marginalised girls. However, significant variations in enrolment figures were observed across projects, reflecting differences in project budgets, operational contexts, and the types of beneficiaries engaged.

Consistent improvements in self-esteem and community attitudes intermediate outcomes

GEC-T projects reported sustained improvements in girls' self-esteem, agency, and parental/ community attitudes towards girls' education. However, projects encountered more challenges in meeting targets related to financial barriers, safety, and attendance. Translating these intermediate changes into improvements in learning and transition proved difficult due to external barriers such as poor school infrastructure, unsupportive government policies, and persistent poverty. Additionally, some projects faced limitations in technical capacity, particularly in monitoring and providing continuous teacher support and mentoring.

What worked well and why

The analysis and findings below relating to what worked well and less well draws on a synthesis of evidence provided in projects' external evaluation reports, previous IE studies, programme management information, learning products produced by the FM, secondary data, and IE primary qualitative research conducted at the portfolio level and for the six project case studies.

GEC-T Window

Across the GEC-T Window, projects used small-group teaching and girl-only spaces to effectively support girls' learning and life skills, fostering safe environments for discussion and peer mentoring, although additional efforts were needed to support marginalised girls facing significant barriers to attending school regularly. GEC-T projects were successful in empowering girls through a range of interventions, including Girls' Clubs, Girls' Empowerment Forums, life skills training, and peer mentoring. Linked to this, projects delivering gender-responsive learning and life skills interventions were found to support improvements in girls' self-esteem leading to a stronger sense of agency and

ability to make decisions. Involving boys and men in targeted activities helped change gender norms and garnered community support by promoting positive masculinities and raising awareness of the challenges faced by girls. The provision of infrastructure and learning materials promoted girls' attendance across the GEC-T Window, proving to be an important motivational factor. The success of infrastructure and resource provision interventions often resulted from a combination of providing resources and training teachers to effectively use them.

LNGB Window

Across the LNGB Window, strong community engagement was found to be essential to the success and sustainability of LNGB projects, fostering trust and participation that improved safety, learning environments, and increased enrolment and transitions to the next phase of girls' education. In tandem with community engagement, activities that raised girls' awareness of their rights, provided vocational training and supported learning improvements positively contributed to improvements in their self-esteem and empowerment, and consequently their capacity to advocate for education and challenge gender norms. LNGB projects delivered high-quality educator training and ongoing support led to improved teaching methodologies, enhanced classroom engagement and comprehension, which ultimately improved learning outcomes. Multiple projects demonstrated that comprehensive vocational training aligned with the local contexts created pathways to economic independence. This equipped girls with marketable skills, promoting economic independence and self-sufficiency, especially when combined with financial literacy and partnerships with local businesses.

What worked less well and why

GEC-T Window

Within the GEC-T Window, projects successfully raised awareness about the importance of girls' education and gender norm change through community engagement. Some projects were constrained by economic barriers, exacerbated by Covid-19, which hindered lasting improvements and contributed to issues such as early marriage. Despite progress in changing gender norms, project initiatives were constrained by deeply entrenched gender norms. Teacher training proved challenging for some projects. In particular, teachers struggled to implement new methodologies due to insufficient training and a lack of ongoing support, mentorship and incentives, which limited their ability to adopt and sustain improved teaching practices.

LNGB Window

Across the LNGB Window, there were examples of project activity that worked less well and undermined progress. These included the effectiveness of educator training, which was occasionally diminished by inconsistent follow-up support and mentoring, at times leading to a return to pre-training practices and decreased morale among some educators. Another challenge was retaining educators, particularly among volunteers and community staff, as many left for better-paid opportunities or due to implementation issues, undermining trust in the projects and the continuity of its activities. Transition pathways for girls were often hindered by inadequate training resources and the lack of formal certification, limiting girls' ability to secure employment and the long-term impact of skills training.

Contextual factors affecting projects across the GEC II portfolio

Across the GEC II portfolio, external contextual factors had a profound effect on project delivery and effectiveness. Among the most prominent of these was the Covid-19 pandemic, which severely disrupted education access for marginalised girls, leading to increased drop-out rates due to school closures, economic hardship, and an increase in domestic responsibilities; while remote learning efforts were hampered by poor infrastructure and low digital literacy. Widespread macro-economic instability and widespread poverty was a significant project constraint forcing many families to withdraw girls from education to meet immediate survival needs, with additional costs for learning materials and transportation further undermining retention and learning outcomes. Conflict, security, and safety also had a negative effect on attendance and educational continuity, forcing some projects to adapt to informal learning models. Natural disasters such as flooding and droughts were similarly disruptive, repeatedly undermining the consistency of learning gains and straining resources. Finally, the learning environment, infrastructural issues and under-investment continued to pose challenges that some projects found difficult to overcome, despite investment in gender-responsive infrastructure and improved classroom quality.

Implementation factors affecting projects' effectiveness

GEC-T Window

Across the GEC-T Window, several implementation factors impacted projects; both positively and negatively. Partnering with national and local governments was shown to drive more sustainable and longer-term changes and

helped overcome challenges linked to implementation. Projects that aligned with national and local government policies and established key partnerships proved more effective and sustainable, for example, by facilitating the adoption of specific learning strategies. Regular project monitoring was a key implementation factor that helped projects adapt their interventions and continue to deliver results despite facing challenges. However, the level of reporting requirements expected of Implementing Partners (IPs) posed challenges, particularly given staff capacity constraints and FCDO budget reductions in 2021.

LNGB Window

There were several key implementation factors that determined operational success across the LNGB Window, including strong partnerships, which were crucial to enhancing resource mobilisation and using local knowledge; although weak or misaligned partnerships sometimes led to inefficiencies. High turnover and limited staff capacity, particularly among volunteer educators constrained project delivery. This created significant challenges with structured mentorship initiatives, which were not able to fully addressing retention issues. The short duration of many LNGB interventions limited the ability of projects to achieve sustainable shifts in gender norms and community perceptions, highlighting the need for longer engagement to embed these changes.

Unexpected and unintended results

Within the **GEC-T Window**, the most critical unexpected result related to boys in project communities. Some GEC-T projects did not anticipate the pushback from communities due to the limited engagement of boys, leading to some resentment among boys and their families. A thorough gender analysis and effective communication prior to project implementation could have mitigated these challenges. Several **LNGB projects** encountered higher-than-expected demand from community members outside their target groups, highlighting the perceived value of interventions, but also straining resources and underscoring the need for clearer inclusion strategies and scalable models to meet growing demand for support.

To what extent and how did LNGB projects reach and benefit the most marginalised

LNGB projects successfully targeted highly marginalised beneficiaries by developing contextualised definitions of marginalisation and tailoring support to specific sub-populations, resulting in a beneficiary population that was significantly more marginalised than that supported by the GEC-T Window. LNGB projects worked with highly marginalised girls, that are often ‘hidden’ within their respective communities. Within this population, projects targeted specific sub-groups (e.g., girls with disabilities or domestic labourers) that were also often invisible. The LNGB Window was successful in reaching these populations because projects employed concentrated, meaningful community engagement strategies to build trust with communities and lessen communities’ perceptions of projects as the ‘other’ or ‘outsider’. Some projects had to adapt their engagement strategies (e.g., by involving community members directly in project delivery) to achieve the access needed to provide support to marginalised girls.

Despite the focus on extending benefits to the most marginalised, some LNGB projects did not consistently and comprehensively track relevant marginalisation markers. This was due to a lack of available, reliable and quality data and challenges in collecting new data for groups that are not visible in communities, or because of problems arising with quantitative data collection processes. LNGB projects with effective monitoring systems were able to develop a more granular understanding of the barriers girls faced; and use this to deliver tailored interventions and capture the wider benefits that girls realised. The LNGB Window achieved approximately 50% of its target of reaching 550,000 highly marginalised adolescent girls. This shortcoming was driven by several factors, including some projects under-estimating the level of resources and type of expertise required to reach and support highly marginalised groups.

GEC-T and LNGB commonalities and differences

These conclusions provide a synthesis of what worked well and less well across both the GEC II portfolio structured by the commonalties and differences found across the GEC-T and LNGB Windows.

Key commonalities

There were several commonalities between the GEC-T and LNGB Windows, in terms of what worked well and less well. Meaningful community engagement was vital for GEC-T and LNGB projects to changing attitudes towards girls' education, as involving local leaders and groups helped normalise girls’ education and develop local ownership of project initiatives. Despite some cultural barriers, context-sensitive strategies effectively influenced community attitudes, demonstrating the importance of buy-in for long-term impact. Adaptive teaching strategies, such as child-centred pedagogy and small-group learning worked well across both windows. These improved cognitive and non-cognitive skills for girls, particularly those experiencing substantial learning gaps, demonstrating the effectiveness of

tailored instructional methods across diverse contexts. Conversely, projects across both windows faced significant difficulties in assessing learning gains and tracking transitions due to inconsistent methodologies, the high mobility among girls, and socio-economic pressures, particularly for more marginalised girls. Additionally, across both windows, economic conditions, social norms, and a lack of follow-up support hindered successful transitions into employment or vocational education. This highlighted the need for integrated economic empowerment strategies, including financial support and mentorship, to sustain transitions to entrepreneurial activities and employment, and promote the long-term independence for girls.

Key differences

The GEC-T and LNGB Windows worked in inherently different ways to deliver their outcomes. GEC-T projects engaged extensively with government bodies to align with institutional policies and practices, which sometimes limited grassroots adaptability. Whereas LNGB projects had a greater focus on engaging local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), promoting grassroots mobilisation, with less consideration of aligning with government education systems. LNGB projects relied heavily on community educators and volunteer facilitators to deliver learning, which allowed for strong local engagement and cost-effective delivery. In some cases, such as peer-to-peer educator models, this approach enhanced relatability and trust between educators and students. However, challenges such as high turnover, inconsistent training, and lack of formal recognition affected teaching quality and continuity. In contrast, GEC-T projects involved training and supporting salaried teachers working in government schools, ensured a more structured and consistent approach to improving teaching quality.

LNGB projects placed a stronger emphasis on vocational and alternative learning pathways, recognising that many of their target girls would not re-enter formal schooling. While vocational training and life skills activities helped some girls build financial independence, challenges such as limited market relevance of skills, a lack of start-up capital, and weak links to employment hindered their effectiveness. In contrast, GEC-T projects, mainly operating within formal education settings, focused more on academic progression and transition to secondary school. However, they often struggled to support girls who dropped out or failed to meet transition criteria, with limited mechanisms to provide alternative pathways. This contrast highlights that while LNGB projects' flexible transition models helped engage highly marginalised girls, stronger linkages to economic and employment opportunities were needed to ensure long-term sustainability; while GEC-T projects required greater flexibility to support girls at risk of dropping out of formal education.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the study's findings and conclusions and are principally directed to the FCDO to apply to current and future programming, noting that there is no successor programme to the GEC II.

Delivering learning and transition outcomes

1) **The FCDO should continue to target highly marginalised girls despite the high costs of reaching and supporting them.** Targeting highly marginalised girls has shown to deliver large learning gains (especially girls who are out of school and/or have never been to school), multiple benefits, and high returns on investment despite high beneficiary unit costs.

2) **To ensure successful transitions, employment/ income generating training should be carefully tailored to the local market.** Conducting analysis of the economic environment at the start of a programme helps avoid graduates trying to enter vocations and sectors offering limited employment, work or income-generating opportunities.

Methodology

3) **Transition should be clearly defined so that projects can collect data to effectively track girls after course completion.** Tracking girls after graduating from project activities enabled projects to assess the overall success of interventions focused on supporting transition into employment and income-generating activities; and helped inform ongoing adaptation to intervention designs.

4) **Intermediate outcome data should be clearly linked to outcome data to enable a robust assessment of what works.** Linking intermediate outcome data – for example, measuring improvements in teaching, girls' empowerment, and attendance – to learning and transition outcome data through standardised metrics would enable a more robust assessment of the effects and effectiveness of different types of interventions and reported intermediate outcomes.

What works

5) **Community engagement should continue to be an integral part of girls' education interventions.** Projects successfully achieved attitudinal and gender norm changes through multi-faceted approaches, engaging different types of stakeholders within communities (such as with religious leaders, parents, and the wider community), which led to greater integration and ownership of project activities and their outcomes.

6) **Programmes should continue to support improvements in girls' self-esteem as a means of enhancing agency and their ability to engage in the classroom and make decisions outside school.** Interventions such as peer mentoring and Girls' Clubs were found to improve self-esteem and created the necessary preconditions for effective learning.

7) **Training of trainers' models for cascading teacher professional development should be accompanied by rigorous monitoring to inform adaptation and improvements as soon as they are needed.** Rigorous monitoring helps ensure that teachers have the necessary support (such as through mentoring and coaching), feedback and resources to apply new teaching methods into practice.

8) **Programmes should consider investing in complementary activities that provide safe, well-equipped, and inclusive learning environments capable of supporting improvements in learning outcomes.** Providing and maintaining gender-responsive WASH facilities, safe drinking water, and accessible infrastructure, while also ensuring the consistent provision of essential learning materials, such as textbooks and assistive devices, were found to be critical to improving attendance, engagement, retention and learning among marginalised girls in both GEC-T and LNGB Windows.

9) **Programmes should seek to incorporate small group learning/ remedial study initiatives, where resources and conditions allow, as a means of engaging and supporting marginalised girls in learning.** Small group learning through interventions such as Girls' Clubs, homework clubs, and remedial classes were found to be highly effective in improving learning and attendance, particularly among highly marginalised girls.

10) **Programmes should remain flexible and adaptable to successfully respond to a wide range of contextual factors, especially in fragile and conflict-affected environments.** Programmes with the organisational capacity and management processes (including robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems) were better able to adapt their designs and budgets to minimise the negative impact of contextual factors.

11) **Girls' education programmes should conduct comprehensive gender analyses during the design phase, where resources allow, to assess the potential impact on boys and the wider community.** Gender analysis would ensure community buy-in and minimise potential pushback and tensions, and inform projects' approaches to raising awareness among men and boys on the importance of educating girls; and involving them as agents of change while being cognisant of the gendered challenges that boys face.

12) **The FCDO and programmes should systematically assess the cost of reaching and supporting highly marginalised sub-groups with complex intersecting needs when determining reach and beneficiary targets.** This should include collecting data on beneficiaries' marginalisation markers to enable ongoing assessments of the costs and benefits realised by different sub-groups over the life of the programme.

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to this report

This is the Evaluation Report for the Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Girls' Education Challenge Phase II (GEC II) Portfolio, and the projects delivered through the GEC-Transitions (GEC-T) and Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) Windows. This evaluation is one of nine studies produced by the GEC Independent Evaluation – further information about all the studies is provided in *Annex A*.

Section 1 summarises the context and background to the evaluation and provides an overview of the GEC II Programme and the Independent Evaluation.

Section 2 summarises the evaluation approach and methodology, including: the evaluation criteria and key evaluation questions; evaluation design; sampling design and case study selection; research methodology; analysis, approach; research ethics and safeguarding; governance and management; and key evaluation limitations.

Section 3 details the 'outcome' level results achieved by both the GEC-T and LNGB Windows. This provides an overview of changes in the GEC II Logframe indicators; a summary of methodological limitations for the learning and transition results; and an overview of GEC-T and LNGB outcome results at the portfolio level.

Section 4 sets out what 'Intermediate Outcome' level results were achieved by the GEC-T and LNGB Windows, and analysis of performance trends across the life of GEC II.

Section 5 provides a synthesis of what worked well and less well and why across the GEC-T and LNGB Windows. It assesses how and to what extent different types of factors i.e., the type of intervention, contextual factors, and implementation factors, have affected the performance of GEC-T and LNGB projects in delivering their reported results (including unexpected and unintended effects); and the key drivers and barriers that have helped or hindered performance across different factors.

Section 6 assesses how and to what extent the LNGB Window reached and benefited the most marginalised. This includes a discussion on how the most marginalised were defined and identified across the portfolio; the extent to which and how the most marginalised were reached; the benefits realised; and key lessons learned.

Section 7 presents the evaluation's conclusions, by window and across the GEC II portfolio.

Section 8 presents the evaluation's recommendations followed by the **References** and several **Annexes** that support the Evaluation Report.

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 I 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 Phase II Programme (GEC II). 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" (FCDO, 2020). All projects were designed and delivered by Implementing Partners (IPs) and GEC II was 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-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. Two projects implemented by Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) and Discovery Learning Alliance (DLA) operate across multiple countries. As a result, in some sections of this report, we refer to 31 projects, counting each country-specific implementation separately.
- **The LNGB Window** funded 14 projects, which set out to support up to 500,000 highly marginalised girls in 10 countries (Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Zimbabwe). The LNGB Window focused on supporting highly marginalised adolescent girls between 10-19 years of age into education or training while gaining skills, including numeracy and literacy. It targeted highly marginalised girls including 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 nine to 12 months.

1.2.2 GEC II Theory of Change

The GEC II Theory of Change (ToC) was produced as part of the FCDO's GEC Phase II Business Case (FCDO, 2020) 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, 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 central hypothesis set out in the Evaluation Design Note (EDN) (*Annex B*) assumes that if marginalised girls and their families are supported to overcome barriers to education at different points of the 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 EDN includes a full review of the GEC II ToC.

1.3. Overview of the GEC II Independent Evaluation

In 2020, the FCDO commissioned the Independent Evaluation of the GEC II to generate evidence and learning to understand what worked well or less well, how, why, for whom and in which contexts. This contract is implemented 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 Partners (SAPs)[3] and national/ regional research partners. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the IE required 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 – 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.

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

This evaluation assesses the effectiveness of the GEC II portfolio, which was implemented through the GEC-T and LNGB Windows, covering GEC II project activities implemented from the start of Phase II in 2017 up to March 2024.

[3] 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; Africa Population and Health Research Centre in Kenya; and Centre for Social Research at Chancellor College in Malawi.

2. Approach and methodology

This section provides an overview of the evaluation's approach and methodology. Further detail is provided in the EDN (*Annex B*).

2.1. Purpose of the evaluation

The evaluation's purpose is to assess the overall effectiveness of the GEC II portfolio. The evaluation assesses what the GEC II portfolio achieved as a whole to:

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

The primary stakeholder audiences for the evaluation include the FCDO and GEC IPs to inform future education programming and policy. Secondary stakeholder audiences include other departments and teams within the FCDO, including the Evaluation Department and Research and Evidence Division, international donors, agencies, and stakeholders working and investing in education, including researchers, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Civil Society Organisations and other international education practitioners.

2.2. Evaluation approach

This evaluation design was framed by key evaluation questions (KEQs). These questions framed the scope and focus of the evaluation, data collection, analysis, findings and conclusions. The KEQs provided the structure for the research and analysis to ensure that the evidence (and data sources), analysis, and methods directly and efficiently responded to the evidence and learning priorities of the key stakeholder audiences, especially the FCDO.

The evaluation primarily used an evidence synthesis approach, reviewing the evidence reported in projects' external 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 was supplemented with primary research to provide additional evidence in response to the evaluation questions. This consisted of key informant interviews with IPs and strategic stakeholders at the portfolio level; and focus group discussions with beneficiaries and parents/ caregivers and key informant interviews with community leaders and other stakeholders for the six project case studies.

This evaluation of the effectiveness of the GEC II portfolio focused on all Logframe outcome (except sustainability) and Intermediate Outcome results reported by projects. Results were assessed with consideration to the changing indicator definitions and targets over the life of the programme (see *Section 3*). The IE team assessed the projects' results in terms of changes in literacy and numeracy outcomes, transition to employment or education, enrolment in GEC II activities and the intermediate outcomes delivered for girls, schools, families, and communities.

2.3. Evaluation criteria and Key Evaluation Questions

As set out in the EDN, this is an evaluation of the effectiveness of the GEC-T and LNGB Windows. This evaluation focuses on the extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives and its results including any differential results across groups (OECD, 2021). This evaluation criterion has been used to frame the development of the evaluation questions (below) that define the scope and focus of the evaluation.

The KEQs and sub-questions (SQs) were developed during the ToR development phase. The Effectiveness Evaluation was framed around one high-level KEQ:

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

This KEQ was built around six SQs, each considering different dimensions of the effectiveness of GEC II projects. All sub-questions are relevant to both windows, except SQ 1.4 which applies only to the LNGB Window. They were defined as follows:

- 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 factors[4] for different projects across the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios influence their performance?
- SQ 1.6: What were the implementation factors[5] behind GEC-T and LNGB projects' success or lack of success?

2.4. Evaluation design

The evaluation design consisted of a portfolio-level assessment supported by six in-depth project case studies. Across both components, the team integrated a Gender, Equity and Social Inclusion lens throughout.

Portfolio assessment: the portfolio assessment focused on identifying and assessing the outcome and Intermediate Outcome (IO) results delivered across the GEC-T and LNGB Windows and what worked well, less well, and why. The GEC-T and LNGB Windows were assessed as portfolios rather than as individual projects to enable findings to be generated across the GEC II portfolio. The portfolio assessment involved a desk-based review of documentary evidence supported by interviews with IPs and key strategic stakeholders. To enhance triangulation, reduce duplication and maximise efficiency, the team used diverse documentary evidence from the FCDO, FM, IPs, previous IE studies, and other sources.

Project case studies: the case studies examined in depth how and why some projects successfully delivered their respective results and why, while other projects were less successful. The case studies enabled the team to unpack how and to what extent the types 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. The case studies involved a desk-based review of documentary evidence, secondary data analysis and primary qualitative research with project beneficiaries, stakeholders, and IP staff.

2.5. Sampling design and case study selection

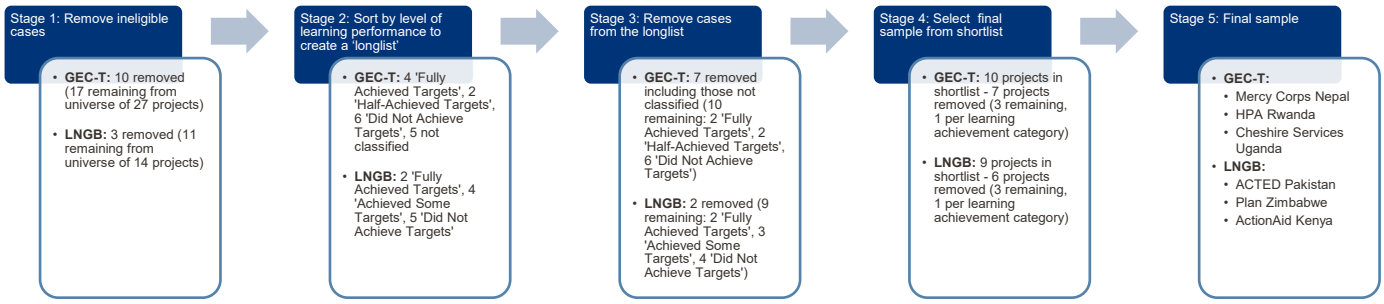
Sampling design

The evaluation was designed to encompass nearly the full scope and scale of the GEC II portfolio. The sample frame for this evaluation included 41 GEC II projects. From this sample frame, the evaluation team selected six projects – three from each of the GEC-T and LNGB Windows – for inclusion as project case studies. Case study selection followed a systematic, multi-phased procedure, outlined in *Figure 1*, below. The purpose of the sampling procedure was to produce a project case study sample that reflected the diversity of the IPs and projects across the two portfolios from the perspective of performance as well as context and geography.

To align with the KEQ, projects' performance against reported learning outcomes was the primary selection criterion, with their status as a previous IE sample project and geography/ context as a secondary selection criteria. In Stage 1, projects were removed that were ineligible because their learning results were either missing or inconclusive, because of premature project closure, or due to severe access constraints in conducting primary research e.g., projects implemented in Afghanistan. Stage 2 involved sorting the projects by the level of achievement against their learning targets to create a longlist. In Stage 3, multi-country projects (i.e., CAMFED and DLA) with mixed country-level learning results and projects which were sampled as case studies in IE Studies 6 and 7 were removed. Finally, in Stage 4, the final sample maintained one case study project in each classification for learning results of 'Fully Achieved Targets', 'Half Achieved/ Achieved Some Targets', and 'Did Not Achieve Targets'. The final sample was also selected to reflect the portfolios' diversity considering project characteristics including type of interventions, region or country context, scale, beneficiary targeting, and the FM's value for money assessment scores.

[4] 'External factors' means 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.
[5] 'Implementation factors' relates to key factors influencing project delivery and performance including: organisational capacity and technical expertise e.g., monitoring and evaluation; project and financial management; risk management; stakeholder communication and management; partnerships and collaboration etc.

Figure 1: Case study selection process



Project case studies

The six project case studies selected were as follows:

GEC-T project case studies

- Mercy Corps (Nepal), Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali
- Health Poverty Action (HPA) (Rwanda), Rwandan Education and Advancement Programme
- Cheshire Services Uganda (CSU) (Uganda), Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education

LNGB project case studies

- ActionAid (Kenya), *Education for Life*
- ACTED (Pakistan), Closing the Gap: Educating marginalised girls in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
- Plan International (Zimbabwe), Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE)

Impact (Ed)/ Discovery/ DLA (Nigeria) in the GEC-T Window was initially selected for the final sample (Stage 5). However, after submission of the EDN, it became clear that this IP was unable to participate in the evaluation, and so Mercy Corps (Nepal) was selected as an alternative from the shortlist (Stage 4) as a project that met the required selection criteria.

2.6. Research methodology

2.6.1. Overview

This evaluation used primary and secondary data, collected through a set of complementary methods – including desk-based document review, secondary analysis, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) – applied to a diverse sample at portfolio and case study project levels. *Table 1* below, presents the methods that were applied, according to their data source, level of analysis and evidence type.

Table 1: 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	KIIs (strategic stakeholders, IPs)	GEC II portfolio (n = 31)							
	KIIs (Community Leaders/ other stakeholders)	GEC II case studies (n = 6)							

Source	Method	Scope	KEQ1	SQ1.1	SQ1.2	SQ1.3	SQ1.4	SQ1.5	SQ1.6
	FGDs (primary/ secondary beneficiaries)	GEC II case studies (n = 6)							

2.6.2. Secondary research

The IE team conducted a systematic desk-based review of secondary data. In total, the team collected, collated and mapped a total of 227 documentary pieces of evidence against the KEQ and SQs (for a full schedule see *Annex C*). These included the following sources: FCDO evidence, FM programme evidence, IP project evidence, IE studies and country-level education evidence. The secondary research served as an evidence base for the analysis in response to the evaluation questions, while also informing the primary research.

2.6.3. Primary research

Portfolio assessment

Complementing the secondary research, primary portfolio-level research deepened the IE team's understanding of the patterns of effects and changes across the GEC-T and LNGB Windows. The IE team conducted a total of 31 KIIs with strategic stakeholders and IP staff; the full list is provided in *Annex D*:

- The IE team conducted a total of eight semi-structured KIIs with strategic stakeholders. These interviews were used to understand how and to what extent portfolio-level results aligned with GEC II objectives, the extent to which contextual and implementation factors influenced projects' performance, and the results they delivered.
- The IE team conducted a total of 23 semi-structured KIIs with representatives from ten out of 27 IPs for the GEC-T Window, and ten out of 14 IPs for the LNGB Window. These were used to obtain insights at the strategic level.

Project case studies

The evaluation used project-level case studies to explain in more depth how and why some projects successfully delivered their results while others were less successful. The IE team developed project profiles for each case study and conducted a Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental (PESTLE) analysis for each case study country to inform the case study analysis. The team took a '360º view', visiting several project sites and interviewing beneficiaries, beneficiaries' parents/ caregivers, community members, project volunteers or tangential individuals (e.g., school management committee members) and project staff. The team conducted a total of 239 KIIs and 172 FGDs across the six case studies; the precise samples for each project case study is provided in the GEC-T and LNGB Fieldwork Reports. Project learning and transition outcome data reported at the project level were also reviewed in full (*Annex E*), including the detailed methodological approach (learning assessment used, grades assessed, sample size and attrition, and data collection timings) as well as achieved results in the treatment and comparison group (if any), targets and FM reported achievements. This analysis provided an in-depth understanding of what results each project delivered and helped inform portfolio-level methodological limitations and case-study examples referenced in *Section 3*.

2.7. Analysis, triangulation, and synthesis

The IE team used an iterative, systematic and participatory approach to analysis, triangulation and synthesis, in response to the complex nature of this evaluation and its substantial volume of underlying data. The full approach can be found in the EDN (*Annex B*).

2.7.1. Data analysis

Data translation, transcription, and cleaning

Primary data was cleaned, including checking for anonymity, missing data that may have occurred throughout processes associated with writing, transcribing, translation (into and from English into local language), storage, transmission, or uploading/ digitalisation of any data. This was conducted by the IE team's in-country data collection partners.

Data coding and analysis

The coding framework was developed both deductively, prior to fieldwork, and inductively, while the data were being reviewed and coded on an ongoing basis. The preliminary coding framework was designed according to a thematic framework in line with the evaluation questions. The data analysis timeline also integrated the inductive themes, which were identified as an iterative and ongoing process throughout data collection. Once the coding reached near-completion, the teams began an analysis phase to review emerging patterns, trends, and differences. The coding framework played a key role in organising the findings from the portfolio-level analysis and project case study analysis for triangulation and synthesis.

The project case study research, analysis and reporting were structured by the evaluation questions to support the synthesis with the secondary data analysis. Analysis, findings and lessons learned for each case study are presented in standalone project case study reports in the following annexes:

GEC-T project case study reports

- *Annex F*: Mercy Corps (Nepal), Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali
- *Annex G*: HPA (Rwanda), Rwandan Education and Advancement Programme
- *Annex H*: Cheshire Services Uganda (Uganda), Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education

LNGB project case study reports

- *Annex I*: ActionAid (Kenya), Education for Life
- *Annex J*: ACTED (Pakistan), Closing the Gap: Educating marginalised girls in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
- *Annex K*: Plan International (Zimbabwe), Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education

Triangulation and synthesis

Each phase of the research involved the triangulation and synthesis of findings that emerged from: desk-based review of programme and project documentation; interviews with IPs and strategic stakeholders; and primary research conducted for the project case studies.

The IE team used a structured approach to the analysis of these diverse sets of data to ensure only relevant data were extracted. This process was framed by the evaluation questions, against which the primary research was designed, and emerging themes and patterns were organised. The IE team held several internal synthesis workshops to validate the findings, harmonise diverging views and identify potential sources of bias. These internal workshops provided the opportunity, specifically, to identify contradictory findings and conduct high level triangulation. The IE team employed a consolidating phase, which involved reassessing the strength of evidence supporting the final set of synthesised findings and conclusions.

2.8. Research ethics and safeguarding

A full description of the evaluation's approach to research ethics and safeguarding can be found in the Evaluation Design Note (*Annex B*).

2.8.1. Overview of IE ethical framework

Evaluation activities fully complied with the GEC IE Ethical Research and Safeguarding Framework (ERSF), in line with 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. The ERSF guided all GEC IE research and data collection, addressing 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.

Through adherence to the ERSF, the IE team ensured that all activities were undertaken in a way that respected the rights and autonomy of marginalised groups. To that end, the IE team made adaptations to research processes where feasible to accommodate the participation of different groups (e.g., by providing sign-language interpretation).

Ethical research permissions and approvals

All research and evaluation activities were implemented after obtaining the necessary research permissions and approvals required from relevant authorities at national, regional, or local levels in the countries where research was conducted. Local data collection partners supported this process where needed with FCDO support when necessary.

2.8.2. Safeguarding and Duty of Care

Clear safeguarding processes were in place to ensure the appropriate handling of any reports of harm to children or adults, whether in relation to the behaviour of IE staff, FM or IP staff, members of the community in which the evaluation was conducted, or others. All IE staff and consultants received training on these safeguarding processes. The evaluation's safeguarding protocol facilitated the flow of safeguarding reports through to a Safeguarding Focal Point (IE Programme Manager) who triaged the information, identified appropriate response paths for safeguarding or welfare concerns and then formally reported them to the FM Safeguarding Team and the FCDO. This protocol is detailed in the EDN (*Annex B*).

2.9. Governance and management

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

The evaluation was led by a Principal Investigator (Simon Griffiths), and included in-house Tetra Tech staff and experts from the IE team's SAPs and field researchers provided by the IE team's local data collection partners who were contracted directly by Tetra Tech. The full organogram is provided in the EDN (*Annex B*).

2.9.2. Engagement with partners

Throughout the evaluation, the IE team engaged with the FCDO, the FM, GEC IPs, data collection partners and SAPs. The IE team liaised with the FCDO through existing channels established with the FCDO Evaluation Lead for the GEC II and liaised with IPs according to our defined Engagement Plan to minimise disruption while providing the opportunity for the IPs to contribute valuable insights. The IE team worked with national data collection partners for primary data collection. These partners were recruited through a competitive process; trained through an intensive two-week training and piloting process before beginning the fieldwork; and, supervised and supported to ensure rigorous adherence to the research methodology. Finally, SAPs supported the IE team through contextualisation and validation during the design and analysis phases.

2.9.3. Quality assurance

Quality assurance (QA) was conducted in-line with the EDN and research methodology and Evaluation Framework (*Annex B*), which detailed a formal protocol for data management, quality control and risk management procedures. The IE team was guided by Tetra Tech's "*Conflict of Interest Ethical Wall Policy and Procedures*" to ensure it worked freely, without interference and without conflicts of interest. The Evaluation Report was quality assured by several senior IE team members as part of the approved QA process. It was submitted to the FCDO Evaluation Studies Working Group including the former FM Learning Lead, project case study IPs, and SAPs for review and validation purposes.

2.10. Changes to the Evaluation Design Note

During the course of the evaluation, the following changes were made to the approach and methodology set out in the Evaluation Design Note:

- **Final sample for the project case studies:** Impact (Ed)/ Discovery/ DLA (Nigeria) in the GEC-T Window was initially selected for the final sample (Stage 5). However, after submission of the EDN, it became clear that this IP was unable to participate in the evaluation, so Mercy Corps (Nepal) was selected as an alternative from the shortlist (Stage 4) as a project that met the required selection criteria.
- **Approach to assessing the GEC Outcomes at the portfolio level:** The assessment of what learning gains have meant for girls in practice proved virtually impossible due to significant modifications in the measurement of learning outcomes post-2020, when assessments shifted towards more qualitative, project-specific and less standardised approaches. Instead, the report provides an overview of changes in how learning outcomes have been measured over the course of the GEC II and methodological limitations and presents the outcome results as

reported in project and FM documents. It draws on the detailed analysis of outcomes and related evaluation methodologies for each case study project to provide illustrative examples of portfolio-level findings as well as a 'deep-dive' into what was achieved by GEC beneficiaries beyond reported results.

2.11. Key evaluation limitations

The limitations that the IE team experienced during the course of conducting the evaluation are set out below.

Generalising what worked well or less well

- Due to the diverse nature of the GEC II portfolio in terms of its target beneficiary groups, context, types of IPs, as well as variable measurement methodology and reporting quality, among other factors, it was difficult to generalise about 'what worked well or less well, for whom and under what conditions' using secondary data analysis of project and portfolio documents.

  Mitigation: The IE team mitigated this limitation by focusing the portfolio analysis on describing the *breadth* of interventions that were reported to have worked well or less well and analysing the diverse factors that influenced performance across the GEC-T and LNGB Windows. Additionally, the project case studies provided the *depth* of analysis needed to illustrate and explain how and why different factors helped or hindered projects in delivering their results for different types of beneficiaries across diverse programme environments.

Potential inconsistencies and bias in project evaluation reporting

- Due to the variable quality and inconsistencies in project reporting, paired with the absence of a systematic assessment of the strength of evidence supporting each report, the use of project evaluation reporting as an evidence source may have introduced bias into the analysis.

  Mitigation: The IE team mitigated this limitation by using internal emerging findings and synthesis workshops to critically assess findings and potential bias. The team also employed triangulation at each stage of its iterative and phased analysis approach, ensuring that potential bias was addressed throughout the process.

Diversity in data sources leading to contradictions in the analysis

- Due to the diversity of data sources and different types of secondary and primary data used, all of which was produced at different levels and by different sources, contradictions of findings emerged during the analysis.

  Mitigation: The IE team used a structured, iterative and systematic approach for analysis, triangulation and synthesis to resolve contradictions by providing a transparent means of explaining why they occurred. When contradictory findings emerged, the team investigated the data and conducted targeted additional analysis and triangulation to understand why the contradiction may have emerged and how to explain it. Where contradictions could not be explained these are clearly stated in the report.

3. What outcome results did the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios deliver?

3.1. GEC II Logframe outcome indicators

3.1.1. Business Case and outcome definitions

The GEC II Business Case 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:

- **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.

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 occurred (but not exclusively) as a result of the effects of Covid-19 on projects' implementation, monitoring, and evaluation activities.

3.1.2. Changes to the GEC II Logframe outcomes 2017 – 2024

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted both the implementation of GEC projects and the standard data collection methods for evaluating learning and transition outcomes, leading to significant changes in the GEC II Logframe outcomes between 2017 and 2024.[6]

Due to these changes in outcomes and indicator definitions, aggregating results across the entire programme is not possible. To account for this, the GEC II was divided into three distinct reporting periods: Reporting Period 1: Pre-Covid-19 (2017 – 2020), Reporting Period 2: Covid-19 (2021), and Reporting Period 3: Post-Covid-19 (2022 – 2024). These periods align with adjustments in FCDO guidance and methods by which learning, and transition were ultimately measured by external evaluators.

The key changes across these periods are summarised below:

- **Learning:** During *Reporting Period 1*, external evaluations used standardised learning assessments, targeting a minimum 0.25 standard deviation improvement above a comparison group, or a benchmark. *Reporting Period 2* was defined by substantial disruptions due to Covid-19, leading external evaluators to rely on national examination data (e.g., from school or national examinations) or qualitative assessments (e.g., from KIIs with teachers, parents and/ or the girls themselves) as evidence for projects' results.[7] In *Reporting Period 3*, post Covid-19, and following the removal of the Payment-by-Results (PbR) approach[8] in June 2021, learning

[6] The EDN (*Annex B*) includes a Gantt chart showing how GEC programme-level outcome definitions, methodologies and targets changed between the Business Case and 2024.
[7] While this applied to most GEC-T projects, LNGB endline evaluations took place after the Covid-19 pandemic from 2022 onwards and were less affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.
[8] Fund Manager (2021), "Annual Report"

progress was measured through statistically significant improvements in learning among beneficiaries over time, following four contributory quantitative lines of evidence.

- **Transition:** During *Reporting Period 1*, the outcome indicator focused on girls' transition to the next stage of education, training or employment, allowing flexibility in the definition of transition across projects and contexts. This flexibility resulted in the absence of aggregated transition targets and achievements at the portfolio level[9]. In *Reporting Period 2*, Covid-19 highlighted the need to recognise additional aspects of transition, particularly ensuring that GEC-T beneficiaries are not lost to education after protracted school closures. By *Reporting Period 3*, portfolio-level transition targets were established and measured against a Life of Project target[10], counting girls who transitioned to one of the three possible transition pathways[11] at least once during a project.
- **Enrolment:** A new *participation* outcome was introduced in 2021 (*Reporting Period 2*) to capture girls' participating in GEC activities; and in 2023 (*Reporting Period 3*), it was renamed *enrolment* to measure the (cumulative) number of girls enrolled in (and returning to) GEC II activities[12] following school closures.

A detailed description of these changes can be found in *Annex B*, which includes a Gantt chart showing how GEC programme-level outcome definitions, methodologies and targets have evolved from the Business Case to 2024.

3.1.3. Methodological challenges in assessing learning and transition at the portfolio level

GEC II represents a substantial effort to assess learning and transition outcomes, particularly for marginalised 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.

In GEC Phase II, the measurement requirements were less standardised than in GEC Phase I, allowing for greater flexibility and relevance to projects' evaluation designs, which operated in diverse and often challenging environments.

For **learning**, this flexibility enabled variability in standard learning assessments primarily used during Reporting Period 1, which complicated the aggregation and comparability of results at the portfolio level (see *Annex O* for further details), reflecting the trade-offs between flexibility and standardisation. The challenges were further exacerbated in Reporting Period 2, when the PbR and standard deviation approach to measuring learning gains ceased to be a requirement. This led to ad-hoc approaches for measuring learning outcomes, which predominantly relied on a mix of qualitative and quantitative evidence, such as girls' perceptions of learning progress. While these quantitative insights provided valuable perspectives, they also tended to present a more positive picture of achievements. For example, on the Mercy Corps (Nepal) project, assessments of girls' perceptions initially suggested positive learning outcomes. However, a research study conducted immediately after the endline assessment found a negative impact of Covid-19 on learning outcomes, highlighting the limitations of self-reported data in capturing actual learning progress.

For **transition**, this flexibility meant projects defined and measured transition differently based on their local contexts. Some focused on formal education progression, particularly for younger girls, while others supported vocational training or employment for older adolescents (typically ages 14 and above). While this ensured contextual relevance, it also made it difficult to compare transition rates across projects. Reported transition rates often presented an overly optimistic depiction for two key reasons. First, attrition rates were high – around 40%[13] – yet girls lost to attrition were frequently unaccounted for, despite the likelihood that many did not transition successfully. Secondly, most projects primarily tracked immediate transitions i.e., what happened after girls completed their courses, offering limited insights into whether these transitions were sustained over time. These challenges were further exacerbated by Covid-19, as increased mobility and attrition made it difficult to assess long-term outcomes. While projects like People in Need (PIN) (Nepal) invested in post-completion tracking to improve transition data, many evaluations risked over-estimating success due to limited follow-up with the most vulnerable girls.

Finally, a key limitation of the Phase II evaluations has been the inability to isolate and compare the impact of specific interventions. Since evaluations were conducted at the project level rather than for individual interventions, they assessed the combined effect of multiple components without quantifying the distinct contribution of each. This complexity reduces the ability to generate robust analyses on the effectiveness of different intervention types, making it challenging to determine which approaches were most impactful and for which types of girls.

[9] This had been agreed in 2018. See FCDO Annual Report (2020) pp.5-6 for more details.
[10] Fund Manager (2022), "Girls' Education Challenge Revised Logframe Milestone"
[11] These pathways were: 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.
[12] For GEC-T projects, enrolment is defined as the maximum number of girls enrolled in project schools or centres at any point during the life of the project. For LNGB projects, enrolment is the sum of all cohort girls enrolled in a project to date. It does not measure active participation and does not reflect girls' attrition from the projects
[13] See page 7 of ***IE study*** - *Aggregate Impact of GEC-T Projects between Baseline and Midline* and page 26 of ***IE study*** - *Education for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling*.

Annex L provides further details on the methodological challenges the IE team experienced with regards to conducting a portfolio evaluation of the GEC II outcomes.

3.2. GEC outcome results

3.2.1. Learning results

GEC II overall learning results (2017 – 2024)

The GEC learning outcome results reported by the FM show that 806,412 girls from 24 out of 31 GEC-T projects[14], and 154,443 girls supported by all 14 LNGB projects were able to demonstrate improvements in learning outcomes over the course of GEC II. This amounted to 960,855 girls supported across the entire GEC II portfolio. This represents 101% of the total number of GEC-T beneficiaries targeted for 7 of the 24 projects with available records on cumulative targets from 2022 and 92% of the total number of LNGB beneficiaries targeted across all 14 projects.

The FM calculated these numbers by taking, for each project, the greater of the midline or endline results. While this approach avoids double counting, it creates challenges for independent evaluation, as the methods to assess the number of girls with improved learning varied across the three FM Reporting Periods, as outlined below. The approach taken by the FM treats equally project benefits measured through the use of comparison groups (during Reporting Period 1); with self-reported improvements (during Reporting Period 2); and quantitative assessments without standard tests or comparison groups (during Reporting Period 3). This means that caution is needed when referring to the cumulative total numbers, which is why the results for each FM Reporting Period are presented separately below.

Reporting Period 1 (2017 – 2020)

Learning progress was initially defined for GEC-T projects as the change in aggregate literacy and numeracy scores expressed in standard deviations, as assessed through standard Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)/ Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) and Secondary Grade Reading Assessments (SeGRA)/ Secondary Grade Mathematics Assessments (SeGMA) learning assessments. Learning targets were set to 0.25 standard deviations per year of implementation, over and above comparison groups. Reporting Period 1 corresponds to the midline evaluation for all GEC-T projects who were able to collect data before Covid-19.

The total number of girls with improved learning is equal to the sum of all GEC II beneficiaries from projects who achieved at least 50% of their learning target and whose difference-in-difference coefficient (the difference between the treatment and comparison group average differences between baseline and midline scores) is statistically significant at the 95% level. The FM reported learning results for Reporting Period 1 are shown in *Table 2*.

Table 2: FM reported learning results for Reporting Period 1

FM Reporting Period:	**1**			
Annual Review (AR) Year:	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**
GEC-T results **Source:** *IE calculations based on project midline scorecards (as per the end date of data collection)*	N/A	Out of 2 project midlines: - 1 **received an AMBER rating against** midline targets in literacy and numeracy - 1 **received a RED rating against** midline targets in literacy and numeracy	Out of 24 project midlines, the results for literacy and numeracy, respectively, were: - 6 and 8 **received a GREEN rating against** midline targets - 7 and 5 **received an AMBER rating against** midline targets - 9 and 9 **received a RED rating against** midline targets - 2 and 2 have **inconclusive** midline results	Out of 1 project midline: - 1 midline result was judged **inconclusive** in literacy and numeracy

[14] In this section, GEC-T multi-country projects (CAMFED & DLA) are counted separately, bringing the total to 31 projects. Seven projects (Avanti Kenya, ICL Kenya, Opportunity Uganda), PEAS Uganda, Plan Sierra Leone, and Save the Children in DRC and Mozambique) did not contribute to the total learning outcome figures due to the unavailability of learning data—either as a result of COVID-19 school closures, or because midline or endline findings were inconclusive or not statistically significant.

FM Reporting Period:	1			
Annual Review (AR) Year:	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**
LNGB results	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total number of girls with improved learning **Source:** *FM Draft PCR Report*	N/A	N/A	N/A	**Target**: 689,795 girls from 21 GEC-T projects **Achieved**: 612,120 girls (89% of target)

***Key**: FM Red, Amber, Green (RAG) ratings. **Green** = Evidence shows achieved or exceeded logframe targets (98% or more); **Amber** = Evidence shows progress in accordance with trajectory towards logframe targets (50% or more); **Red** = Evidence shows no progress or negative progress towards logframe targets; **Inconclusive** = Data does not support comment on progress or lack off.*

GEC-T results: Out of 27 projects reporting on their midline evaluations[15]:

- Six projects received a green rating in literacy (22% of projects), and eight projects in numeracy (30%);
- Eight projects received an amber rating in literacy (30%) and six projects in numeracy (22%);
- Ten projects received a red rating in literacy (37%) and 10 projects in numeracy; and
- Three projects had inconclusive results for both literacy and numeracy (11% of projects).

LNGB results: No LNGB projects reported any learning outcome results during this period because it was too soon in their project lifecycles.

Box 1: Lessons from IE Study – Aggregate Impact of GEC-T Projects between Baseline and Midline

The IE Study drew on reanalysis of data collected by external project evaluators at baseline and at midline to estimate learning progress achieved by GEC-T projects before the disruptions caused by Covid-19.

GEC-T projects achieved improvements in literacy and numeracy across all age groups. By midline, girls correctly read 10 more words per minute in EGRA, with average scores increasing by 8–10 percentage points, and average numeracy scores (EGMA) improving by 4-8 percentage points. GEC-T beneficiaries showed slightly better learning gains than non-GEC beneficiaries, with a 2-3 percentage point difference in literacy and numeracy. The proportion of girls scoring zero decreased substantially, indicating progress even among the most marginalised. Many secondary-school girls struggled with higher-order skills, with one-third scoring zero in algebra and half scoring zero in complex word problems. For comparison purposes, most GEC-T beneficiaries fell short of international standards of oral reading and comprehension: at age 10, GEC-T beneficiaries could read 45 words-per-minute on average across the GEC-T projects. This is at the lower end of a contextually relevant reading fluency benchmark of between 45 to 60 words-per-minute.[16]

Learning progress was driven by a few large projects, which accounted for most GEC-T participants and showed better results. Certain groups, such as overage girls, those from poor households, or with uneducated caregivers, had smaller learning gains, highlighting the need for targeted support for these sub-groups.

Reporting Period 2 (2021)

Following the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020, learning targets were removed for the GEC-T and LNGB Windows. PbR, which required an approach to aggregate learning outcomes (the approach using standard deviations during Reporting Period 1), ceased in June 2021 for GEC-T projects. Both GEC-T and LNGB projects assessed progress in learning using qualitative evidence, mostly self-reporting tools, for example by asking girls if they thought they were making any improvement in learning.

- **GEC-T results:** All eight projects reporting during this period showed "positive trends"[17] in their self-reported learning[18].

[15] Of the 31 GEC-T projects, four projects did not have midline scorecards before Covid-19: Avanti (Kenya), Link (Ethiopia), and Save the Children in both DRC and Mozambique.
[16] See Developing Cross-Language Metrics for Reading Fluency Measurement (Abadzi, 2012). Children in the USA would be expected to read at over 100 words per minute by the end of grade three. See DIBELS benchmarks: http://oregonreadingfirst.uoregon.edu/downloads/assessment/dibels_benchmarks_3x.pdf
[17] "Positive trends" was a FM performance classification used during Reporting Period 2.
[18] Some projects (e.g., CAMFED (Zimbabwe/ Tanzania/ Zambia)) reported national examination results in their endline evaluation reports during Reporting Period 2.

- **LNGB results:** All five projects reporting during this period showed "positive trends" in their self-reported learning.

Box 2: Impact on learning outcomes due to Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic had a profound impact on learning outcomes, with prolonged school closures disrupting education and exacerbating vulnerabilities among marginalised girls. In response, projects took measures such as distributing learning materials, organising small-group sessions, and involving community-based educators to support continued engagement (as described in detail as part of *IE Study* - *Teachers and Teaching*). While these efforts helped mitigate some of the disruption, challenges such as teacher attrition, limited access to resources, and increased dropout rates remained persistent barriers to girls' learning. The pandemic underscored the importance of building resilient education systems and prioritising marginalised groups in recovery efforts.

CSU Uganda (GEC-T) – World's longest school closures worsened vulnerabilities

Uganda experienced the world's longest school closures due to Covid-19, severely impacting education outcomes. Vulnerabilities worsened as families and teachers frequently moved, and many teachers did not return after the pandemic. The project provided learning materials and small-group activities, but their effectiveness varied, and many girls dropped out due to pregnancy or inconsistent support and did not come back to school following national reopening. While some practical skills showed improvement, foundational challenges in areas like reading comprehension persisted.

Mercy Corps (Nepal) – Significant learning losses due to Covid-19

In Nepal, the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in significant learning losses, with literacy and numeracy scores dropping by approximately one standard deviation among both the treatment and comparison groups. While the project implemented measures such as small-group instruction and distributed learning materials, the pandemic's impact highlighted the limitations of these approaches.

Lessons learned from *IE Study* – *Access and Learning*

The study found that many girls in Kenya and Nepal project areas suffered large learning losses in literacy and numeracy. Indeed, many girls reported having no access to studies at all during school closures. Many struggled with a lack of direct teaching support, loss of motivation and limited access to educational resources to help them learn. Connectivity issues, limited access to devices and the cost of internet and electricity hindered the support offered from projects (Education Development Trust (EDT) Kenya and Mercy Corps (Nepal)). Household poverty, magnified during the pandemic, was the largest factor associated with girls dropping out from school. Remedial learning such as reading camps, back-to-school campaigns and community mobilisation activities helped girls returning to school to catch up with learning.

Reporting Period 3 (2022 – 2024)

Between 2022 and 2024, a new indicator was introduced as the "number of girls with improved learning, out of all active projects that assess learning quantitatively". Four contributory lines of evidence were used to report on this indicator: (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 a prior evaluation point; and (4) increase in girls acquiring a reading skill (UKAID, 2022). These lines of evidence relied on a time comparison of the learning levels of GEC II beneficiaries, as comparison groups were dropped at the onset of Covid-19. GEC-T and LNGB projects could choose to report against one or several of the lines of evidence.

The number of girls with improved learning followed a different methodology for each line of evidence:

- If the increase in the mean score was statistically significant, all beneficiaries from the project should have improved learning;
- If statistically significant, the percentage decrease in non-learners was multiplied by the project's beneficiary population to obtain the number of girls with improved learning;
- If statistically significant, the percentage increase in girls meeting the benchmark was multiplied by the project's beneficiary population to obtain the number of girls with improved learning; and
- If statistically significant, the percentage increase in girls acquiring a skill was multiplied by the project's beneficiary population to obtain the number of girls with improved learning.

The FM reported learning results for Reporting Period 3 are shown in *Table 3*.

Table 3: FM reported learning results for Reporting Period 3

FM Reporting Period:	3		
Annual Review (AR) Year:	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
GEC-T results	**Target**: 400,596 girls from 8 projects **Achieved**: 369,811 girls (92%) Out of 8 projects: - 6 achieved 100% of their target. - 2 achieved 76-99% of their target.	**Target**: 76,603 girls from 2 projects **Achieved**: 76,603 girls (100%) Out of 2 projects: - 2 achieved 100% of their target.	**Target**: 14,890 girls from 2 projects **Achieved**: 17,129 girls (115%) Out of 2 projects: - 2 exceeded their target (100%+)
LNGB results	**Target**: 49,291 girls from 9 projects **Achieved**: 50,464 girls (102%) Out of 9 projects: - 3 exceeded their target (+100%) - 4 achieved 100% of their target. - 2 achieved 76-99% of their target.	**Target**: 120,314 girls from 12 projects **Achieved**: 106,294 girls (88%) Out of 12 projects: - 9 achieved 100% of their target. - 1 achieved 76-99% of their target. - 2 achieved 51-75% of their target.	**Target**: 75,055 girls from 2 projects **Achieved**: 61,125 girls (81%) Out of 2 projects: - 1 achieved 76-99% of their target - 1 achieved 51-75% of their target
Total number of girls with improved learning	**Target**: 449,887 girls from 17 projects **Achieved**: 447,275 girls (99%)	**Target**: 196,917 girls from 14 projects **Achieved**: 182,897 girls (93%)	**Target**: 89,945 girls from 4 projects **Achieved**: 78,254 girls (87%)

Source: FM Draft PCR Report and IE calculations based on FM documentation

- **GEC-T:** 12 out of 28 GEC-T projects reported on their endline evaluation using quantitative evidence between 2022 and 2024. The other 16 GEC-T projects either closed early and did not have an endline evaluations, or their endline evaluations were conducted during Reporting Period 2 when learning was assessed qualitatively, or for various reasons they could not assess learning quantitatively at endline.
- **LNGB:** 23[19] LNGB project cohorts reported on learning between 2022 and 2024.

[19] This total may double (or triple) count projects, as they often reported on separate cohorts in separate years.

Box 3: Lessons from IE Studies

Value for Money of Educating the Most Marginalised Girls through the GEC

The IE team produced a study on the of interventions reaching the most marginalised girls in the LNGB Window, based on three project case studies (PIN (Nepal), PIN (Ethiopia), Link (Malawi)). These were found to have raised literacy and numeracy levels substantially, by about 20 additional percentage points in their percentage correct scores for both literacy and numeracy. This is equivalent to girls having achieved three to five additional years of formal schooling. Interestingly, GEC beneficiaries valued their gains in literacy and numeracy more than any other project benefit. Even though LNGB projects did not use comparison groups to assess learning, the case for attributing these gains to the case study projects is strong with the girls otherwise out-of-school and the majority coming from households whose parents had either never been to school or who had never completed primary education.

Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling

The IE team analysed baseline and follow-up assessment data from 10 LNGB projects, finding statistically significant improvements of 28 percentage points for literacy and 25 percentage points for numeracy. On average, girls read 30 more words per minute at follow-up compared to baseline, with the largest gains observed among those who had never attended school. In the three case study projects, most girls identified literacy and numeracy sessions as the most valuable aspect of their enrolment, highlighting increased confidence as a key outcome of their improved skills.

3.2.2. Transition results

GEC II overall transition results (2017 – 2024)

The GEC transition outcome results reported by the FM show that 175,115 girls from GEC-T projects; and 127,620 girls from LNGB projects successfully transitioned. This amounts to a total of 302,735 girls across the GEC II portfolio. This figure includes 230,919 girls progressing through school, 36,861 transitioning to vocational skills training, and 55,769 moving into work or self-employment[20].

Aggregated quantitative measurement and reporting of transition was only introduced in 2022. Before 2022, transition was reported through qualitative evidence. During Reporting Period 1 (2017-2020), transition was only reported at the project-level without any portfolio-level aggregation, due to "differences in what transition means and variations in context"[21].

As for learning, transition results are presented below across the three reporting periods.

Reporting Period 1 (2017 – 2020)

The transition outcome indicator was initially defined in the GEC Logframe as the "Number of marginalised girls who have transitioned through key stages of education, training or employment". Although targets were not aggregated at the portfolio-level, they were set at the level of each GEC-T project and reported as part of their midline evaluation reports and scorecards. In the case study projects, observed targets ranged from a 5 to 8 percentage points increase compared to the comparison group between baseline and midline.[22] The FM reported transition results for Reporting Period 1 are shown in *Table 4*.

Table 4: FM reported transition results for Reporting Period 1

FM Reporting Period:	1			
Annual Review (AR) Year:	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**
GEC-T results	N/A	Out of 2 midlines: - 1 had **inconclusive** midline results	Out of 24 midlines: - 7 **received a GREEN rating against** midline	Out of 1 project midline: - 1 had **inconclusive** midline results

[20] From PwC (2024) GEC II PCR Draft Report 2024. As for learning it is however unclear how overall total numbers were derived, as they do not correspond to the sum across different years or reporting periods.
[21] FCDO Annual Review of GEC II (2020).
[22] CSU Uganda set a target of a 7% increase in transition rates from baseline to Midline (ML) 1 and 8% increase in transition rates for each grade between ML1 and ML2; in HPA Rwanda the target for each academic year was set at an 8% increase from the baseline transition rat; and for Mercy Corps Nepal, 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.

FM Reporting Period:	1			
Annual Review (AR) Year:	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**
		- 1 had no rating on midline scorecards	targets - 9 **received an AMBER rating against** midline targets - 4 **received a RED rating against** midline targets - 3 midline results were judged **inconclusive** - 1 lacked a rating on midline scorecards	
LNGB results	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total number of girls who transitioned successfully	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: *IE calculations based on project midline scorecards as per the end date of data collection.*
Key*: **Green** = Evidence shows achieved or exceeded logframe targets (98% or more); **Amber** = Evidence shows progress in accordance with trajectory towards logframe targets (50% or more); **Red** = Evidence shows no progress or negative progress towards logframe targets; **Inconclusive** = Data does not support comment on progress or lack off.*

GEC-T results: Out of 27 projects reporting on their midline evaluation[23]:

- Seven projects received a green rating (26% of projects);
- Nine projects received an amber rating (33%);
- Four projects received a red rating (15%);
- Five projects had inconclusive results (15%); and
- Two projects had no rating on the scorecards for this outcome (11%).

LNGB results: No LNGB projects reported any transition outcome results during this period because it was too early in their project lifecycles.

Box 4: Lessons from IE Study – Aggregate Impact of GEC-T Projects between Baseline and Midline

The IE Study found that between baseline and midline, 63% of the girls successfully transitioned, while 23% did not (due to dropout or grade repetition), and the status of 14% remained unclear. While the overall transition rate was marginally higher than the comparison group by 1.5 percentage points, significant variations existed across projects due to differences in target populations and operational environments, such as in conflict zones and high population mobility areas. Large variations in transition figures were observed across the GEC-T Window due to projects targeting girls of different age groups and disability status, and because some projects operated in complex environments, including situations of armed conflict.

Mercy Corps (Nepal, GEC-T)

Mercy Corps Nepal achieved one of the highest re-contact rates among GEC-T projects, maintaining a low attrition rate of just 13% between baseline and midline. Among in-school girls, the project exceeded its target by 15.5 percentage points, successfully retaining more girls in education. In contrast, the control group experienced a significant 20% decline in school attendance, highlighting the project's effectiveness in supporting girls to stay in school.

Reporting Period 2 (2021)

As with the approach to learning during the same period, the measurement and reporting on transition changed to reporting on the basis of qualitative evidence as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak. This also accompanied a change in definition, as expressed in the Programme's Annual Review Report for 2021 (FCDO, 2021):

[23] Of the 31 GEC-T projects, four projects did not have midline scorecards before Covid-19: Avanti (Kenya), Link (Ethiopia), and Save the Children in both DRC and Mozambique.

> *"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 Review Report (2021)

Following these new definitions, all GEC-T and LNGB projects showed "positive trends" in transition among eight GEC-T projects and five LNGB projects who reported during this period (eight out of eight GEC-T projects and five out of five LNGB projects).

Box 5: Impact on transition outcomes due to Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic severely disrupted transition outcomes across the GEC-T Window. School closures and mobility restrictions delayed progress for many girls, particularly among older participants who often migrated for work and could not be recontacted, and those in rural or conflict-affected areas. Economic pressures and increased caregiving responsibilities forced numerous girls to abandon school or vocational training altogether.

In response, GEC projects adapted by providing remote learning resources, facilitating teacher-led support through phone calls and home visits, and helping girls access national distance learning initiatives. Female community-based educators played a crucial role in keeping girls engaged, often acting as trusted sources of information and learning support, as shown in *IE Study* - *Teachers and Teaching*. However, while these efforts mitigated some of the pandemic's effects, they could not fully prevent disruptions to transitions for many girls, particularly those facing economic or social pressures.

CSU (Uganda, GEC-T) – Prolonged school closures disrupted girls' transitions due to economic hardship

In Uganda, prolonged school closures created significant challenges for girls' transitions, particularly for those facing economic hardship. Many girls took on increased caregiving and financial responsibilities, making it difficult to return to education once schools reopened. In response, the project provided learning materials and facilitated remote learning sessions to help mitigate learning loss. While these efforts supported many girls, outreach was limited for the most marginalised, highlighting the need for sustained engagement strategies to keep vulnerable learners connected to education and transition pathways (see *Annex H*).

Mercy Corps (Nepal, GEC-T) – Covid-19 disruptions due to emigration for work affecting girls' transitions

Mercy Corps (Nepal) faced unique transition challenges as many Grade 10 girls emigrated for work post-graduation, reducing the number continuing into further education, training, or employment. To address this, the project introduced vocational training and employment initiatives, reaching a portion of the cohort. While 13% of girls engaged in vocational training or employment and 4% continued to higher secondary education, broader economic and mobility challenges affected long-term transition tracking. These findings emphasise the importance of stronger post-graduation support systems to enhance education-to-work transitions, particularly for girls at risk of economic migration.

Reporting Period 3 (2022 – 2024)

A new transition indicator was introduced across the GEC II portfolio in 2022, which counted the "Number of girls who transitioned into or progress through school, skills/ vocational training, or into work, out of all active projects in reporting period that collect quantitative transitions data." This indicator reported results cumulatively over time, by counting girls who transitioned at least once during a project and could be aggregated at the project and portfolio levels. Transition pathways remain different for each individual girl. Data for projects ending in 2024 was not available at the time of writing this report. The FM reported transition results for Reporting Period 3 are shown in *Table 5*.

Table 5: FM reported transition results for Reporting Period 3

FM Reporting Period:	**3**		
Annual Review (AR) Year:	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
GEC-T results	**Target**: 133,014 girls from 9 projects	**Target**: 124,072 girls from 4 projects	**Target**: not available

FM Reporting Period:	3		
Annual Review (AR) Year:	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
	Achieved: 101,237 girls (76%) Out of 9 projects: - 3 achieved 100% of their target - 4 achieved 76-99% of their target - 2 achieved 51-75% of their target	**Achieved**: 113,842 girls (92%) Out of 4 projects: - 1 exceeded their target (100%+) - 3 achieved 76-99% of their target	**Achieved**: not available - No data available at project level
LNGB results	**Target**: 97,873 girls from 11 projects **Achieved:** 67,763 girls (69%) Out of 11 projects: - 1 exceeded their target (+100%) - 5 achieved 76-99% of their target - 3 achieved 51-75% of their target - 1 achieved 26-50% of their target - 1 achieved 0-25% of their target	**Target**: 102,480 girls from 11 projects **Achieved**: 105,747 girls (103%) Out of 11 projects: - 7 exceeded their target (100%+) - 4 achieved 76-99% of their target	**Target**: not available **Achieved**: not available - No data available at project level
Total number of girls who transitioned successfully	**Target**: 230,887 girls from 20 projects **Achieved**: 169,000 girls (73%)	**Target**: 226,551 girls from 15 projects **Achieved**: 219,589 girls (97%)	**Target**: not available **Achieved**: not available

Source: FM Draft PCR Report and IE calculations based on FM documentation

- **GEC-T (2022-2023):** 13 out of 28 GEC-T projects reported on transition as part of their endline evaluations between 2022 and 2023.
- **LNGB (2022-2023):** 22 project cohorts from 14 projects reported on transition between 2022 and 2023.

Box 6: Summary of findings from IE studies

Education for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling

Most of the 14 LNGB projects primarily offered younger adolescents the option of formal school pathways, while older adolescents were mainly provided with skills training or employment opportunities. This resulted in a mismatch between the pre-determined transition pathways designed by the projects and the preferences of nearly a quarter of the girls.

The IE study found that 41% of the girls of 10 projects (17 project cohorts) were lost to attrition between baseline and endline. However, continued support from LNGB projects after girls graduated from the LNGB learning centre was identified as integral to girls' success in their transitions.

Value for Money of Educating the Most Marginalised Girls through the GEC

The majority of beneficiaries (76%) from the three LNGB project case studies, who were out-of-school prior to their enrolment on the project, progressed into further education or employment after completing the project. The most significant impact was observed among younger girls, many of whom transitioned into formal schooling.

3.2.3. Enrolment

GEC II overall enrolment results (2017 – 2024)

The GEC II enrolment outcome was introduced after Covid-19 to track the number of girls enrolled in project activities. Projects faced substantial disruptions during the pandemic and associated school closures, and they adapted quickly to meet the changing needs of girls. At the time, it was unclear when schools might reopen and what effect Covid-19 would have on girls' returning to schools and the projects' activities. The primary purpose of the GEC II enrolment outcome was to measure the cumulative number of girls enrolling in GEC-T project schools or centres and in LNGB project activities. The enrolment outcome did not measure active participation, completion or attrition from project activities. It only measured those girls who started to engage in project activities. Individual project targets were adapted throughout implementation to respond to changing factors, especially contextual factors, that the project faced. As shown in *Table 6*, over four years (2021–2024), both the GEC-T and LNGB Windows exceeded their annual targets and exceeded the cumulative GEC II target by 7% reaching 1,696,719 marginalised girls (UKAID, 2024).

Table 6: FM reported enrolment results across the GEC II programme period

FM Reporting Period	**1**				**2**	**3**			**Cumulative Total**
Annual Review (AR) Year	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	
Learning Outcome Indicator	NA – Not a GEC outcome until Covid-19				No. of girls enrolled in GEC activities out of all projects (cumulative)				
GEC-T Target	NA	NA	NA	NA	1,300,000	1,318,930	1,336,297	1,336,297	1,336,297
GEC-T Actual	NA	NA	NA	NA	1,318,930	1,408,014	1,443,008	1,446,340	**1,446,340**
LNGB Target	NA	NA	NA	NA	126,098	207,799	228,236	241,061	241,061
LNGB Actual	NA	NA	NA	NA	126,372	211,468	236,087	250,379	**250,379**
Total Target	NA	NA	NA	NA	1,426,372	1,526,729	1,564,533	1,577,358	1,577,358
Total Actual	NA	NA	NA	NA	**1,445,302**	**1,618,482**	**1,679,095**	**1,696,719**	**1,696,719**

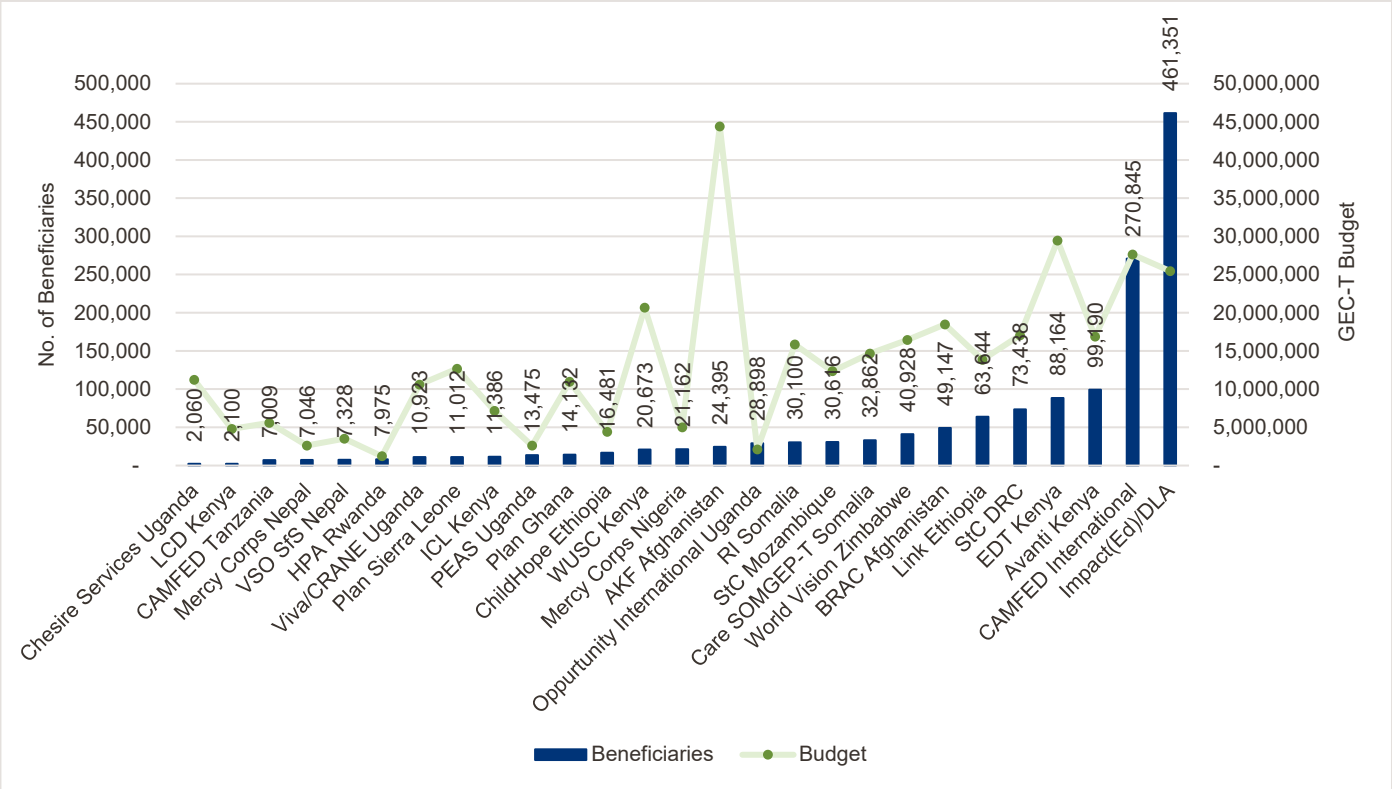
Source: *UKAID (2024) Draft Project Completion Report, Fund Manager results table*

Range of project enrolment results and diversity of GEC II portfolio

The 41 projects in the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios represent a wide range of different sized projects in terms of their total budgets ranging from £1.2m (HPA, Rwanda) to £45m (Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), Afghanistan), which is also reflected in their enrolment figures and the total number of beneficiaries that they reached (see *Figure 2* and *Figure 3*).[24] The differences in enrolment figures reflects the diverse range of contexts that projects operated in (e.g., rural, fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS), urban, slum dwellings, climate vulnerable areas, refugee camps etc.); different types of beneficiaries (e.g., girls and boys with disabilities, orphans, pastoralists, internally displaced girls, refugees, religious group members, street children etc.); and girls in different school phases and school enrolment statuses including out-of-schools girls and those who have never attended school – see *Annex M* for a mapping of contextual factors and types of beneficiary groups by project across both GEC-T and LNGB Windows. Projects' capacity to enrol their target beneficiaries in their activities were affected by range of contextual and implementation factors covered in *Section 5*. Projects used a range of strategies – in particular their close engagement and embedded relationships with their local communities (*IE Study* - *Sustaining Changes in Community Attitudes and Norms to Improve Girls' Education Outcomes*) – to mitigate and adapt to changes in their project environments such as Covid-19, entrenched social norms, FCDO Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget reductions, conflict etc. This is demonstrated by the high re-enrolment rates in 2021 after school closures due to Covid-19.

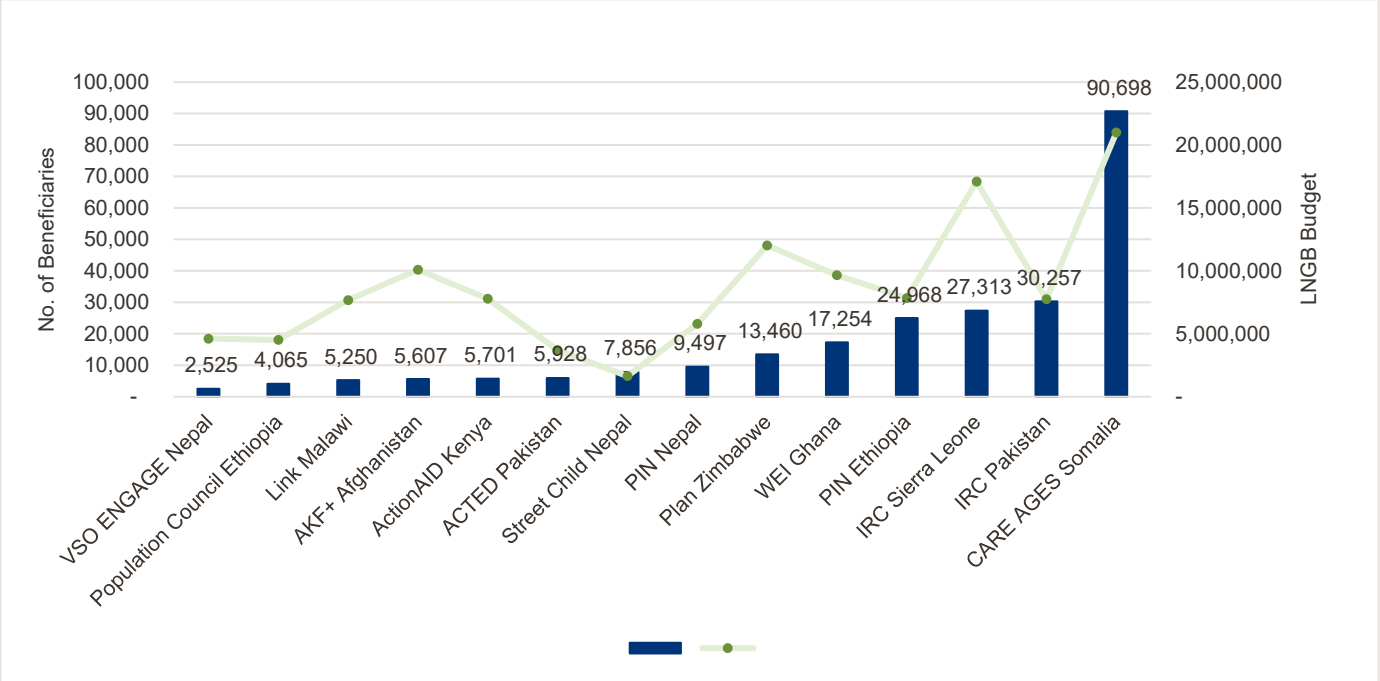
[24] Budgets are sourced from the FM's GEC Project Completion Report 2024.

Figure 2: Total number of beneficiaries and budget, by GEC-T project



Source: UKAID (2024) Draft Project Completion Report

Figure 3: Total number of beneficiaries and budget, by LNGB project



Source: UKAID (2024) Draft Project Completion Report

4. What intermediate outcomes did the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios deliver?

All projects implemented multiple interventions to deliver their GEC II outcomes, which are described in *Annex O*. IOs were developed to: chart projects' progress towards achieving their outcomes; provide a more granular understanding about how GEC outcomes were being delivered; and to demonstrate progress through projects' external evaluations (UKAID, 2024). This section summarises the performance of the GEC-T and LNGB Windows in delivering their IOs over the three FM reporting periods drawing on the portfolio assessment, case study primary research and the mapping the IE team conducted of the different types of interventions delivered by each project as shown in *Annex N*.

4.1. GEC II Intermediate Outcomes

4.1.1. GEC II Logframe Intermediate Outcomes

IOs were introduced as a GEC Logframe outcome in 2020 as an intermediary step between outputs and outcomes[25]. The definition of IOs at the portfolio level were revised throughout the life of GEC II. From 2022 onwards, the seven intermediate outcomes common to the GEC-T and LNGB Windows were 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

IO measurement and reporting pre-2020

In 2018, GEC II projects had the choice of selecting three to five intermediate outcomes to measure and report against, except for attendance, which was a compulsory IO. Each IP developed their own project-specific indicators and targets for each IO, which were validated by the FM. During this period, the monitoring focused on the technical aspects of project delivery at IO and outcome levels to enable more robust evaluations of progress towards achieving their IO targets. As such, IOs were not reported at the portfolio level during this period.

IO measurement and reporting in 2020

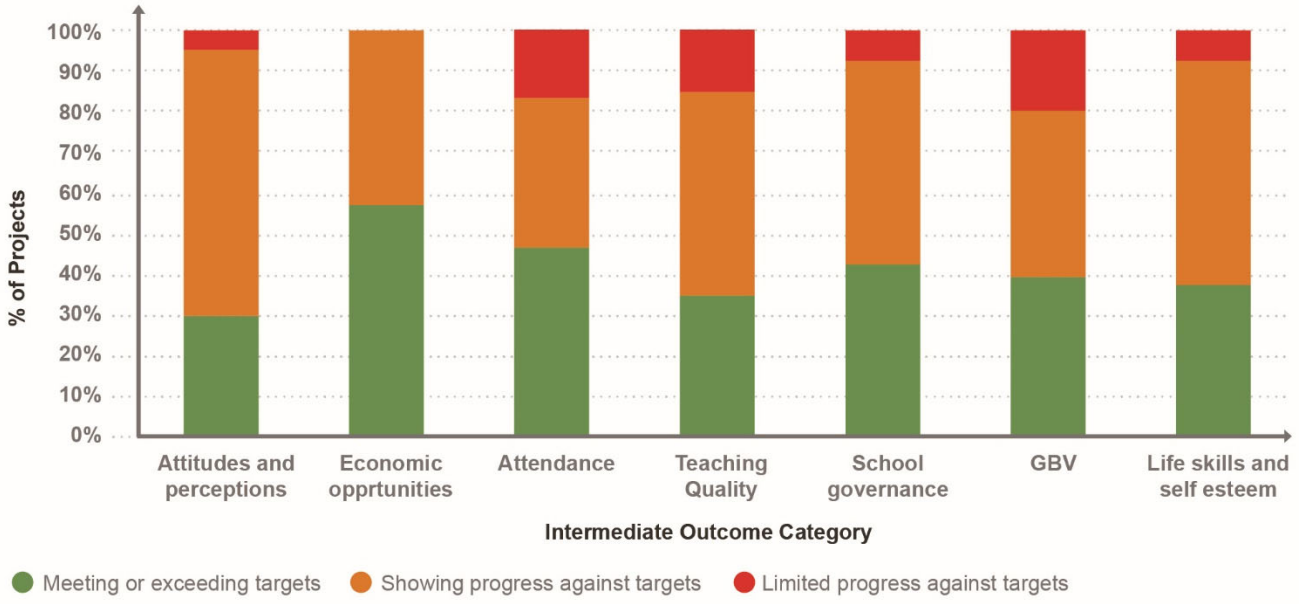
The FM's target for September 2020 was for 75% of the projects signed up to each IO to meet or exceed their IO targets, as evidenced by 23 midline evaluations of GEC-T projects that were completed before Covid-19. LNGB projects had not made sufficient progress in their implementation at this stage to be included. While projects were affected by Covid-19 school closures in 2020, progress against IOs was measured through the baseline and midline evaluations, for which data was mostly collected before March 2020. Therefore, the 2020 data does not reflect the impact of Covid-19 on project activities and related IOs. *Figure 4* shows that for each IO category, 29–57% of projects reporting against that IO met or exceeded targets in 2020 (green). For each IO, more than 80% of projects reporting against that IO showed some progress (green or amber). Reporting of progress differed across the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios because IOs were measured at projects' midline and endline evaluation points (UKAID, 2024).

As of 2020 reporting, relatively more projects had met or exceeded their targets relating to economic opportunities, attendance, and school governance, compared to other IO areas. At the same time, a relatively large share of projects reported limited progress against their attendance targets, as well as their gender-based violence (GBV) and teaching quality targets. According to the 2020 Annual Review (AR) Report, this can partly be explained by underlying issues of poverty, which had a direct effect on school attendance; and negative attitudes and social norms, affecting both girls' education and GBV. Disrupting negative attitudes and norms takes time and as shown in the sections below, there was further progress on this IO as GEC-T projects progressed. The AR Report also mentions that project targets may

[25] "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).

have initially been too ambitious, which were then reviewed by IPs and the FM. Teachers also experienced challenges in applying new methods in the classroom, which would have constrained projects' progress in achieving their teaching quality targets. The importance of underlying barriers relating to poverty and teacher challenges in applying new methodologies were confirmed in IE primary case study research (see *Section 5* and Case Study Reports in *Annexes F to K*).

Figure 4: GEC-T portfolio progress against intermediate outcomes in 2020



Source: *UKAID (2024) Draft Project Completion Report pp.45*

IO measurement and reporting in 2021 during Covid-19

During 2021, project activities were substantially disrupted by Covid-19 and school closures and projects quickly pivoted to meet different needs to support marginalised girls. Consequently, three new IO categories were added: (1) *Provision of Education*; (2) *Effective Content/ Materials*; and (3) *Effective Sustainability Implementation*; and the *Attendance* IO was dropped. The FM used RAAG ratings to assess the performance of the 28 operational projects against their targets for each of the nine IO categories in terms of the percentage of projects showing: (1) strong contribution [to outcomes]; (2) some contribution; (3) poor quality/ lack of effectiveness. *Figure 5* below shows that for seven of the nine categories, at least 60% of projects were assessed as making a strong contribution (green) to the IOs. A large majority of GEC projects made strong contributions to *Effective Content/ Materials* (86% of projects) and *Life Skills and Self-Esteem* (83% of projects) in particular (UKAID, 2024). To a slightly lesser extent, projects made gains in *School Management, Economic Opportunities, Attitudes and Norms*, and the *Provision of Education*.

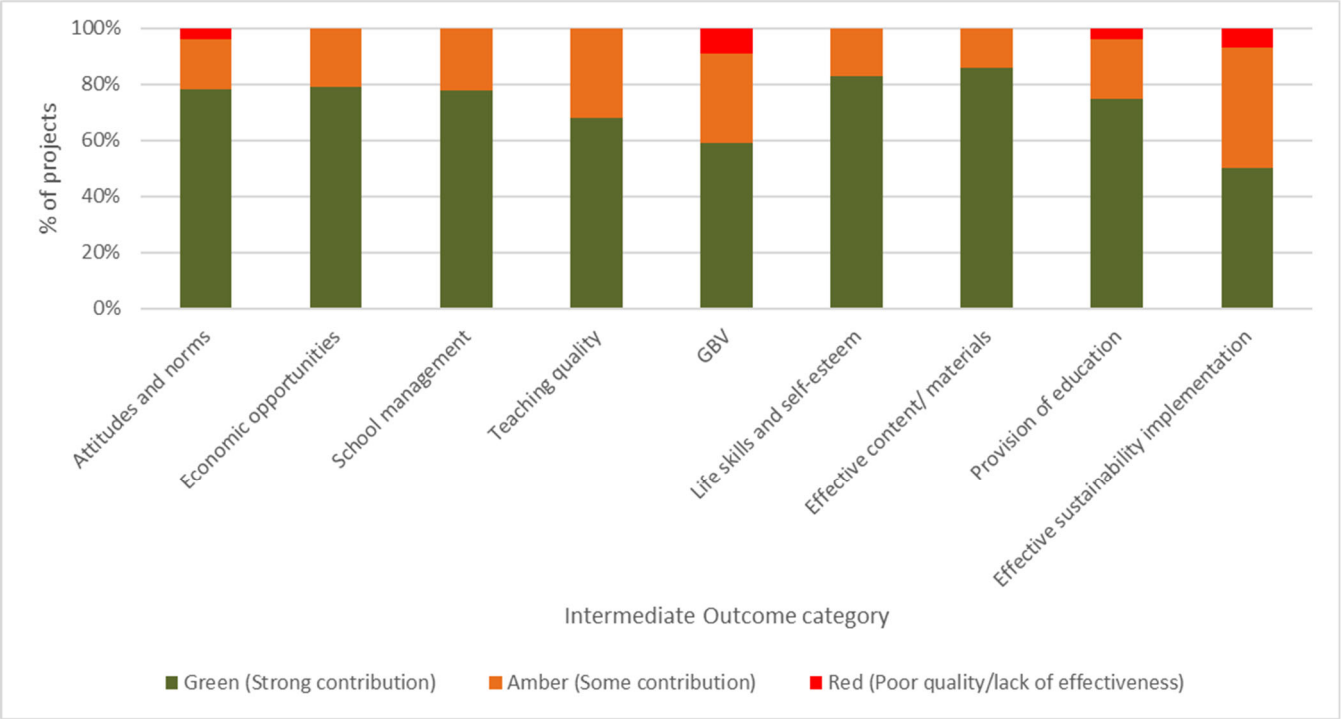
Projects that provided psychosocial wellbeing and continued learning during Covid-19 through activities such as Girls' Clubs made important gains in self-esteem in particular (see *Section 5* on the importance of Girls' Clubs for girls' learning and life skills). *IE Study* - *Teachers and Teaching* found that as part of projects' response to Covid-19, educators not only supported learning, but also provided pastoral care and health and safety information to girls and their communities, which may explain progress against the *Life Skills and Self-Esteem* IOs.

The 2021 AR reported progress on *Attitudes and Norms*, with high enrolment rates once schools and learning centres reopened. This was supported by working with caregivers, men and boys, and community or religious leaders. Progress made on *Economic Opportunities* was linked to financial activities to mitigate increased poverty due to Covid-19, such as reducing interest rates for girls' loans or providing cash transfers to caregivers. Nonetheless, higher poverty rates continued to have a negative impact on girls' education and on early marriage, as shown in *Section 5*.

As further explained in *Section 5* and in *IE Study – Access and Learning,* reliance on remote learning during school closures, while aligned with national government responses, proved challenging in practice due to connectivity issues and a lack of digital literacy. These issues may explain the mixed results in relation to the *Teaching Quality* IO. Coordination with community and school stakeholders was important to ensure continued provision of education but was limited in some cases by the low activity levels of these structures, as reflected in progress made towards the *School Management* IO.

Less progress was made with regards to the *Effective Sustainability Implementation* and *GBV* IOs. Half of the projects had not yet fully developed or implemented sustainability planning at the time of reporting, which explains the large share of amber and red scores. Issues around GBV also continued to be difficult to shift in this period. According to the 2021 AR, this is likely to be linked to IPs' limited technical capacity in this area. It is important to also note that GBV became an increasing issue in many contexts during and following Covid-19 lockdowns. Issues prevalent in the social and school environment therefore likely continued to affect GBV, especially where direct interventions to shift behaviours and attitudes in this area were limited or focused solely on the school environment.

Figure 5: Progress against intermediate outcomes in 2021



Source: UKAID (2024) Draft Project Completion Report, pp.46

IO measurement and reporting 2022 – 2024

Project IO indicators and outcomes were not data linked (see *box* below), which meant that it was not possible to quantitatively assess the correlation between the two. So, it was up to the individual projects and their external evaluators to determine the extent to which correlations (and attribution) could be drawn between changes at the IO level and changes at the outcome level (UKAID, 2024). However, this led to a lack of consistency in the way IOs were measured and reported across projects. As part of the Logframe Refresh in 2022, the FM introduced a consistent approach to reporting IOs at the portfolio level, which resulted in the seven intermediate outcome categories (above) and a process for awarding RAAG ratings. The FM mapped each project's indicators against the GEC IOs (UKAID, 2022).[26] From the Annual Review 2022-23 period onwards, the FM's Evaluation Team reviewed each project's Logframe and assigned a rating for each GEC IO based on projects' indicator data, reports and additional evidence from external evaluations[27]. The number of IOs was reduced from nine to seven because the two that were dropped had been previously added in 2021 to capture Covid-19-related activities and were no longer relevant in this period.

[26] See UKAID (2022) GEC Revised Logframe Milestone, Annex 4 for a full list of project IO indicators mapped against each IO category.

[27] **Green** – Target met or exceeded; **Green Amber** – Target 70-99% achieved; **Amber Red** – Target 69-50% achieved; **Red** - Target 49% achieved or below.

Box 7: Intermediate Outcomes – strengths and weakness for measuring projects' effectiveness

- IOs provide useful measures for tracking and assessing projects' progress towards achieving their outcomes, which was missing in GEC I. While IOs were not included in reporting during the first three years of GEC (2017–2020), project learning about how mechanisms and drivers at the IO level enhanced projects' results were used to share lessons across GEC II.[28]
- The *IE Study* - *Aggregate impact of GEC-T projects between baseline and midline*, which assessed the GEC-T IOs at midline, concluded that analysis of the extent to which changes at the IO level contributed to the delivery of GEC I outcomes was limited. Data collected to measure IO indicators were typically not quantitatively linked to GEC outcome data, so, for example, in the *IE Study* - *Teachers and Teaching*, it was not possible to quantitatively assess whether the support provided to teachers to improve teaching quality was effective in improving girls' learning outcomes.

The results for the IOs delivered by the GEC-T and LNGB Windows in 2022 and 2023 are presented below in *Figure 6* and *Figure 7*. These results were reported following their endline external evaluations. The IO results (using the RAAG ratings) for projects completing in 2024 were not available at the time of writing this report.

The *IE Study* – *Aggregate impact of GEC-T projects between baseline and midline* – conducted in 2020–2021 found that improvements in learning could be linked with improvements in IOs, including life skills, teaching quality indicators, reduction in school corporal punishment and teacher absenteeism, and parental attitudes to girls' education. These included specific life skills (academic self-confidence, and leadership and communication), most teaching quality measures (gender-sensitive pedagogy, teacher attendance, child-centred practices, interactive learning, school corporal punishment), and parental attitudes to girls' education. Despite good performance across many of the IOs, it is important to note that beneficiaries across the GEC-T Window did not improve more than the average comparison girl in terms of attendance or in terms of the economic constraints they faced to continue schooling. Girls largely remained constrained by the contexts they lived in, though teacher quality, social norms, appropriateness of learning resources, adequacy of school and classroom facilities and infrastructure were found to all be necessary enabling factors to improved learning.

As shown in *Figure 6*, the GEC-T projects that were still active in 2022 overall scored highly on *Teaching Quality* (IO3), followed by *Attitudes* (IO1) and *Management* (IO4). GEC-T projects made important gains in training teachers to use gender-responsive teaching methods, and in some cases, inclusive education practices. As mentioned in the FM Project Completion Report (PCR), projects that accompanied training with ongoing coaching and mentoring were more successful in making progress against IO3, although their ability to implement in the classroom and the impact on different types of learners varied across projects and contexts (see *Section 5* on teaching quality). According to *IE Study* - *Teachers and Teaching,* teaching-related interventions led to improvements in pedagogy, gender responsiveness in the classroom, and safeguarding of learners. Progress was initially more limited in changing attitudes (IO1) for LNGB projects, following a similar trajectory observed in GEC-T (see above): attitudinal shifts are time consuming and may be observed after some time. While more LNGB projects were scored Amber-Green and Amber in 2022, by 2023 all were Green or Amber-Green. *IE Study* - *Sustaining Changes in Community Attitudes and Norms to Improve Girls' Education Outcomes*, found that sustained shifts in community attitudes and norms are key to contribute to the longer-term viability of education outcomes, and as further explored in *Section 5*, community and family engagement were crucial to ensure girls were able to attend and learn in school, across different contexts and intervention designs.

Important gains in *Self-Esteem* (IO6) were reported across both GEC-T and LNGB Windows. *IE Study – Educating Girls with Disabilities in GEC II*, which focused on the education of girls with disability across the GEC-T and LNGB portfolios, found that projects showed improvements in girls' self-confidence and more positive interactions with family, peers and community members, through a combination of school-based and community-based interventions, including awareness raising. LNGB projects made important gains in improving girls' self-esteem in both 2022 and 2023. *IE Study – Value for Money of Educating the Most Marginalised Girls*, which focused on LNGB projects, found that improved self-confidence, self-efficacy, social networks and wellbeing were important effects of the GEC II interventions and contributed to improvements in girls' learning.

Projects fared relatively worse against the IOs relating to *Financial* (IO2), *Safety* (IO5), and *Attendance* (IO7), although most projects were still scored Green or Amber-Green. This can be explained by several factors. Financial interventions were constrained by the challenging and worsening economic environment following Covid-19, and secondary evidence and the primary case study research also showed that girls and their families would have

[28] The GEC website houses 16 'Lessons from the Field' that include topics such as: working with teachers, economic interventions, teaching and learning, safer schools, sexual and reproductive health etc., all areas under the IOs.

required more support to overcome economic barriers (see *Section 5*). Projects also struggled to make gains in attendance; this could be linked to continued issues of seasonal employment and household commitments (see *Section 5* and IE primary case studies); as well as the challenges in working with very vulnerable groups, especially for LNGB projects, which had to accommodate other responsibilities falling on their beneficiaries. The mixed performance in terms of *Management* (IO4) is likely to relate to issues in the uptake of new ways of working at the school level and limited engagement with parents and school structures, especially as projects started to close-out. *Safety* (IO5) was also more challenging than other IO areas. As explained above, issues relating to GBV could reflect persistent social norms around corporal violence and harmful gender norms, which require lengthy and intensive engagements to foster change.

Figure 6: Reported Intermediate Outcome results for GEC-T and LNGB projects in 2022

Annual Review (AR) Period 2022		Attitudes	Financial	Teaching	Management	Safety	Self-esteem	Attendance
	Project	IO1	IO2	IO3	IO4	IO5	IO6	IO7
GEC-T	Camfed Tanzania	Green	Green	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green
	Camfed Tan /Zamb /Zimb	Green	Green	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green
	CARE Somalia	Amber-Green	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green	Amber-Red
	CSU Uganda	Amber-Red	Amber-Red	Amber-Green	Amber-Red	Amber-Red	Amber-Red	Amber-Red
	EDT Kenya	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green	Green
	ICL Kenya	Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green	Green
	LCD Kenya	Green	Amber-Red	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green
	Link Ethiopia	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green
	Plan Ghana	Green	N/A	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green
	StC DRC	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green
	Viva CRANE Uganda	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green
	WUSC Kenya	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Red	Green	Amber-Green
	World Vision Zimbabwe	Amber-Green	N/A	Green	N/A	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green
LNGB	ACTED Pakistan	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green
	ActionAid Kenya	Green	Green	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green
	CARE Somalia	Amber-Red	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green
	IRC Sierra Leone	Amber-Green	Green	Green	N/A	Green	Green	Green
	IRC Pakistan	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green
	Link Malawi	Amber-Green	Green	Green	N/A	Green	Green	Amber-Red
	PIN Nepal	Green	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green
	PIN Ethiopia	Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Red	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	N/A
	Plan Zimbabwe	Green	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green
	Population Council Ethiopia	Amber-Red	Amber-Red	N/A	N/A	Amber-Red	Amber-Green	Red
	Street Child Nepal	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green
	VSO Nepal	Amber-Green	Green	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green
	WEI Ghana	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green

Source: PwC (2023) IO Ratings by Project AR2022-2023

Figure 7: Reported Intermediate Outcome results for GEC-T and LNGB projects in 2023

Annual Review (AR) Period 2023		Attitudes	Financial	Teaching	Management	Safety	Self-esteem	Attendance
	Project	IO1	IO2	IO3	IO4	IO5	IO6	IO7
GEC-T	CSU Uganda	Amber-Green	Amber-Red	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green
	EDT Kenya	Green	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green
	Link Ethiopia	Green	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green
	Viva CRANE Uganda	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green
	WUSC Kenya	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Red	Green	Amber-Green
LNGB	ACTED Pakistan	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
	ActionAid Kenya	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green	Amber-Red	Green	Green
	Aga Khan Afghanistan	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green
	CARE Somalia	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green
	IRC Pakistan	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green	Green
	IRC Sierra Leone	Green	Green	Green	N/A	Green	Green	Green
	Link Malawi	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green	N/A	Green	Green	Amber-Green
	PIN Ethiopia	Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green
	PIN Nepal	Green	Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green	Green
	Plan Zimbabwe	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green	Amber-Green
	VSO Nepal	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Green	Green
	WEI Ghana	Green	Amber-Green	Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green	Amber-Green

Source: PwC (2023) IO Ratings by Project AR2022-2023

5. What worked well/ less well and why?

This section summarises an in-depth analysis of how the interplay of different factors either contributed to or did not contribute to success, which is provided in *Annex P*. 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., KIIs and FGDs) conducted for the six project case studies.

The section is composed of four subsections:

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 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. As contextual factors applied to both windows, they have been presented across the GEC-T and LNGB Windows.

Box 8: Summary of key findings

GEC-T key findings

- **GEC-T projects were particularly effective at improving girls' self-esteem and confidence as a means to improving learning.** Small-group learning environments – e.g., through group work, mentoring, and child clubs – supported improvements in both self-esteem and learning.
- **Teaching training was effective when it focused on child-centred, engaging and interactive teaching methods.** Awareness raising among caregivers and communities, especially when working with boys and men, helped combat harmful gender norms and increased support for girls' education. Improvements to the learning environment through investments in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and learning materials also helped create a more positive learning environment.
- **GEC-T projects were constrained by contextual factors,** especially the long-term disruption caused by Covid-19, which had negative effects on girls' motivation, families' economic hardship and harmful social norms. Project schools also faced other important contextual barriers, including long distances to schools, large class sizes and poor infrastructure. These affected project results even where positive change was observed. Teachers often struggled to implement what they learned in training because of challenging school infrastructure, large class sizes and limited prior training. While community awareness was important, economic barriers continued to pose challenges to girls' education.
- **Partnerships with government and alignment with government policy enhanced the effectiveness of projects' activities and their sustainability.** GEC-T projects developed and sustained relationships with national governments and there was evidence of government investment in scaling up or continuing project activities after they closed.
- **An important limitation for some GEC-T projects was the exclusion of boys, whether real or perceived.** This led to resentment and community pushback in some contexts. The perception that girls were being encouraged at the expense of boys combined with the reinforcement of negative stereotypes about masculinity contributed to this pushback. In some cases, this led to a decrease in school motivation and participation among boys. Although many of the GEC-T projects attempted to include boys in their activity, this was often the result of adaptation rather than as an integral part of the project design.

LNGB key findings

- **Community engagement and cultural sensitisation were critical to success, particularly in culturally conservative contexts.** Developing strong relationships with community groups (e.g., women's groups) and community leaders (e.g., religious leaders) was essential to gaining support for projects. Culturally and contextually sensitive approaches to community-engagement were critical. For example, framing formal education as complementary to Quranic studies in Afghanistan. While community engagement helped facilitate activities targeting harmful norms, projects still faced persistent disapproval from certain segments within their communities.
- **Vocational training initiatives demonstrated mixed results.** While some projects reported significant success, other projects faced challenges with social norms inhibiting women's participation in public-facing professions; insufficient follow-up support; a lack of market alignment (i.e., not meeting market demand); and a lack of formal certification.
- **Infrastructure and resource limitations impacted project effectiveness.** Several projects faced challenges with inadequate WASH facilities, and a lack of safe drinking water and poor building infrastructure. For example, LINK (Malawi) reported that poorly maintained infrastructure led to class cancellations and disrupted learning schedules, particularly during the rainy season when classrooms would flood.
- **Strong partnerships with local government and community organisations proved essential for sustainability, while weak partnerships inhibited success**. Projects that were able to successfully engage stakeholders, including local organisations and local government, were able to lock in successes. Conversely, when projects did not form strong relationships with stakeholders or followed diverging agendas, they were unable to guarantee the longer-term viability of the changes they had delivered.
- **The LNGB Window's focus on girls caused tensions in some project communities who did not understand why boys could not also be supported.** LNGB projects targeted the most marginalised girls, which for some projects resulted in pushback within several projects' communities because they perceived that deserving boys were being excluded. Specifically, communities believed that some selected girl beneficiaries were not more marginalised than some boys within the community. As a result of community consultations on these issues, several projects engaged boys as part of their primary beneficiary population.

5.1. What types of intervention worked for different projects?

5.1.1. 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. Across the GEC-T Window there were examples of learner-centred approaches generally supporting learning gains. However, teachers frequently faced challenges in implementing the methods (such as interactive and innovative learner-centred pedagogies) they were taught in training. In some cases, these challenges were linked to contextual factors such as a lack of school infrastructure or large class sizes.

Box 9: Mercy Corps (Nepal) - Challenges implementing engaging methods

The case study primary research found that teachers supported by Mercy Corps (Nepal) appreciated the more interactive and engaging methodologies they were trained on, but they were not able to implement them in formal classes due to strict curriculum requirements mandated by the Government of Nepal.

Additional detail is available in *Annex F* (Mercy Corps (Nepal) Case Study).

The extent to which teachers were able to implement specific 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 school lagged behind in terms of being able to explain the adaptations they made for children with disabilities in the classroom. This was echoed in the case study primary research for CSU (Uganda), which showed that despite teachers reportedly being more aware and interested in inclusive education, the majority of teachers lacked the practical skills to implement inclusive education practices.

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.

Box 10: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, insufficient follow-up support and ineffective mentoring for some projects limited the effectiveness and long-term impact of training sessions. For example, the case study primary research demonstrated a lack of coordination between educator coaches and school administration in the Plan (Zimbabwe) project, resulting in an inconsistent application of new teaching methodologies.

5.1.2. 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 well 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.

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 in: increasing girls' self-efficacy; motivating girls to stay in school, learn and develop life skills; and encouraging girls to seek pathways to financial independence.

Girls' Clubs supporting attendance and increasing participation

Across the GEC-T Window, several project endline evaluation 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. Project endline evaluation reports confirmed that girls attending Girls' Clubs showed improvements in self-confidence, self-esteem and life skills.

Box 11: ChildHope (Ethiopia) – Girls' Clubs supporting attendance

The ChildHope (Ethiopia) Endline Evaluation Report found that Girls' Clubs contributed to regular attendance at school and improved motivation. Furthermore, it also reported that Girls' Clubs acted as a safeguarding function in which the project could intervene in cases where girls were intending to marry early.

LNGB Window

Projects across the LNGB Window delivered small group learning initiatives, such as catch-up and 'bridge' classes, which were instrumental in addressing the educational needs of the most marginalised and struggling beneficiaries. In the Voluntary Service Overseas (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. The project's endline evaluations reports revealed a 30% increase in literacy proficiency among participating girls, showcasing the effectiveness of this targeted approach.

Box 12: 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 explained how the literacy lessons enabled them to progress from recognising letters to constructing sentences and understanding comprehension passages; whilst numeracy improvements included mastering addition, subtraction, and profit-loss calculations.

Additional detail is available in *Annex K* (Zimbabwe (Plan) Case Study).

Pivoting to small group learning during the Covid-19 pandemic helped mitigate against learning losses. External evaluation reports showed 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. 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 successes, small group learning initiatives faced challenges in reaching the most marginalised populations, as evidenced in external evaluation reports. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) (Pakistan) project faced cultural norms, which 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.

5.1.3. Changing community attitudes and norms

GEC-T Window

Evidence from project endline evaluation reports and the *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, the World Vision (Zimbabwe) Endline Evaluation Report described how the project 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 improving social norms on early marriage. The ChildHope (Ethiopia) Endline Evaluation Report recognised the importance of opening a space to discuss positive masculinities and gender. This led to boys taking concrete actions, such as dividing up household chores equally with their sisters, allowing an enabling environment for girls' learning.

Ongoing barriers to attitudinal change constrains the sustainability of projects' gains

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. For instance, 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. This highlighted that while community awareness is crucial, it needs to be accompanied by support to address the economic barriers that prevent girls from attending.

Box 13: CSU (Uganda) – Deep rooted community and caregiver attitudes in Uganda

The primary research case study for 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, improvements in attendance were limited and often short-lived.

Additional detail is available in *Annex H* (CSU (Uganda) Case Study).

LNGB Window

For many LNGB projects, community engagement has been pivotal in reshaping the perceptions of girls' education and developing supportive environments. Many projects collaborated with religious leaders and senior community figures to promote girls' education. For example, the AKF (Afghanistan) External Evaluation Report found that framing formal education as complementary to Quranic studies helped the project gain broad acceptance and helped facilitate transitions from Quranic to formal education; whilst training Quranic teachers to support this transition ensured continuity in learning, while also addressing cultural resistance.

The Plan (Zimbabwe) project's mother-daughter clubs further exemplified the transformative power of grassroots initiatives. These clubs facilitated discussions on sensitive topics such as Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and early marriage prevention, with 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.

Box 14: ACTED (Pakistan) – Tangible project benefits create self-perpetuating positive perception

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. The case study primary research demonstrates that effective community mobilisation and awareness campaigns also increased support for girls' education, transforming previous resistance into acceptance. 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.

> *"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 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 communities.

5.1.4. Infrastructure and resource provision

GEC-T Window

Improving infrastructure to promote girls' attendance and interest in school

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 Report showed 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 evaluation reported that accessing Information and Communications Technology (ICT) labs and being able to use computers led to improvements in girls' self-esteem, their ability to express themselves, and their digital competencies and digital literacy. 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.

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 Promoting Equality in African Schools (PEAS) (Uganda) highlighted that though *'it's often sort of forgotten or overlooked because it feels so obvious,'* welcoming infrastructural spaces play 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 as an important motivational factor for girls' learning

Providing learning materials directly to students was an important motivational factor across the GEC-T Window. The case study primary research for HPA (Rwanda) found that the provision of school materials, such as books and notebooks, was frequently mentioned by boys and girls, and community members as helpful for learning and focusing on studies. 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.

Box 15: 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 a lack of assistive devices were major barriers to going to school, support provided by the project 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 projects' 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. The Link Community Development (Malawi) project endline evaluation reported that the distribution of hygiene kits 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. The consistent provision of devices and materials enabled improved participation in classroom activities and contributed to higher retention rates among girls with disabilities.

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, the CARE (Somalia)

project's 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.

5.1.5. 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* examined this in detail, finding that girls engaged with vocational training either because they perceived it would prove profitable, or because they were interested in learning more about a specific vocation.

The World Education Inc. (Ghana) project's 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.

Box 16: Plan (Zimbabwe) – How local master crafts people 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. 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 Mafararikwa 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 impact of the vocational training. 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.

5.1.6. 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 supporting learning (see *Section 5.1.2.* above), Child Clubs or Girls' Clubs were found to contribute to improvements in girls' confidence and empowerment. The PEAS (Uganda) evaluations 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 Mercy Corps (Nepal) team participating in the case study primary research reported that Girls' Clubs were effective at empowering girls and giving them the confidence to speak up for themselves. Similarly, improvements in girls' confidence (and confidence in decision-making) were reported by Girls' Empowerment Forums (GEFs), which were unique to the CARE (Somalia) project. Participation in GEF activities led

to increased confidence in engaging in classroom discussions and school governance, enhancing their sense of agency. KIIs with the CARE (Somalia) project team as part of the IE primary research highlighted that girls became less tolerant of early marriage, GBV, and traditional gender norms as a result.

Life skills training to improve girls' self-esteem and empowerment

Life skills training was also demonstrated across the GEC-T Window to have a positive impact on girls' empowerment. Activities including life skills, counselling, and health education led to important changes in girls' self-esteem and self-perception

Box 17: HPA (Rwanda) – Life skills improving confidence and transition

Changes in children's life skills and confidence were frequently reported by parents, girls, and teachers in the case study 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.

Additional detail is available in *Annex G* (HPA (Rwanda) Case Study).

Peer mentoring contributing to girls' agency

Many projects 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) also demonstrated a positive trend in self-efficacy which was credited to its peer mentoring activities.

LNGB Window

Projects across the LNGB Window reported how empowerment and life skills sessions were 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, the VSO (Nepal) project 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.

Box 18: 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. 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.

While empowerment initiatives achieved notable successes, certain challenges limited their broader impact. For some projects, a lack of integration between empowerment initiatives and broader community efforts limited their overall sustainability. The ActionAid (Kenya) project (see *Annex I*: ActionAid (Kenya) Case Study) primary research respondents stated that while the project raised awareness on SRHR, cultural restrictions in particularly conservative project areas and policies restricting SRHR discussion in educational settings limited its impact.

5.2. To what extent and how did external and contextual factors for different GEC-T and LNGB projects influence their performance?

5.2.1. Covid-19

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.

Barriers to learning and economic hardship

Covid-19 significantly disrupted education across both the GEC-T and LNGB Windows, affecting learning, social norms, and economic stability. In the GEC-T Window, projects faced difficulties reaching in-school beneficiaries due to limited knowledge of girls' personal circumstances, delaying support. As corroborated by the *IE Study - Effects of Covid-19 on Access and Learning in the GEC II*, learning losses were reported widely, with Mercy Corps (Nepal) and EDT (Kenya) finding that girls lacked access to essential learning resources, such as technology and printed materials.

Prolonged school closures across the LNGB Window exacerbated dropout rates and economic instability. The Street Child (Nepal) project found that economic hardship pushed families to prioritise subsistence over education, leading to increased early marriage rates. PIN (Ethiopia) reported that girls took on caregiving and income-generating roles, disrupting their studies.

Social norms and psychological effects

Both GEC-T and LNGB projects reported increased GBV and harmful social norms during Covid-19. 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. Mercy Corps (Nepal) reported that economic hardship and school closures led to greater risks of transactional sex, early marriage, and pregnancy. Psychological effects were also significant. The Plan (Ghana) project reported declining confidence in reading and maths among girls, linking this to school closures. Mercy Corps (Nepal) found that over 70% of girls reported a reduced interest in education. In the LNGB Window, the Link Community Development (Malawi) project reported that girls felt isolated and anxious during school closures, affecting their return to education, while Plan (Zimbabwe) noted that girls without independent learning skills were particularly disadvantaged.

5.2.2. Conflict, security, safety

Safety and security concerns significantly impacted attendance

Security risks were a major barrier to attendance in GEC-T projects. EDT (Kenya) reported girls in urban areas faced violence while commuting, leading some to shorten school hours. Viva (Uganda) and CSU (Uganda) noted worsening safety concerns during Covid-19. World Vision (Zimbabwe) found that long commutes exposed girls to harassment, discouraging attendance.

Box 19: 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. 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.

Additional detail is available in *Annex I* (ActionAid (Kenya) Case Study).

Political and ethnic conflict disrupted educational continuity

Broader conflicts disrupted education. AKF (Afghanistan) cited Taliban-related violence as a deterrent to schooling, while Save the Children (StC) (DRC) reported conflict-driven economic hardships preventing school attendance. Ethnic clashes in Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Somalia further hindered education, with CARE (Somalia) highlighting inter-clan conflict and Al-Shabaab's influence disrupting learning.

Resilience and adaptation through partnerships and psychosocial support

Despite these challenges, projects adapted through community partnerships and alternative learning models. PIN (Ethiopia) facilitated mobile classrooms for displaced students, while CARE (Somalia) collaborated with local leaders to create safer learning environments. Psychosocial support and trauma-informed teaching further supported students affected by conflict, demonstrating the importance of flexible, community-driven interventions.

5.2.3. Natural disasters

Natural disasters caused challenges for education access and attendance

Natural disasters, particularly droughts and floods, disrupted education in both the GEC-T and LNGB Windows. In the GEC-T Window, EDT (Kenya) reported that severe drought in arid regions heightened the risk of GBV, sexual exploitation, and economic hardship, exacerbating barriers to education. Migration in pastoralist communities further hindered education, as EDT (Kenya) noted that families relocating in search of livelihoods made it difficult to maintain consistent engagement with learners.

In the LNGB Window, natural disasters had a broader impact on infrastructure and educational continuity. The ACTED (Pakistan) project faced widespread flooding in 2022, displacing over 3.5 million children. Learning centres were repurposed as shelters, and extensive damage to facilities delayed the resumption of classes. In remote areas, a lack of clean water and sanitation deterred families from sending children back to school. Limited funding for long-term recovery further exacerbated delays in rebuilding schools.

Project adaptation and resilience through flexibility and partnerships

Despite these challenges, projects demonstrated resilience. VSO (Nepal) integrated disaster preparedness, establishing temporary learning spaces and community hubs. Link Community Development (Malawi) partnered with humanitarian organisations to support displaced families. ActionAid (Kenya) provided mobile education services to reach migrating children. These adaptive strategies ensured continuity in learning, highlighting the importance of flexible and collaborative approaches to disaster response in education.

5.2.4. Economic factors

Extent of economic challenges undermined projects' financial support

Economic hardship was a significant barrier across both the GEC-T and LNGB Windows, exacerbated by Covid-19. Despite this, financial support to families was limited. In the GEC-T Window, economic difficulties directly impacted girls through reduced income, household poverty, and an inability to afford school fees. The challenging economic context often rendered financial interventions ineffective or unsustainable. Viva (Uganda) reported that market closures and lockdowns particularly affected novice entrepreneurs, while HPA (Rwanda) found that fewer girls were able to save income due to increasing hardship.

Macro-economic pressures significantly impacted project initiatives

Projects in the LNGB Window faced severe macro-economic challenges, including hyperinflation, unemployment, and food insecurity, which disproportionately affected marginalised girls. Plan (Zimbabwe) reported that hyperinflation increased the cost of books, uniforms, and transport, making education unaffordable. Economic instability led families to prioritise immediate income over education, with many girls forced into domestic work or street vending. Migration driven by economic hardship further disrupted learning, as students frequently relocated. Rising costs forced many LNGB projects to reallocate funds from planned activities to urgent relief, such as food and transport allowances. Limited job opportunities for girls who completed their education led to disillusionment, while girls attempting entrepreneurial activities faced resource and infrastructure challenges.

5.2.5. Cultural and social norms

Deeply ingrained cultural and social norms posed significant challenges to the implementation and success of projects across the Portfolio, particularly in limiting access to education for girls. This corroborates the findings 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.

Early marriage, pregnancy and gender norms endured as severe impediments to girls' participation

Despite some positive shifts in attitudes, early marriage and pregnancy remained major barriers across both GEC-T and LNGB Windows. ChildHope (Ethiopia) reported that early marriage often resulted in girls dropping out of school, particularly among marginalised communities. Mercy Corps (Nigeria) found that married girls required their husbands' approval to continue education, while mobility post-marriage often led to permanent dropout.

Pregnancy-related stigma also hindered girls' enrolment and attendance. World Vision (Zimbabwe) identified pregnancy and motherhood as key factors in failed transition outcomes. Though some projects encouraged re-enrolment post-pregnancy, Covid-19 reversed many pre-2020 gains.

Harmful social norms and household responsibilities prevented girls' sustained attendance

Harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) were reported as limiting girls' attendance, with Avanti (Kenya) and I Choose Life (ICL) (Kenya) linking it to school dropouts due to early marriage. Household responsibilities also constrained girls' education. Mercy Corps (Nepal) found that girls were absent during peak agricultural seasons, while CARE (Somalia) reported increased domestic duties during Covid-19 lockdowns.

In the LNGB Window, patriarchal norms reinforced gender disparities. ACTED (Pakistan) highlighted how male chaperone requirements restricted girls' mobility, while Plan (Zimbabwe) found resistance from conservative religious groups. However, targeted interventions, such as mothers' advocacy groups in the Street Child (Nepal) project, successfully reintegrated girls into schools through awareness campaigns and local media outreach, challenging entrenched norms.

5.3. What were the implementation factors behind GEC-T projects' success or lack of success?

5.3.1. Partnerships

GEC-T Window

Supporting government partnerships to enhance sustainability

Across the GEC-T Window, collaboration with ministries, the broader education sector, and government partnerships were predominantly reported 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 critical to sustaining, scaling up and replicating GEC-T interventions.

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 implemented through the Link Community Development (Kenya) project.

Government investment in scaling up GEC II 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 activities implemented by GEC II projects in Nepal, and CAMFED (Tanzania) project's 'Girls Learn, Succeed and Lead' intervention was fully adopted and is integrated at the Government level in Tanzania. PLAN (Sierra Leone) worked closely with the district authorities and the project was credited with mainstreaming disability into the government's agenda.

Overcoming challenges with government collaboration

The importance of building relationships and a common understanding with relevant ministries was key to encouraging sustainability efforts. Some GEC-T projects were able to leverage these relationships to overcome implementation challenges resulting from a lack of understanding by 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 its education content. Despite these challenges, the project continued to provide practical support to girls, such as sanitary products. The IE primary research KII with AKF (Afghanistan) project staff highlighted how the project faced initial resistance with the Ministry of Education, which saw the project's community-based education (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.

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.

Box 20: Plan (Zimbabwe) – Developing strong partnerships with specialist organisations

Evaluation reports underlined 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.

Additional detail is available in *Annex K* (Plan (Zimbabwe) Case Study).

Partnerships with Government stakeholders facilitated curriculum alignment and transition

Partnerships with education authorities helped improve transition between project initiatives and formal education. The ACTED (Pakistan) project 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 after graduation from the project. Local organisations brought expertise in providing 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.

Collaboration helped forge adaptive approaches in crisis management

The 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 GEC beneficiaries 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.

5.3.2. Project management and monitoring systems

GEC-T Window

Using monitoring effectively to inform project adaptations

The VIVA (Uganda) RAAG Report highlighted that regular catch-ups, project monitoring, and close collaboration with the FM as key to supporting positive results. Some projects noted that regular project monitoring fed into their adaptive management systems. The CSU (Uganda) Endline Evaluation reported using monitoring data to inform adaptive management – for example, 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. The Mercy Corps (Nepal) endline evaluation highlighted several adaptations to their teaching and learning approach based on monitoring and evidence from their midline evaluation.

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 KIIs 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 KIIs 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.

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. This is evidenced in *IE Study – Value for Money of Educating the Most Marginalised Girls through the GEC*, which found that of the case study sample, PIN (Nepal) had the best monitoring systems and delivered the best results.

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.

Regular reviews, feedback loops and community feedback mechanisms drove adaptive project management

FM 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 systems enabling timely adjustments to project strategies

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. The *IE Study – Value for Money of Educating the Most Marginalised Girls through the GEC,* found that across the three project case studies, the PIN (Nepal) project had the strongest and most accurate data overall, including on the types and degrees of marginalisation and student completion rates. This corresponded with stronger overall performance and likely reflected a better ability to track and respond to ongoing issues. Projects with inefficient project management and monitoring practices hindered progress, leading to inefficiencies, delays, and difficulties in addressing key challenges effectively.

5.3.3. Staff capacity and availability

GEC-T Window

Adapting teacher training models to adapt to a range of implementation challenges

The FM reported[29] that the initial model of cascading teacher professional development, in which centralised training is given to select teachers, which is then cascaded down to other teachers, 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 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 (see *Box 21* below).

[29] https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/dodb2fx2/gec_pip_4_self_assessment_tools_final.pdf

Box 21: CSU (Uganda) – Challenges with teacher training and quality

Despite some improvements in inclusive pedagogy, non-inclusive teaching practices continued. The case study primary research identified several issues with the support provided to teachers. 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.

Additional detail is available in *Annex H* (CSU (Uganda) Case Study).

Teacher absenteeism as a predictor of outcomes

Teacher absenteeism and turnover, linked to both education policy and teacher incentives has an important influence on learning outcomes. Teacher absenteeism was found to be a statistically significant predictor of language scores in both English and local languages on the STAGES (Ethiopia) project.

Redeployment and the movement of teachers led to an attrition of trained teachers, as mentioned in Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria. The attrition of teachers was found on the WUSC (Kenya) project to be higher in arid and semi-arid counties, leading to further educational marginalisation in these areas. The Avanti (Nigeria) project team attempted to mitigate this issue by engaging with the government to encourage teacher transfers to other Avanti schools rather than outside project schools.

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 primary research KIIs with the PEAS (Uganda) project team highlighted the issue of high teacher turnover as the project was unable to match government rates, which resulted in the project losing a number of teachers when the teacher recruitment for government schools opened up. Case study primary research for the CSU (Uganda) project similarly found numerous issues relating to teacher availability and quality due to teacher absenteeism, strikes and transfers, all linked to low teacher salaries leading to high teacher turnover. The loss of institutional memory as teachers left project schools was a challenge reported in the secondary data and IE primary research.

LNGB Window

Effective, capable staff and the 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 enhanced project effectiveness

Regular capacity-building initiatives were a cornerstone of project success. The Endline Evaluation Report for the AKF (Afghanistan) project describes how 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.

Collaborative and inclusive training approaches reinforced trust and accountability

The case study primary research showed 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, facilitated 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.

Staff turnover and recruitment challenges affected productivity and morale

Retaining skilled staff was a persistent issue across several projects in the LNGB Window. Burnout due to understaffing among the PIN (Ethiopia) project staff, particularly during peak implementation periods, impacted productivity and morale. Delays in hiring technical experts during critical curriculum development phases in the World Education Inc. (Ghana) project created significant gaps, forcing existing personnel to fill roles they were not

adequately trained for. Case study primary research for the ActionAid (Kenya) project 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.

Box 22: 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, as disrupting 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).

5.4. What were the unexpected or unintended results across the two portfolios?

5.4.1. GEC-T Window

Positive unexpected or intended results

Some project results exceeded expectations. For example, EDT (Kenya) reported an unexpected recovery in learning losses after Covid-19, thanks to remedial learning activities. Several other projects reported positive effects on girls' interactions with boys. The Endline Evaluation Report for Relief International (Somalia) found increased collaboration between girls and boys in school competitions, thanks to mixed-gender Leadership Groups. Other projects reported positive effects at the community level as GEC-T beneficiaries shared their knowledge with others. The Avanti (Kenya) project evaluation found that girls shared their new ICT skills among their families and communities.

Negative unintended results

The most frequently reported unintended consequence, including in all three case studies, was the exclusion of boys, whether real or perceived (see *Box 23* below). Another unintended effect was due to the limited alignment of vocational training with girls' needs and economic context, leading to challenges in finding employment and some increased risks for girls.

Box 23: Mercy Corps (Nepal) – Community perceptions of boys' exclusion

Project evaluations and the case study primary research highlighted that boys face important barriers to their education, linked to the need for income generation, migration to India, and low motivation to go to school. According to several case study respondents, boys wanted to take part in extra-curricular clubs but were not able to. 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. Several mentioned that boys' education outcomes have been worsening as a result. Additional detail is available in *Annex F* (Mercy Corps (Nepal) Case Study).

The CARE (Somalia) project Endline Evaluation 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 this led to resentment from boys in the classroom and a lack of motivation. 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) which reported a worsening situation for boys. Case study research stakeholders reported that boys wanted to be included in extra classes and extra-curricular clubs, and that girls had begun to academically outperform boys.

There were a small number of examples across the GEC-T Window of other unintended effects. 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 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (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)

5.4.2. LNGB Window

Positive unexpected or unintended results

Several projects supported more beneficiaries due to unexpectedly high demand, exceeding enrolment targets. In some cases, this led to tensions among those who could not be supported. Others reported that elements of their project continued outside of the scope of the GEC II Programme – expanding to new geographies or continuing (in part) after the end of the funding. For example, VSO (Nepal)'s inclusive education and mentoring model was adopted by local government.[30]

Negative unexpected results

There were tensions in some communities due to boys being excluded from project activities. The LNGB Window by definition aimed to work with the most marginalised girls. In some cases, girls were perceived to have been unfairly selected, as boys were also seen as marginalised and in need of support. This reportedly created difficulties as it created the impression that certain community members were being excluded, despite the community members' perception that these excluded individuals should receive project support.

> *"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."* (Implementing Partner KII)

It was partly for this reason that several projects adopted boys into 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.

[30] KII, implementing partner.

6. To what extent and how did the LNGB portfolio reach and benefit the most marginalised?

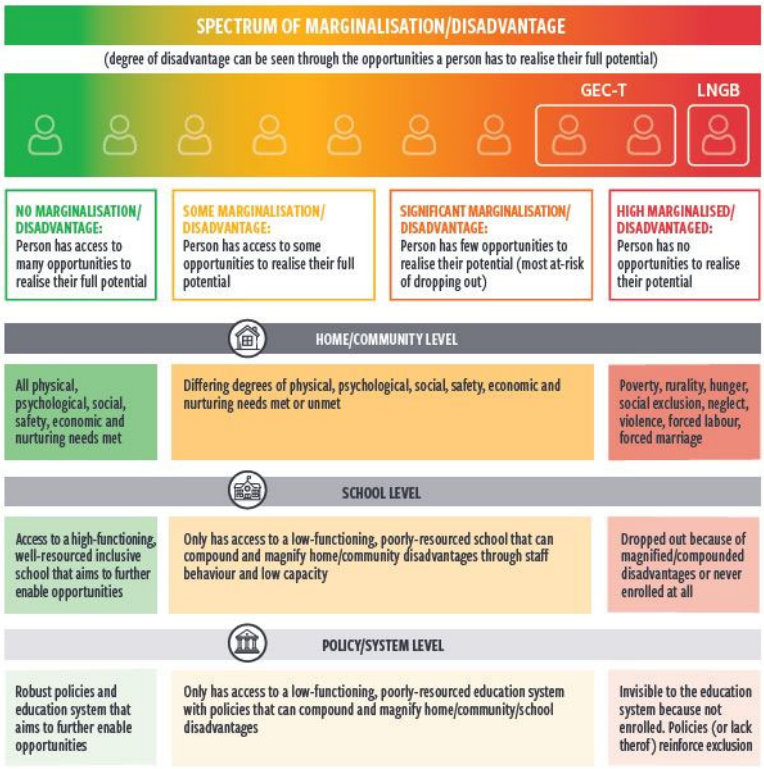
6.1 Introduction

This section assesses the extent to which and how the LNGB Window reached and benefited the *most* marginalised.

Whilst reaching marginalised girls was always a primary objective of GEC I, the FCDO recognised that the 'most' marginalised were not likely to be present in formal education systems (UKAID, 2024). Projects funded through the GEC-T Window continued to provide support to the same beneficiaries supported in GEC I who were mostly in school. Therefore, the GEC II LNGB Window was created "*to fund targeted 'catch up' programmes providing literacy, numeracy, and skills for life and work for highly marginalised girls, particularly adolescent girls that have already dropped out or never attended school*;" (FCDO, 2015, p.2) and to deliver the Headline Result (3) to:

> *"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."* (FCDO, 2015, p.3)

Figure 8: GEC II Spectrum of Marginalisation developed by the FM



GEC II recognised that its beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries (i.e., girls within the wider population) exist on a spectrum of marginalisation i.e., the "degree of disadvantage [that] can be seen through the opportunities a person has to realise their full potential" (UKAID, 2024, p.3) as illustrated in *Figure 8*. At the far end of the spectrum are the highly marginalised, or those with "no opportunity to realise their potential". (UKAID, 2024, p.3)

This evaluation sub-question was designed to assess the specific qualifier of "*most"* marginalised as set out in the GEC II Business Case. To that end, this section presents: (1) how the most marginalised were defined across the LNGB Window; (2) how they were identified; (3) the extent to which they were reached; and (4) what benefits they realised.

6.1. Defining the most marginalised girls in the LNGB Window

6.1.1 GEC I Business Case

The GEC I Business Case used a flexible conceptualisation of marginalisation defining marginalised girls as "those girls (age: 6 to 19) who have not been enrolled or have dropped out from school". (FCDO, 2015, p.4) Projects then had latitude to develop their own definitions of marginalisation. While this offered the opportunity for contextualisation, ultimately most projects "considered marginalised girls in their target areas as a homogenous group", with "relatively few projects providing a holistic, flexible approach to conceptualising marginalisation", in part due to limited baseline data to understand the beneficiary populations. (FCDO, 2015, p.4) Programme design mechanisms, such as payment-by-results also disincentivised targeting beneficiaries with the most challenging needs, which meant that GEC I fell short of systematically reaching the *most* marginalised. (FCDO, 2015, p.4)

GEC I girls were largely 'easier to reach' (i.e., "in-school girls facing mainly supply-side barriers") or 'harder to reach' (i.e., "facing supply and demand side barriers compared with girls regionally, nationally or internationally"), rather than the 'hardest to reach' (i.e., "Out of School (OOS) girls facing a complex set of barriers"). (FCDO, 2015, p.4)

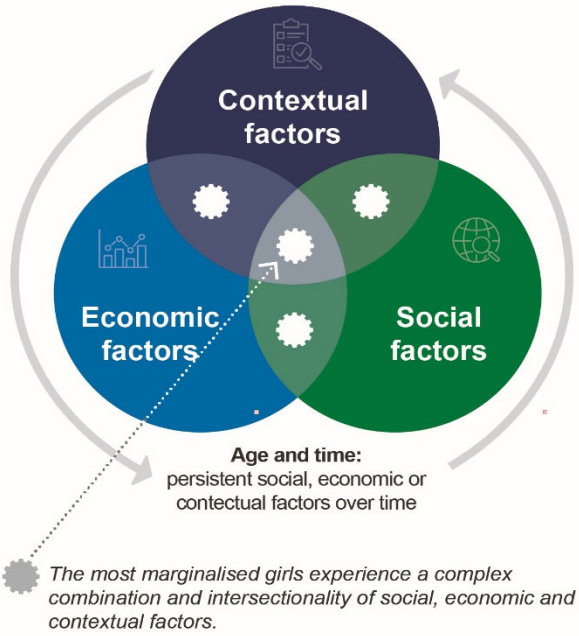
6.1.2 GEC II Business Case

GEC II learnt lessons from GEC I developing a more nuanced definition of intersectional marginalisation which framed the creation of the LNGB Window and guided projects to target marginalised sub-groups and out-of-school girls. Marginalisation exists on a spectrum and GEC II recognised that this spectrum is defined by intersectionality – the various factors of marginalisation that interact with each other and create experiences of marginalisation that are greater than the sum of their parts, as set out in the GEC II Business Case:

> *"Educational marginalisation can be understood as social, economic, contextual and time factors that interact, layer upon, and compound each other to exclude people from opportunities to learn"* (FCDO, 2015, p.1).

The intersectional conceptualisation of marginalisation set out in the GEC II Business Case (*Figure 9*) would, in theory, inform the identification of the most marginalised. By considering the full spectrum of marginalisation projects would systematically target and select the *most* marginalised, while designing support packages that would most effectively serve these beneficiaries' complex needs.

Figure 9: GEC II conceptualisation of



Source: GEC II Business Case, Annex A

6.1.3 LNGB Window

The GEC II Challenge Fund process for the LNGB Window set several parameters for beneficiary selection criteria, referring to girls' marginalisation as:

> *"Girls who experience complex marginalisation because of their circumstances These include orphans, married or young mothers, girls with a disability, nomadic girls, refugees, those from the poorest communities and those with no access to education".* (UKAID, 2016)

LNGB projects were not explicitly tasked with systematically targeting the most marginalised girls in target populations through an intersectional approach as set out in the GEC II Business Case. In response to the call for proposals, LNGB projects contextualised their definitions of marginalisation. Some projects used complex intersectional models in line with the model in the Business Case, while others used more bivariate 'models' to align with the Call for Funding's criteria above i.e., incorporating one or two marginalisation factors in identifying their marginalised target groups.

6.1.4 Project definitions of marginalisation

Projects developed contextualised definitions of marginalisation and targeted highly marginalised sub-groups which they successfully reached, supported and benefitted. LNGB projects largely recognised that beneficiaries' experience of complex marginalisation with respect to access to education would require tailored support initiatives that mitigate barriers to attending education and are aligned with the needs of specific marginalisation factors. To that end, LNGB projects employed a myriad of strategies (e.g., financial incentives, community engagement, inclusive support) to ensure that beneficiaries could participate in the projects and therefore ultimately benefit from the projects.

Several key definitions of marginalised girls were used by LNGB projects, reflecting the diversity of programming under the Window. Projects identified several types of marginalised girls, which in turn formed the key definitions of marginalisation employed. The most commonly appearing key definitions are described in *Table 7*.

Table 7: Key definitions of marginalised girls by LNGB projects

Type	Definition
Girls with disabilities	Girls with physical, cognitive, or mental health disabilities were particularly vulnerable due to the lack of appropriate infrastructure, assistive devices, and trained personnel. Mental health issues like anxiety and depression also posed additional challenges, further compounding their exclusion from education.
Married and mothering girls	Early marriage and motherhood forced many girls to leave school or prevented them from re-entering education. Caregiving responsibilities and societal expectations to prioritise family life often outweighed educational pursuits.
Economically disadvantaged girls	Poverty was a cross-cutting barrier, making it difficult for families to afford school fees, uniforms, and materials. In many cases, girls were required to work or manage domestic chores, preventing them from attending school regularly.
Girls in geographically isolated areas	Girls living in rural or remote areas faced challenges accessing education due to long distances to schools, unsafe travel routes, and a lack of transportation. For girls with disabilities, this barrier was compounded by the lack of accessible infrastructure in schools.
Girls from ethnic and linguistic minorities	Girls from minority ethnic or linguistic groups faced additional challenges in school, particularly when the language of instruction was not their mother tongue. This barrier was often coupled with social marginalisation.
Girls affected by harmful social norms	In communities where traditional gender roles and harmful practices like early marriage, FGM, and GBV prevailed, girls were significantly marginalised. These norms placed significant obstacles in the way of girls seeking education.
Orphans and vulnerable girls	Orphaned girls or those heading households were further marginalised due to the additional caregiving and economic burdens placed on them, often leaving them with little to no opportunity to pursue education.

6.2. Identifying the most marginalised girls

LNGB projects used a suite of methods to identify potential beneficiaries. The projects were largely community focused, oriented around specific physical or human geographical points (e.g., a specific village or specific ethnolinguistic group). As such, identification largely followed community-based identification mechanisms, including:

- Forming partnerships with community-based organisations that work with specific sub-groups (e.g., disabled people's organisations) (e.g., ActionAid (Kenya));
- Working through local community leaders who can support identification at the hyper-local level (i.e., telling project staff which houses specifically have marginalised girls) (e.g., IRC (Sierra Leone));
- Relatedly, working through local institutions such as churches and mosques to conduct identification and influence participation;
- Conducting community mapping exercises and transect walks (e.g., Street Child (Nepal));
- Conducting house-to-house visits combined with community-specific strategies (e.g., coffee or tea ceremonies);
- Coordinating with local administration or related authorities (e.g., community health workers) who had previously provided support to specific marginalised girls (e.g., ActionAid (Kenya)); and
- Employing members of the community directly as project staff or otherwise engaging community members in project-related volunteer capacities (e.g., as community advocates) (e.g., VSO (Nepal)), among other methods (*IE Study – Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling*).

Projects employed these mechanisms in a range of combinations or sequenced approach (i.e., the degree of complexity and systematic nature). For example, PIN (Nepal) used a multi-stage, complex approach to ensure comprehensiveness in identifying the beneficiary population (see below).

Box 24: PIN (Nepal): Beneficiary identification strategy

PIN (Nepal) used a systematic approach involving the following steps:

- In cooperation with the local government, prepare a list of all known Musahar settlements in target districts.
- Verify the list using official Central Bureau of Statistics data.
- Conduct outreach with community leaders to triangulate settlement lists and establish in-roads into the communities.
- Conduct a participatory social and resource mapping exercise within the listed communities.
- Conduct a household survey within the settlements identified through the mapping exercise, collecting data on education, livelihood, disability, etc.
- Recruit identified priority sub-groups, including young mothers, married girls, and girls with disabilities.

Key stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation and the *IE Study – Lessons Learned* reported that the identification strategies described above were reasonably effective in reaching the hard-to-reach target populations of marginalised girls. One academic/ practitioner interviewed for this evaluation summarised these approaches as:

> *"You had to have projects think really carefully about how to find people that are part of that community and gain trust/ credibility …There's a lot of really nuanced thoughtful work in order to even recruit or find those girls, gain the trust of communities so they can be allowed to be a part of your LNGB project. To me, there was a lot of that very thoughtful design and programming that occurred within those LNGB projects, so I speak very highly of those."* (KII, Practitioner)

Within these identification strategies, projects used specific tools to assess marginalisation. In conducting their outreach methods, projects had to use a set of tools to empirically assess potential beneficiaries' marginalisation against the target population criteria. For example, following FM guidance, projects used the Washington Group of questions as the disability identification mechanism; employing the Child Functioning Module for this purpose. Projects designed bespoke tools to assess marginalisation; for example, World Education Inc. (Ghana) developed a bespoke identification tool to disaggregate sub-groups along each vulnerability category.

Box 25: Learning from IE Study – Educating Girls with Disabilities in GEC II

The IE Study found that all 14 projects (at the time of writing) used the Washington Group/ UNICEF Module on Child Functioning. This screened girls on six functioning domains (seeing, hearing, walking, self-care, communication and remembering), as well as learning, concentrating, accepting change, controlling behaviour, making friends, anxiety, and depression.

These tools were administered after being translated and adapted to local language and context. However, projects encountered challenges with this adaptation. One respondent from World Education Inc. Ghana spoke on the topic thusly: "*another issue that we have with the Washington Group set of questions [is] that…you got to find appropriate words for certain impairments and often words used in local language are not really positive".*[31]

The identification methods projects used did not necessarily capture individuals with marginalisation factors that were either non-visible or not aligned with the specific individual key marginalisation criteria being targeted. For example, girls with non-visible disabilities were not necessarily identified by projects that did not use a systematic disability assessment mechanism (e.g., the Child Functioning Model).[32] Relatedly, girls with marginalisation factors that were socially stigmatised (e.g., disability in some contexts) or illegal (e.g., domestic labour in some contexts) were at risk of being 'hidden' by community members to identification mechanisms such as household visits, community consultations or comparisons with existing measurement data. Additionally, when projects specifically targeted a single key marginalisation criterion, they risked missing beneficiaries that had potentially greater degrees of marginalisation albeit on different axes. For example, as LNGB explicitly targeted gender as an axis of marginalisation, boys were excluded from most projects without the understanding (i.e., through formal assessment) as to whether specific boys were the *most* marginalised within a community.

There is limited evidence to suggest that girls' marginalisation was assessed against a *most* marginalised definition. To reach the *most* marginalised, rather than *more* marginalised, the FM would theoretically have had to start with a holistic definition of marginalisation and then assess potential beneficiaries against that definition, targeting the

[31] IE Study – Educating Girls with Disabilities pp 13.
[32] IE Study – Educating Girls with Disabilities

beneficiaries who met the definition's criteria. There is no evidence to suggest that this process occurred systematically across the LNGB Window; rather, it occurred irregularly depending on individual projects' designs. Instead, the evidence suggests that projects either:

a) Highlighted key marginalisation criteria (e.g., girls with disabilities) and then targeted those beneficiaries on that single marginalisation marker regardless of their degree of marginalisation on other markers; or
b) Recruited beneficiaries proximal to target programming locations or access pathways and then assessed their marginalisation after the fact.

In the latter case, this means that projects did not necessarily know the extent of marginalisation of their beneficiary population prior to beginning programming. In both instances, such methods would result in recruiting *more* marginalised beneficiaries rather than necessarily the *most* marginalised.

6.3. How and to what extent were the most marginalised reached across the LNGB portfolio?

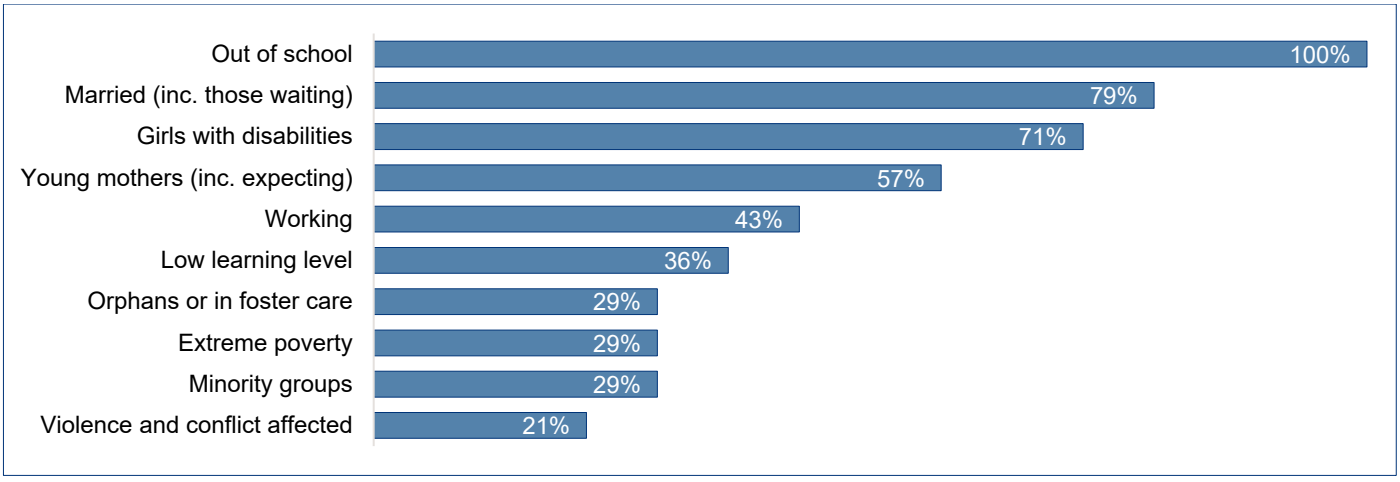
6.3.1. LNGB reach

Projects in the LNGB Window reached over 250,000 primary beneficiaries, defined as girls enrolled in LNGB programming (UKAID, 2024). This fell short of the GEC Business Case II Headline Result of 550,000. There is little information about why the LNGB Window did not achieve its headline result. However, in the KIIs for the *IE Study - Lessons Learned Study*, the FCDO explained the total reach targets for the LNGB had to be scaled back because the LNGB projects realised during implementation that they could not reach the number of marginalised girls that they had planned to support partly because of the cost and expertise needed to do so. For example, in the FGD for the *IE Study - Lessons Learned Study*, CARE (Somalia) explained they had to scale back their target numbers because they did not have the resources or expertise needed to support girls with severe disabilities in their communities.

6.3.2. LNGB project targeting

To reach marginalised sub-groups, LNGB projects used strong degrees of intentional and direct targeting. LNGB projects all targeted specific sub-groups of marginalised populations. *Figure 10*, below, indicates the percentage of LNGB projects that targeted specific types of marginalised populations corresponding to key definitions of marginalisation (*IE Study – Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling*, p.26). Project data (e.g., monitoring reports) suggests LNGB projects targeted marginalised sub-groups other than those depicted in *Figure 10* (e.g., specific religious groups); however, this evidence was not systematically collected across the portfolio. This lack of systematic collection of marginalisation data was also reflected in projects' results, which is discussed in the subsequent sub-section.

Figure 10: Types of marginalised populations targeted by LNGB projects



Source: *IE study – Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling* (pp.26)

Most of the LNGB project beneficiaries were marginalised against key definitions of marginalised girls, as an absolute proportion of the portfolio beneficiary population who were generally more marginalised relative to the GEC-T

Window. *Table 8*, below, details the sub-group populations within the portfolio's overall population for the GEC-T and LNGB Windows (Colquhoun et al., 2024).

Table 8: Summary characteristics of girls from LNGB and GEC-T Windows

Characteristic	LNGB	GEC-T	Variance
% girls out of school	100%	3%	+97%
Primary caregiver having completed no schooling at all	70%	37%	+43%
% girls who are mothers	23%	2%	+21%
% girls married	18%	2%	+16%
% girls from a household without enough clean water for use at home	14%	5%	+9%
% girls without enough money to pay costs of girls' school	64%	55%	+9%
% girls who are single orphans	18%	12%	+6%
% girls with a disability	14%	9%	+5%

6.3.3. Project initiatives enabling participation

Across the LNGB Window, projects were designed to use specific initiatives that would enable marginalised beneficiaries to participate in the projects, in recognition that beneficiaries experiencing complex marginalisation to obtaining education would require support that aligns with their specific marginalisation factors. For example, in this evaluation's case studies, this took the shape of:

- **Financial incentives** such as paying for lost income generation to encourage families to support their children to attend programme activities;
- **Logistical support** such as subsidising transportation costs or directly providing transportation to mitigate distance and safety barriers (e.g., ACTED (Pakistan));
- **Flexible programming** such as tailoring the language of instruction to specific cohorts' needs or changing the hours of instruction during the harvest period to allow for programming to take place around beneficiaries' lives (e.g. PLAN (Zimbabwe));
- **Tailored programming** such as altering the curriculum to be digestible to students with learning disabilities or providing interpreters (e.g., ActionAid (Kenya)); and,
- **Infrastructure adaptations** such as installing wheelchair ramps (e.g., PLAN (Zimbabwe)).

Outside of this direct tailored approach, projects recognised the importance of holistically addressing barriers to education according to specific forms of marginalisation; this is discussed further in *Section 3* (Intermediate Outcomes). Overall, due to the complex needs of the sub-populations targeted by LNGB projects, over half of the costs were on initiatives that did not involve direct learning provision.[33]

6.3.4. Challenges in reaching the most marginalised

Some projects were not able to fully support some highly marginalised groups they intended to target because the IP's capacities did not align with beneficiaries' needs. Supporting the most marginalised beneficiaries' costs more given the complexities associated with their specific needs.[34] Despite considerable effort across the LNGB Window, including specific design decisions and adaptations made to reach the most marginalised, projects encountered several barriers.[35] In some instances, these barriers proved insurmountable considering the project's scale and scope. Implementation factors are discussed fully in *Section 5.4*, where both previous studies and this evaluation's findings suggest that in at least four projects, organisational capacity directly impacted on the respective projects' abilities to reach the *most* marginalised, such as those with severe disabilities relative to the beneficiary population. Several projects attempted to reach individuals with complex and severe disabilities but simply did not have the capacity/ specialisation or resources to reach these individuals. For example, the *IE Study – Educating Girls with Disabilities* found that 25% of the schools in the Malawi population sample lacked educators who could use sign

[33] *IE Study – Value for Money of Educating the Most Marginalised GEC Girls*, pp 7.
[34] *IE Study - Lessons Learned Study*
[35] Barriers related to context and implementation factors across the portfolio are discussed in Sections 5.3 and 5.4, respectively.

language, despite the project explicitly targeting girls with disabilities.[36] IRC Sierra Leone also mapped several girls who fit the targeting criteria (i.e., girls with disabilities), but were unable to be supported by the project due to the severity of their respective disabilities. The *IE Study – Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling* found that ActionAid (Kenya) fell short of its goals for recruiting girls with disabilities by 22 percentage points (8% achieved against a 30% target) because "*the physical and human resources together with the remote contexts within which the project operated meant they did not have the capacity to support girls with severe disabilities*".[37]

Several respondents highlighted that the procurement process itself could have contributed to these challenges in reaching the most marginalised. As an FM Portfolio Adviser stated, "*A lot of projects initially over promised in order to win the contract. This was an issue related to the application and procurement process*."[38] Monitoring data further suggests that there may have been substantial limitations to projects' abilities to overcome challenges and reach the most marginalised. For example, several projects set goals for their reach of specific sub-populations (e.g., never having attended school) but fell short by upwards of a factor of five.[39]

6.3.5. Tracking marginalisation markers

Projects did not sufficiently consistently identify and track the markers of marginalisation for different sub-groups across intersections that would enable a disaggregated assessment of the costs and benefits of support. Projects did not measure markers in a consistent and comprehensive fashion, with individual projects selecting different sets of marginalisation markers and measuring them using different approaches. Consequently, as found in the *IE Study - Lessons Learned Study*, the projects used heterogenous approaches which made continued aggregation difficult.[40] Additionally, due to the lack of counterfactuals, while LNGB projects could demonstrate how specific sub-groups benefited from GEC II support, they could not demonstrate how the most marginalised within its beneficiary population benefited from GEC II support relative to those less marginalised within the same population. For example, in an in-depth study of three LNGB projects, the *IE Study – Value for Money of Educating the Most Marginalised Girls* (focusing on the LNGB Window) found that the "information collected on markers of marginalisation varied and in some cases was limited",[41] As such:

> *"This obscures an understanding of what happens to girls facing different challenges and whether there are systematic trends in the characteristics of the girls who drop out, learn less and fail to transition which might inform tailored responses."*[42]

6.4. Benefits realised by the most marginalised across the LNGB portfolio

LNGB beneficiaries widely realised both academic and non-academic benefits. As discussed in *Sections 2* and *3*, and previously in studies such as *IE Study - Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling*, LNGB beneficiaries realised considerable benefits from participating in LNGB projects.[43] As all LNGB beneficiaries experienced at least one form of marginalisation, this suggests that LNGB projects extended benefits to marginalised girls in the target communities. LNGB projects did not use comparison groups in its evaluations, and so there is no definitive evidence to establish attribution. However, it is highly plausible to assume that a substantive proportion of beneficiaries would not have enrolled in formal education and as such would not have achieved the substantial learning gains and benefits that were realised without the intervention of LNGB projects.

High attrition rates further complicated an accurate understanding of the benefits realised by the most marginalised. The evaluation lifecycle served as the core mechanism for which the LNGB Window assessed and understood the benefits realised by its beneficiaries. Attrition rates between baseline and endline were notably high across LNGB projects. Project monitoring suggests that beneficiaries with more acute experiences of marginalisation were more likely to drop out of project activities – for example, hyperinflation in Zimbabwe meant that PLAN (Zimbabwe) beneficiaries from more economically precarious positions had to find work to supplement lost household income. Therefore, any discussion of results realised by marginalised beneficiaries at project close excludes girls who may have been even more marginalised than those who were retained. Ultimately, it is likely the LNGB Window did not

[36] *IE Study – Educating Girls with Disabilities*, pp 36.
[37] *IE Study – Educating Girls with Disabilities*, pp 26.
[38] KII. Strategic Stakeholder.
[39] *IE Study - Educational Pathways Beyond Formal Schooling*
[40] *IE Study - Lessons Learned Study*, pp 36.
[41] *IE Study - Lessons Learned Study*, pp 28.
[42] *IE Study – Value for Money of Educating the Most Marginalised GEC Girls*, pp 37.
[43] *IE Study - Educational Pathways Beyond Formal Schooling*, pp 32.

fully measure or capture the benefits realised, or not realised, by the *most* marginalised within the beneficiary population.

6.5. Key lessons learned

- **If policy-makers want projects or programmes to use an intersectional approach to defining and targeting the most marginalised then they should explicitly require or prescribe the use of this approach, which can then be adapted to context.** GEC II rightly recognised that marginalisation is inherently intersectional; this reflects the current state of literature and practical programmatic experience. However, LNGB projects were not explicitly tasked with systematically targeting the most marginalised girls in target populations through an intersectional approach. The LNGB Phase II Call for Proposals set out that girls selected as beneficiaries by IPs should be:

  > *"Girls who experience complex marginalisation because of their circumstances. These include orphans, married or young mothers, girls with a disability, nomadic girls, refugees, those from the poorest communities and those with no access to education."* (UKAID, 2016b, p.2)

- **If policy-makers and projects want to reach the *most* marginalised, then they need to carefully consider competing priorities and the realities of achieving large-scale reach versus the cost, resources and expertise needed to reach the most marginalised.** LNGB project experience illustrates that reaching the most marginalised requires considerable resource allocation and specific specialised capabilities that may not lend themselves to achieving large scale beneficiary numbers, for example those achieved by GEC-T projects. Policy-makers and practitioners should be transparent about the realities of reaching the *most* marginalised when considering scale-related goals. Consequently, projects had to withdraw support from beneficiaries with complex needs due to these constraints. As one practitioner described, "*We had a big conversation with FCDO and asked, 'do you want numbers, quality, or the most marginalised?' because these don't all work hand in hand*."[44]
- **If projects need to robustly assess and measure benefits for the *most* marginalised, then Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems need consistently and comprehensively track relevant marginalisation markers.** Despite its focus on extending benefits to the most marginalised, LNGB projects did not consistently and comprehensively track relevant marginalisation markers. In turn, monitoring and evaluation evidence could not report results in a sufficiently granular manner to demonstrate all benefits realised by different marginalised sub-groups supported by LNGB projects.[45]
- **If projects need to reach the most marginalised, then an integrated approach to community engagement is critical.** The most marginalised beneficiaries are often 'hidden' and therefore the only way to successfully engage them is through deep connections to the specific community in which they live. Often the most marginalised beneficiaries are engaged in practices which are illegal or otherwise problematic from an outsiders' perspective, so there is limited willingness to engage with the 'outsider'. This can be mitigated through mobilising individuals from target communities directly or committing to a sustained socialisation or engagement period.

[44] KII. Strategic Stakeholder.
[45] *IE Study – Value for Money of Educating the Most Marginalised GEC Girls*

7. Conclusions

This section presents conclusions from the evaluation findings related to the GEC II outcomes, what worked well and why for each window, what worked less well and why for each window, contextual factors affecting both GEC-T and LNGB projects, implementation factors and unexpected and unintended results affecting each window. The structure differs from the main findings section (*Section 5*) as the conclusions focus on the most salient points arising from the findings. The main findings section presents analysis of what works by individual intervention types and by in each window integrating the assessment of what worked well and less well. In this section, conclusions represent the most prominent and notable findings from each window about what worked well and what worked less well depending on the weight of evidence relating to the assessment of different types of interventions in each window. As such, the conclusions for what works present what works well and less well in separate sections.

7.1. GEC outcomes

GEC II represents a substantial effort to assess learning and transition outcomes for marginalised and vulnerable girls, including out-of-school learners, girls with disabilities, married girls, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. While GEC II contributed to improvements in literacy, numeracy, and school transitions, the extent of the progress varied across the portfolio. Despite these mixed outcomes, the broader benefits for marginalised girls, such as an increased awareness of health and wellbeing, greater self-confidence, stronger sense of agency and ability to make decisions, and reductions in gender-based violence – represent important achievements. These outcomes highlight the value of continuing to invest in girls' education to ensure lasting, positive impacts on their lives and their communities.

Learning gains were uneven, and evaluation limitations hindered insights on intervention effectiveness

The period prior to Covid-19 disruptions (2017-2020) offers the most reliable insights in terms of learning gains delivered by GEC-T projects, as standardised assessments and difference-in-difference methodologies with a comparison group, showed statistically significant improvements primarily driven by a few large projects, with most GEC-T beneficiaries still falling short of international reading standards, averaging 45 words per minute at age 10.

A key limitation of the FM-guided evaluation approach was the inability to track interventions at the individual level. As evaluations were conducted at the project level, it was not possible to isolate and assess the distinct contribution of individual interventions. This limited the ability to generate insights on what specific approaches were most effective for different types of girls.

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted GEC-T project implementation and standard evaluation methods, leading to significant changes in the GEC II Logframe outcomes from 2021. During this year, mixed-methods evidence suggested positive trends, yet these were contradicted by findings from IE studies indicating substantial learning losses, largely attributed to Covid-19-related school closures and disruptions in educational support. Differences in project evaluation methodologies further complicated efforts to establish a clear pattern of impact.

In the most recent reporting period (2022-2024), many projects reported achieving their targets. However, for GEC-T projects, the absence of robust comparative data – due to the removal of comparison groups alongside PbR – limits the ability to determine the extent to which improvements can be attributed to project interventions. These variations in how learning was measured, combined with external factors, mean that strong conclusions about the overall learning impact of GEC-T projects cannot be drawn with confidence.

For the LNGB Window, strong evidence from previous IE studies suggest that the provision of literacy and numeracy support were highly effective and valued by adolescent girls, with many beneficiaries considering this support as the most important aspect of their participation on projects' activities. Learning gains in LNGB projects were substantial, with case studies estimating progress equivalent to three to five additional years of schooling. These findings are particularly compelling given that the targeted girls were out of school and predominantly from households whose parents had little to no formal education, suggesting that these learning gains would not have been achieved in the absence of the projects' interventions.

Transition outcomes were mixed, short-term in scope, and inflated by unaccounted high attrition rates

GEC II was not designed to measure long-term transitions, specifically sustained progress beyond the immediate transition from courses to the next phase of education or employment. Transition was only introduced as a portfolio-level outcome with quantitative metrics in 2022.

While some projects met or exceeded their targets, overall progress was mixed. During Reporting Period 1, prior to the Covid-19 disruptions (2017-2020), GEC-T projects were not required to set transition targets. Despite this, most projects targeted an estimated increase of 5-8% over the comparison group. While this approach provided a general benchmark for progress, it lacked a clear rationale, with many projects adopting similar target increases without a clear justification. Despite the lack of clarity around what constituted success, evidence from this period indicated that about a quarter of projects were successful in supporting girls' transitions through school. However, over a quarter of projects struggled to effectively measure and track transitions. Furthermore, attrition rates exceeding 40% at the portfolio level, often going unaccounted for, meant that the transition status of a significant proportion of girls remained unknown.

By 2021, while qualitative measures indicated positive trends in all projects, case study data revealed that many girls still faced substantial barriers to successfully transitioning to the next phase of their education or employment.

LNGB projects, which were primarily active after the Covid-19 disruptions, also experienced high attrition rates, with data from the IE studies showing similar attrition to GEC-T projects, around 40% across the LNGB Window. Like many GEC-T projects, LNGB projects also struggled to measure transition, opting instead to focus on other related indicators.

Most LNGB projects offered younger adolescents the option of formal schooling, while older adolescents were directed towards skills training or employment opportunities. Nearly a quarter of girls – both younger and older – experienced a mismatch between the transition pathways offered and their own preferences. Yet, the greatest impact was observed among younger girls, many of whom successfully transitioned into formal schooling. For older girls, skills training was concentrated in a limited number of vocations due to the wider economic environment and resulting in market saturation, Additionally, cultural barriers often acted as impediments to girls transitioning to work-related pathways. Achieving successful transitions into the workforce or entrepreneurship, proved challenging. Continued support from LNGB projects after girls graduated from the LNGB learning centre was identified as integral to girls' success in their transitions.

GEC II projects exceeded enrolment targets successfully engaging girls after school closures due to Covid-19

Following Covid-19, an enrolment outcome was introduced to track girls' engagement in project schools, learning centres and other activities. This measure did not account for participation, completion, or attrition, but focused on overall enrolment figures counted cumulatively over time. Over four years (2021–2024), both GEC-T and LNGB Windows exceeded annual targets, surpassing the cumulative GEC II target by 7%, reaching 1,696,719 marginalised girls. However, significant variations in enrolment figures were observed across projects, reflecting differences in project budgets, operational contexts, and the types of beneficiaries engaged.

Consistent improvements in self-esteem and community attitudes intermediate outcomes

GEC-T projects reported sustained improvements in girls' self-esteem, agency, and parental/ community attitudes towards girls' education. However, projects encountered more challenges in meeting targets related to financial barriers, safety, and attendance. Translating these intermediate changes into improvements in learning and transition proved difficult due to external barriers such as poor school infrastructure, unsupportive government policies, and persistent poverty. Additionally, some projects faced limitations in technical capacity, particularly in monitoring and providing continuous teacher support and mentoring.

7.2. What worked well and why

GEC-T Window

Small-group environments and girl-only spaces support effective learning and life skills

Projects that included small-group teaching within their design were effective at supporting girls' learning. Girls' Clubs, in particular, provided safe spaces for girls to participate in lessons and ask questions, but also to discuss sensitive issues around SRHR and menstrual health management. Small-group learning was effective for various reasons – primarily it was more feasible for teachers to apply new methodologies in smaller groups, compared to mainstream classes which were challenging due to the large number of students and lack of materials. These activities also offered spaces for girls to focus on their studies, with students supporting each other through peer mentoring. Girls from very marginalised backgrounds struggled to attend regularly without additional targeted efforts to support their inclusion.

Gender-responsive learning and life skills interventions support girls' self-esteem, which lead to stronger sense of agency and ability to make decisions

GEC-T projects overall had positive effects on girls' self-esteem and life skills. Building self-esteem supports their participation in the classroom and overall engagement and motivation. It supports girls' empowerment, their ability to make decisions about their future (including in delaying marriage), enhances their perceived value in the household and community, and ultimately, contributes to gender norm change enabling girls' education and learning.

Working with boys and men through targeted activities transform gender norms in and beyond schools

Projects aiming to include men and boys in specific activities, fostering positive masculinities and considering how gender dynamics affected boys' education, as well as raising their awareness about the challenges girls face, were more successful in supporting gender norm change and gaining community support.

Projects raised awareness about the importance of girls' education and gender norm change, but were ultimately constrained by economic barriers and entrenched gender norms

Awareness-raising at the household- and community-level led to improvements in attendance and supported transition in school. Household visits and other targeted awareness raising with caregivers, such as Family Dialogues, as well as community-level activities, such as theatre-based activities, were effective in raising awareness about harmful gender norms, including early marriage. Working with religious leaders was helpful in contexts with very strong traditional social norms. While attitudes improved, this was often not enough to support lasting change. Economic barriers continued to affect girls' education, which worsened during and after Covid-19. This included girls' underlying decisions about transition, for example, leading to higher rates of early marriage, and influencing household decisions regarding working in and outside the home for example.

LNGB Window

Successful community engagement proved to be the foundation for project success and legacy

Strong community engagement was critical to the success and sustainability of LNGB interventions. Trust-building with families, religious leaders, and local figures ensured long-term buy-in, improving girls' safety, learning environments, and project continuity. Meaningful involvement in governance structures strengthened oversight of travel safety, GBV risks, and early marriage prevention. Community-sourced educators enhanced attendance and the relevance of education provision by tailoring learning to local contexts; while communities played a vital role in identifying and retaining the most marginalised girls. As attitudes towards girls' education shifted, enrolment, confidence, and transitions to further education or vocational training increased. These changes reinforced the long-term sustainability of interventions and reduced resistance to future initiatives.

Improved self-esteem was one of the most valuable contributions of LNGB projects

Improving girls' self-esteem was one of the most enduring benefits of LNGB projects. Increased confidence stemmed from an awareness of rights, financial literacy, and vocational training, enabling girls to become active decision-makers in their households and communities. Empowerment initiatives helped them advocate for their education, reduce early marriage, and challenge gender norms. Applying newly learned skills, such as financial literacy, further reinforced their agency and standing. Menstrual hygiene education and SRHR training helped reduce stigma, improving attendance and engagement. These self-esteem gains had cascading effects, fostering autonomy and enabling girls to act as role models, driving long-term change and gender equity.

Enhanced teaching quality improved learning outcomes

Projects that invested in high-quality teacher training, peer mentoring, and ongoing coaching demonstrated notable improvements in learning outcomes. Effective teaching approaches, such as subject-specific training in literacy and numeracy using evidence-based methodologies, strengthened pedagogical skills and classroom engagement. Where projects embedded mechanisms for sustained professional development, such as educator learning circles and structured coaching, teachers retained and applied new techniques more consistently. Additionally, in contexts where educators received support in transitioning to new curricula (such as English as a medium of instruction), students benefited from improved comprehension and engagement.

Infrastructure and resource investments were key determinants of participation and retention

Improved learning environments played a crucial role in increasing attendance and sustaining participation, particularly for girls facing multiple barriers to education. Investments in gender-sensitive sanitation facilities, such as segregated washrooms and menstrual hygiene support, significantly reduced absenteeism among adolescent girls. Similarly, projects that provided essential learning materials like books and assistive devices for students with disabilities, saw enhanced classroom engagement and reduced dropout rates. Equally, projects that provided

inadequate WASH facilities, had a lack of safe drinking water or poorly maintained infrastructure, led to class cancellations, disrupted learning schedules and contributed to lower attendance.

Comprehensive vocational training aligned with the local contexts created pathways to economic independence

For many projects, vocational training initiatives proved to be highly effective in equipping girls with marketable skills, enhancing their economic independence and self-sufficiency. Projects that aligned training with local economic opportunities such as tailoring, agriculture, and catering enabled participants to establish small businesses or secure employment. Where projects integrated financial literacy and entrepreneurship training alongside vocational skills, girls were better prepared to manage their own income and plan for their futures. Additionally, partnerships with local businesses and master craftsmen enhanced practical learning, making the training more relevant and impactful.

7.3. What worked less well and why

GEC-T Window

Teachers required further ongoing support, mentorship, and greater incentives to implement the methodological improvements introduced by projects

Teachers faced considerable challenges in implementing new methods and strategies introduced by GEC-T projects. The training provided was, in some cases, insufficient to address these challenges and teachers would have needed more feedback and support, as well as opportunities to put in practice what they learned. In a context of under-paid teachers, projects were not always able to provide sufficient incentives for teachers to commit to implementing new methodologies on a regular basis.

LNGB Window

Ensuring lasting impact through educator support

While educator training was a central component of many LNGB projects, its effectiveness was occasionally diminished by inconsistent follow-up support and a lack of continued mentoring. Without sustained engagement, educators sometimes reverted to pre-training practices or felt isolated and unsupported, which reduced morale and trust in the project.

Addressing educator retention to sustain learning gains

The retention of educators was another major challenge, particularly in projects that relied heavily on volunteers or community-based staff. Many educators left once better-paid opportunities arose, or due to implementation issues such as delayed salaries, a lack of resources, or the closure of learning centres. These disruptions eroded trust in the project and weakened educational continuity, highlighting the importance of securing adequate incentives and retention strategies for educators.

Strengthening training pathways for sustainable transitions

Transition pathways for LNGB beneficiaries were often undermined by implementation gaps, including inadequate training resources and courses that were too short to enable a comprehensive understanding of a particular skill. In many cases, the lack of formal certification meant that girls could not secure employment in the formal sector, limiting the long-term impact of skills training.

Strengthening caregiver and community engagement

While many LNGB projects sought to engage caregivers and communities in supporting girls' education, the depth and consistency of this engagement varied widely. In some contexts, interventions to change community attitudes towards girls' education were limited or not sustained, reducing their long-term effectiveness. Without strong caregiver buy-in, many girls struggled to sustain participation, particularly when household economic pressures increased.

7.4. Contextual factors affecting both GEC-T and LNGB projects

Covid-19 demonstrated the fragility of education access and pushed girls out of education

The Covid-19 pandemic severely disrupted both GEC-T and LNGB projects, disproportionately affecting the most marginalised girls. School closures, economic hardship, and an increase in domestic responsibilities pushed many girls out of education, with some never returning. While projects attempted to mitigate learning loss through remote learning and small-group instruction, digital learning alternatives often failed due to poor infrastructure, limited

technology access, and low digital literacy among both educators and learners. Despite the projects' interventions, Covid-19 ultimately heightened already existing barriers to girls' education and had long-term effects on household poverty and existing inequalities.

Economic barriers significantly undermined retention and learning outcomes

Macro-economic instability, hyperinflation, and widespread poverty presented significant challenges for all projects. Many families, already facing financial hardship, withdrew their daughters from education to prioritise immediate survival needs, with girls pushed into domestic work or early marriage. The cost of learning materials, transportation, and hidden school fees created additional barriers, despite interventions such as financial literacy training and small-scale livelihood support. While some projects successfully integrated economic empowerment initiatives, such as micro-loans and vocational training, many lacked strong linkages to local job markets, limiting their effectiveness.

Conflict, security, and safety a persistent threat to attendance and educational continuity

Armed conflict, political instability, and community violence severely disrupted learning in several project locations, making it difficult for girls to access education safely. In conflict-affected areas, school closures, displacement, and security risks forced projects to pivot to informal or mobile learning models. While some initiatives like home-based learning and community-led safety monitoring helped sustain engagement, ongoing insecurity meant that many girls remained at risk of dropping out.

Natural disasters and weather events disrupted learning and strained resources

Floods, droughts, and extreme weather events repeatedly disrupted interventions, particularly in regions with weak infrastructure. Damage to roads, bridges, and school buildings made attendance difficult, while food insecurity in drought-affected areas exacerbated economic vulnerability. Projects that incorporated disaster preparedness strategies such as temporary learning spaces and emergency response funds proved more resilient, but overall, natural disasters underlined the vulnerability of education systems to external shocks.

The learning environment, infrastructural issues and underinvestment continued to pose challenges that projects were not able to overcome

GEC-T projects made important investments in the learning environment, and there were positive changes in terms of gender-responsive infrastructure, such as WASH facilities, improved classroom quality and, in some cases, more inclusive school environments. Despite this, project results were constrained by significant infrastructural and environmental barriers in school, which interventions were not able to fully address and would have required considerable large-scale support and further government prioritisation.

7.5. Implementation factors

GEC-T Window

Partnering with national and local governments helps drive more sustainable and longer-term changes, and helped overcome challenges linked to implementation

Projects that aligned with government policy and priorities and set up key partnerships with relevant government agencies, both at national and local level, proved more effective and sustainable. Advocacy and close collaboration led to the adoption of specific learning modules and strategies developed by projects.

Regular project monitoring helped adapt interventions and deliver results, but the level of reporting requirements posed challenges

Tailored capacity building for monitoring and evaluation supported efforts to generate and use evidence, and monitoring systems were in some cases effective at supporting adaptive management systems. Despite the capacity building provided, overall M&E reporting requirements were time consuming and burdensome, particularly in the context of existing staff capacity constraints and especially following budget reductions due to changes in the UK government aid budget.

LNGB Window

Leveraging strong partnerships to enhance impact

Effective partnerships were a key driver of success across LNGB projects, enabling the integration of specialist expertise, resource mobilisation, and localised knowledge. Collaborations with education authorities improved curriculum alignment and transition pathways, while partnerships with community-based organisations helped build trust and ensure culturally sensitive implementation. In crisis settings, partnerships with humanitarian agencies

facilitated the delivery of emergency education and essential services. Where partnerships were well-structured and actively maintained, they strengthened project sustainability and expanded the reach of interventions. However, in some cases, weak or misaligned partnerships created inefficiencies, highlighting the need for early and sustained coordination with relevant stakeholders.

Poor monitoring processes undermined effectiveness

Weak monitoring systems were a significant barrier to project effectiveness, leading to delays, inefficiencies, and missed opportunities for adaptation. In some cases, rigid approval processes slowed down critical decisions, limiting the responsiveness of projects to emerging challenges, such as high dropout rates or shifting contextual factors. Monitoring frameworks varied in quality, with some projects struggling to collect reliable, disaggregated data to track progress and inform adjustments. Where strong monitoring mechanisms were in place, projects were better able to tailor interventions, demonstrating the critical role of data-driven decision-making in successful implementation.

Staffing shortages and high turnover disrupted learning

Limited staff capacity and high turnover among educators and project personnel created significant challenges, particularly in remote and crisis-affected areas; an issue compounded by projects' inability to anticipate and address this. Many LNGB projects relied on volunteer educators or community-based facilitators, leading to inconsistent education delivery when staff left for better opportunities. Burnout, insufficient training, and logistical difficulties further exacerbated retention issues. Some projects mitigated these challenges through structured mentorship and professional development initiatives, but overall, staff shortages weakened continuity and reduced the long-term impact of interventions.

Extending project timelines to drive systemic change

The relatively short duration of many LNGB projects meant that there was limited time to effect sustainable shifts in gender norms, community perceptions, or institutional practices. Behavioural and attitudinal changes towards girls' education require long-term engagement, but many projects operated on short cycles, leading to challenges in embedding sustainable improvements. This was particularly evident where projects lacked the time or resources to follow-up and embed vocational skills and improvements in learning outcomes.

7.6. Unexpected and unintended results

GEC-T Window

Challenges in transition to employment reflect limited alignment with girls' economic environments

Girls would have required more hands-on support and tailored guidance to transition to employment and entrepreneurship, including access to start-up capital and tailored skills development. Where projects were not aligned with girls' economic contexts, employment rates were particularly low and in one case there were heightened risks of GBV due to movement to other areas to find employment. The lack of contextual analysis posed a considerable barrier to the effectiveness of this type of intervention.

Projects could have better anticipated the impact of a girls-only education project on communities

The most critical unexpected result related to boys in project communities. Some GEC-T projects did not anticipate the pushback from communities due to the limited engagement of boys, leading to some resentment among boys and their families. A thorough gender analysis and effective communication prior to project implementation could have mitigated these challenges.

LNGB Window

Unanticipated demand from non-beneficiaries expanded project reach

Many LNGB projects experienced higher-than-expected demand from community members outside their original target groups, reflecting both the perceived value of the interventions and the scale of unmet educational needs. While this extended the project's impact beyond its intended scope, it also created challenges, as resources were often insufficient to accommodate additional participants. The heightened demand demonstrated the effectiveness of the interventions but also illustrated the need for clearer inclusion strategies and scalable models to manage community expectations.

Projects did not anticipate pressure from communities to include additional demographic groups

In some communities, the exclusive focus on girls' education created tensions, with parents and local leaders questioning why boys were excluded – particularly where boys also faced educational marginalisation. This led to

adaptations in some projects, where boys were incorporated into literacy and numeracy activities alongside girls. While this helped maintain community support, it also diverted resources away from the intended focus on girls, raising challenges in maintaining the original project scope. The need to adjust programming in response to community feedback highlights the importance of managing expectations and reinforcing the rationale for gender-focused interventions, while also ensuring flexibility to address broader educational inequalities.

7.7. To what extent and how did the LNGB portfolio reach and benefit the most marginalised

LNGB's design successfully facilitated reaching highly marginalised beneficiaries, particularly ensuring the inclusion of traditionally excluded sub-populations

LNGB projects targeted and reached specific sub-groups of highly marginalised populations. LNGB projects intentionally engaged IPs that had identified specific marginalised communities while targeting out-of-school sub-groups (in contrast to the GEC-T Window). Projects developed contextualised definitions of marginalisation and targeted highly marginalised sub-groups which they in-turn successfully reached, supported and benefited. Projects built into their approach support tailored to specific sub-groups' needs (although this was not sufficient at times; see below) with respect to mitigating barriers to obtaining education. Ultimately, this resulted in LNGB projects reaching beneficiaries who were substantively more marginalised across several markers compared to beneficiaries supported by the GEC-T Window. To reach these communities, such as girls from the Musahar community in Nepal and the Apostolic community in Zimbabwe, LNGB projects used strong intentional and direct targeting strategies.

LNGB projects successfully engaged communities as a critical driver for effective project delivery

LNGB projects worked with highly marginalised girls, that are often 'hidden' within their respective communities. Within this population, projects targeted specific sub-groups (e.g., girls with disabilities or domestic labourers) that were often invisible. The LNGB Window was successful in reaching these populations because its projects employed concentrated, meaningful community engagement strategies to build trust with communities and lessen communities' perceptions of projects as the 'other' or 'outsider'. Some projects had to adapt their engagement strategies (e.g., by involving community members directly in project delivery) to achieve the access needed to provide support to marginalised girls.

Programme M&E systems need to consistently and comprehensively track relevant marginalisation markers to robustly assess and measure benefits for the most marginalised

Despite its focus on extending benefits to the most marginalised, LNGB projects did not consistently and comprehensively track relevant marginalisation markers. Project monitoring systems and evaluation reports did not consistently report results in a sufficiently granular manner to demonstrate all the benefits realised by different marginalised sub-groups.

LNGB Window was not able to deliver its headline target for reaching highly marginalised girls as some projects were not able to support some beneficiaries with highly complex needs

The LNGB Window achieved approximately 50% of its Headline Result (3) for beneficiaries reached, reaching approximately 250,000 beneficiaries against the target of "at least 500,000 highly marginalised adolescent girls". (FCDO, 2015, p.3). This shortcoming was driven by several factors, in particular projects under-estimating the level of resources and type of expertise required to reach and benefit highly marginalised groups. Projects did not fully consider the realities of providing support to highly marginalised girls that required considerably more resources and different types of expertise compared to less marginalised girls. Consequently, several LNGB projects had to withdraw support from some beneficiaries due to a lack of capacity and resources that would have been needed.

7.8. GEC-T and LNGB commonalities and differences

These conclusions provide a synthesis of what worked well and less well across both the GEC II portfolio structured by the commonalties and differences found across the GEC-T and LNGB Windows.

Key commonalties

Innovations in teaching and learning approaches

Both the GEC-T and LNGB Windows incorporated adaptive teaching strategies, including child-centred pedagogy, small-group learning, and mentoring. These methods improved cognitive and non-cognitive skills for girls, particularly those experiencing substantial learning gaps. The use of flexible, girl-centred teaching models demonstrated success

across diverse contexts, reinforcing the effectiveness of tailored instructional approaches in improving learning outcomes.

Community engagement as a catalyst for change

Both LNGB and GEC-T projects found that meaningful community engagement was key to shifting attitudes towards girls' education. Involving religious leaders, parents, and local groups helped normalise education for girls and reduce resistance, particularly in conservative settings. Participatory models, such as School Management Committees and mother-daughter clubs, encouraged local ownership, increasing the likelihood of sustained support. While cultural barriers persisted in some areas, context-sensitive engagement strategies successfully influenced attitudes, demonstrating the importance of community buy-in for long-term impact.

Building girls' self-esteem and agency

Targeted initiatives across both windows strengthened girls' confidence, leadership skills, and ability to advocate for their education. Safe spaces like Girls' Clubs, mentorship, and life skills training empowered girls to challenge restrictive norms and make informed decisions about their futures. Vocational training further enhanced self-reliance, reinforcing aspirations beyond traditional gender roles.

Challenges in measuring outcomes and tracking transitions

Both windows encountered significant challenges in assessing learning gains and tracking transition outcomes due to inconsistencies in assessment methodologies, high levels of mobility among girls, and socio-economic pressures that affected retention. Attrition rates were particularly high among more marginalised girls, making long-term impact assessments difficult. Measuring economic and employability outcomes for girls who did not transition into formal education was a shared challenge, pointing to the need for more robust longitudinal tracking systems.

Barriers to transition into employment and vocational pathways

Across both windows, economic conditions, social norms, and insufficient follow-up support created barriers to successful transitions into employment or vocational education. Limited start-up capital, lack of market-relevant skills, and restrictive gender norms often curtailed economic opportunities for project beneficiaries. These common constraints suggest that more integrated economic empowerment strategies, including financial support and mentorship, are critical for ensuring long-term economic independence for girls.

Key differences

Scale and level of Government engagement

GEC-T projects engaged extensively with national and local governments, leveraging policy alignment to integrate interventions into formal education strategies. This provided pathways for institutionalisation but sometimes limited adaptability at the grassroots level. LNGB projects, in contrast, primarily worked with local NGOs and community groups, facilitating grassroots mobilisation but often lacking the policy leverage necessary for long-term systemic change, partly as it was less of a focus for the LNGB Window. The contrast illustrates a trade-off between localised responsiveness and national-level sustainability.

Impact of different educator models on teaching quality

LNGB projects relied heavily on community educators and volunteer facilitators to deliver learning, which allowed for strong local engagement and cost-effective delivery. In some cases, such as peer-to-peer educator models, this approach enhanced relatability and trust between educators and students. However, challenges such as high turnover, inconsistent training, and lack of formal recognition affected teaching quality and continuity. By contrast, GEC-T projects involving training and supporting salaried teachers working in government schools, ensured a more structured approach to improving teaching quality. This resulted in more consistent delivery of the curriculum and greater alignment with national education policies but limited the ability to provide intensive support for girls needing remedial education. The differences in educator models highlight the trade-offs between community-led approaches that prioritise access and adaptability and school-based approaches that ensure stability and integration into the formal education system.

Effectiveness of transition support for girls moving beyond basic education

LNGB projects placed a stronger emphasis on vocational and alternative learning pathways, recognising that many of their target girls would not re-enter formal schooling. While vocational training and life skills programmes helped some girls build financial independence, challenges such as limited market relevance of skills, lack of start-up capital, and weak links to employment hindered long-term impact. In contrast, GEC-T projects, operating within formal education settings, focused more on academic progression and transition to secondary school. However, they often struggled to support girls who dropped out or failed to meet transition criteria, with limited mechanisms to provide alternative pathways. This contrast highlights that while LNGB's flexible transition models helped engage highly marginalised

girls, stronger linkages to economic and employment opportunities were needed to ensure long-term sustainability, while GEC-T projects required greater flexibility to support girls at risk of dropping out of formal education.

8. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the study's conclusions and are principally directed to the FCDO to apply to current and future programming, noting that there is no successor programme to the GEC II.

Delivering learning and transition outcomes

1. **The FCDO should continue to target highly marginalised girls despite the high costs of reaching and supporting them.** Targeting highly marginalised girls has shown to deliver large learning gains (especially girls who are out of school and/or have never been to school), multiple benefits, and high returns on investment despite high beneficiary unit costs.

2. **To ensure successful transitions, employment/ income generating training should be carefully tailored to the local market.** Conducting analysis of the economic environment at the start of a programme helps avoid graduates trying to enter vocations and sectors offering limited employment, work or income-generating opportunities.

Methodology

3. **Transition should be clearly defined so that projects can collect data to effectively track girls after course completion.** Tracking girls after graduating from project activities enabled projects to assess the overall success of interventions focused on supporting transition into employment and income-generating activities in particular; and helped inform ongoing adaptation to intervention designs.

4. **Intermediate outcome data should be clearly linked to outcome data to enable a robust assessment of what works.** Linking intermediate outcome data – for example, measuring improvements in teaching, girls' empowerment, and attendance – to learning and transition outcome data through standardised metrics would enable a more robust assessment of the effects and effectiveness of different types of interventions and reported intermediate outcomes.

What works

5. **Community engagement should continue to be an integral part of girls' education interventions.** Projects successfully achieved attitudinal and gender norm changes through multi-faceted approaches, engaging different types of stakeholders within communities (such as with religious leaders, parents, and the wider community), which led to greater integration and ownership of project activities and their outcomes.

6. **Programmes should continue to support improvements in girls' self-esteem as a means of enhancing agency and their ability to engage in the classroom and make decisions outside school.** Interventions such as peer mentoring and Girls' Clubs were found to improve self-esteem and created the necessary preconditions for effective learning.

7. **Training of trainers' models for cascading teacher professional development should be accompanied by rigorous monitoring to inform adaptation and improvements as soon as they are needed.** Rigorous monitoring helps ensure that teachers have the necessary support (such as through mentoring and coaching), feedback and resources to apply new teaching methods into practice.

8. **Programmes should consider investing in complementary activities that provide safe, well-equipped, and inclusive learning environments capable of supporting improvements in learning outcomes.** Providing and maintaining gender-responsive WASH facilities, safe drinking water, and accessible infrastructure, while also ensuring the consistent provision of essential learning materials, such as textbooks and assistive devices, were found to be critical to improving attendance, engagement, retention and learning among marginalised girls in both GEC-T and LNGB Windows.

9. **Programmes should seek to incorporate small group learning/ remedial study initiatives, where resources and conditions allow, as a means of engaging and supporting marginalised girls in learning.** Small group learning through interventions such as Girls' Clubs, homework clubs, and remedial classes were found to be highly effective in improving learning and attendance, particularly among highly marginalised girls.

10. **Programmes should remain flexible and adaptable to successfully respond to a wide range of contextual factors, especially in fragile and conflict-affected environments.** Programmes with the organisational

capacity and management processes (including robust M&E systems) were better able to adapt their designs and budgets to minimise the negative impact of contextual factors.

11. **Girls' education programmes should conduct comprehensive gender analyses during the design phase, where resources allow, to assess the potential impact on boys and the wider community.** Gender analysis would ensure community buy-in and minimise potential pushback and tensions, and inform projects' approaches to raising awareness among men and boys on the importance of educating girls and involving them as agents of change while being cognisant of the gendered challenges that boys face.

12. **The FCDO and programmes should systematically assess the cost of reaching and supporting highly marginalised sub-groups with complex intersecting needs when determining reach and beneficiary targets.** This should include collecting data on beneficiaries' marginalisation markers to enable ongoing assessments of the costs and benefits realised by different sub-groups over the life of the programme.

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