

## Girls' Education Challenge Phase II – Lessons Learned

### Lessons from 12 years of evaluation and learning on the GEC

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### Recommendations



**At the design stage, the FCDO and Implementing Partners should ensure that programme evaluation and learning strategies are driven by clearly articulated stakeholder use and influence plans.** These should identify which stakeholders are intended to use the evidence and insights generated from evaluation and learning activities at project, programme and strategic levels and how. This ensures that the added value of monitoring and evaluation at project and programme levels justifies the scale of the investment and potential associated opportunity costs and trade-offs.



**At the design stage, the potential benefits of investing in longitudinal impact studies for large-scale multi-year education programmes should be considered.** These studies can provide long-term insights into how education and intersecting inequalities affect the lives of marginalised girls and children as they progress through adolescence and into adulthood – including their transition pathways within schooling, and beyond education into work.



**When developing a programme's evaluation and learning strategy, a feasibility assessment should be undertaken to ensure that programme partners have the resources and expertise needed to implement them.** This should be completed during the programme Inception Phase with adequate time and resources dedicated to the assessment to ensure that evaluation and learning plans are realistic and deliverable and meet the evidence needs of the funder and wider stakeholder audiences.



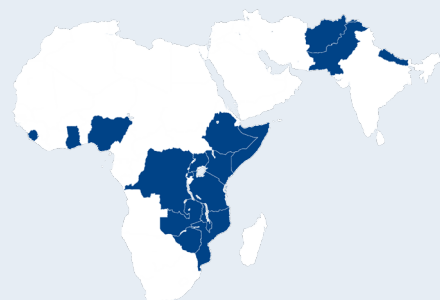
**All education programmes that explicitly aim to inform and influence education programming and policy should set out key performance and measurement metrics for doing so.** The dissemination and facilitation of evidence uptake needs to be included in performance indicators for programmes, to ensure that the benefits of evaluation and learning are realised, including spillover benefits across the wider education sector.

*Image Front Cover: Children sitting at desk paying attention in class, Kathmandu, Nepal - Shutterstock*

## Background

The Girls' Education Challenge Phase II was an eight-year (2017-2025), £500m programme funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) that aimed to improve the learning opportunities and outcomes of over 1.6 million girls around the world. The programme spanned 17 countries and included 41 projects delivered through two funding windows: the Girls' Education Challenge – Transition (GEC-T) Window with 27 projects, and the Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) Window with 14 projects that targeted the most marginalised out-of-school girls.

Phase I of the GEC was a six-year (2012 to 2017), £355m programme which aimed to improve the education outcomes of up to one million marginalised girls through three funding windows. Projects received funding to deliver approaches that improve girls' education at scale.





# Findings

- The GEC's evaluation and learning approach was multi-tiered, involving implementing partners, external evaluators, a fund manager, and an independent evaluation team.
- The Phase I programme and project evaluations were ambitious in scope, focusing primarily on quantitative evaluation for accountability purposes. In particular, project learning assessment data were used to determine whether projects had met their results targets and whether payments associated with these results could be made.
- The evaluations demonstrated that measuring learning outcomes is feasible even in challenging contexts. However, some implementing partners and the fund manager identified the high cost and burden of commissioning and delivering such rigorous project evaluations.
- In Phase II, the GEC's evidence and learning priorities shifted towards exploring drivers and barriers that influence learning outcomes. This helped stakeholders understand what worked and how for the purpose of learning how to improve programming both within the GEC and more widely.
- The priority for quantitative analysis was to collect data at the project level. It was not always straightforward to analyse these data in ways that were comparable across projects and geographies. The Covid-19 pandemic reinforced this shift, as conducting learning assessments was not possible.
- Learning from Phase I, the fund manager developed a learning strategy, appointed a learning lead, and developed learning resources and dissemination channels, which successfully increased the internal and external uptake and use of learning in Phase II.

Image: Girls at school in Harare Zimbabwe, reading maths textbook inside a classroom - Shutterstock



# Lessons and discussion

- Ambitious and demanding monitoring, evaluation, and learning mechanisms require time for design and planning, and consideration of their appropriateness to a programme's objectives.
- It is important for large-scale global programmes to identify evidence and learning priorities from the start and consider trade-offs between standardised evaluation approaches that support aggregation and learning and more adaptable project-specific evaluation designs.
- Large, multi-country, long-term programmes with a longitudinal evaluation design can assess and demonstrate the long-term effects of improved education on girls' lives across a range of contexts.
- The GEC demonstrated the benefit of dedicated learning resources and a formal learning strategy to support the dissemination and uptake of lessons.
- Programmes aiming to influence policy need dedicated resources for learning and dissemination, a stakeholder use and influence plan, and a monitoring and evaluation plan to assess the uptake of evidence.
- The GEC demonstrated that it is possible to measure learning outcomes on a large scale across a wide range of educational, cultural, and geographic contexts.

Learning from the GEC highlights the importance of defining how a programme aims to influence broader education policy and programming and including these objectives in the evaluation and learning approach. The design of evaluation and learning strategies needs to consider conflict sensitivity and social inclusion for programmes that address marginalisation, and the potential tension between incentivising outcomes and supporting innovation, which has the potential for failure.

Learning from the GEC emphasises the need to consider the feasibility of implementing an evaluation and learning approach during a programme's Inception Phase, including the resources required and the capacity of implementing partners. This process can ensure that the approach is proportionate and deliverable without over-burdening stakeholders. Programmes also need to consider the accessibility of evaluation and learning products to maximise their uptake and use.



Image: Young children studying in school in Nepal - Shutterstock

## For more information

This research was carried out by the Independent Evaluation Team of the Girls' Education Challenge Fund Programme. The Independent Evaluation Team is a consortium of partners led by Tetra Tech International Development together with the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre at the University of Cambridge and Fab Inc.

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This policy brief is a summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations from the complete evaluation report which is available at: <https://intdev.tetratecheurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/GEC-II-IE-Lessons-Learned-Study-FINAL.pdf>