



MARCH 2021

COUNTRY BRIEFING: DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO



GEC-T

1 project

62,720 target beneficiaries

The GEC has one GEC-T project in DRC, REALISE, which focuses on the transition of girls between basic and secondary education.

REALISE has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis with nation-wide school closures since March 2020.¹ This has been compounded by an economic downturn and renewed conflict, particularly in Ituri. A government COVID-19 directive has prohibited activities taking place with children during school closures, preventing direct engagement with girls. During the quarter July to September 2020, the project supported 10,042 girls and kept in touch with them through the distribution of reading materials and distance learning packs; meetings with key stakeholders, parents and caregiver sessions; training of teachers and community-based child networks (called RECOPE networks); support for Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) groups; continued access to hotline numbers for advice and supports; and radio transmissions.

PROJECT NAME	WINDOW	LEAD PARTNER	PROJECT START DATE	PROJECT CLOSE DATE
REALISE – 'Success and Fulfilment Through Learning'	GEC-T	Save the Children Fund	1 August 2017	31 Oct 2021

Challenges

During the period of prolonged school closure, girls have had limited opportunities to continue with formal education. Girls have limited access to the technologies² required to be able to access the distance learning programmes that have been put in place by the national government. An external rapid assessment provided information about girls' learning as well as barriers to returning to school for both teachers and students which informed project decisions on urgent and necessary adaptations. Key findings indicate that most cohort girls had limited learning opportunities from March, and it is anticipated that there has been a loss of key reading and numeracy skills during this timeframe due to lack of practice: 31.3% of caretakers reported that their girls did not engage in any learning retention activities (e.g. reading books, doing maths problems) since schools closed in March, and the vast majority³ of girls did not have access to informal teaching or tutoring. Reported levels of chore burden have increased: the proportion of girls who were reported to be doing chores four to six hours of the day has doubled since the baseline, and there are now a small number of girls who were reported to be doing chores for six to eight hours. This indicates that this barrier to retention is becoming even more prevalent and severe. The girls are now at heightened risk of dropping out of school permanently. A risk the project is working to mitigate (see *below*).

There is a risk that economic hardships in DRC, particularly affecting provinces in eastern and southern regions, may increase teacher turnover or absenteeism, as nearly one in five teachers have not been paid before and during the pandemic. The significant loss of livelihood by many families has led to an increase of crime, particularly in large urban centres such as Lubumbashi and Kalemie. This restricts travel for project staff, making support for VSLA activities challenging. Conflict and insecurity in Ituri province has intensified and spread which has made some project areas inaccessible and delaying planned activities. Projects have reported an increased risk during the past six months of gender-based violence (GBV), early marriage, early pregnancy, child abuse and exploitation.

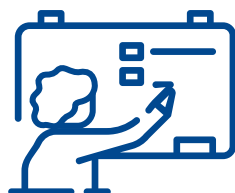
¹ Schools reopened for one month between August 10 and September 10 to complete the school year, allowing grade students in Grade 6 and Accelerated Education Programmes Level 3 to sit their final exams. The Accelerated Education Programmes intervention is aimed at ensuring that the most vulnerable children who have not had a chance to enter the formal education system, or those who dropped out, are able to catch up and complete primary education, and enrol in secondary school.

² Only 24.9% of caretakers reported that their girls listened to educational radio (survey conducted as part of an external rapid midline assessment).

³ When asked about the availability of informal learning opportunities, 13.6% of caretakers reported that their girls attended informal teaching/tutoring, 9.5% reported that their girls had access to teaching, and 5.7% reported that their girls had access to tutoring.

Project data is based on reporting from May to October 2020

The project has reported the following achievements up to June 2020:



2,665

teachers trained



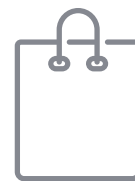
20,696

textbooks distributed



46,776

bursaries distributed



1,778

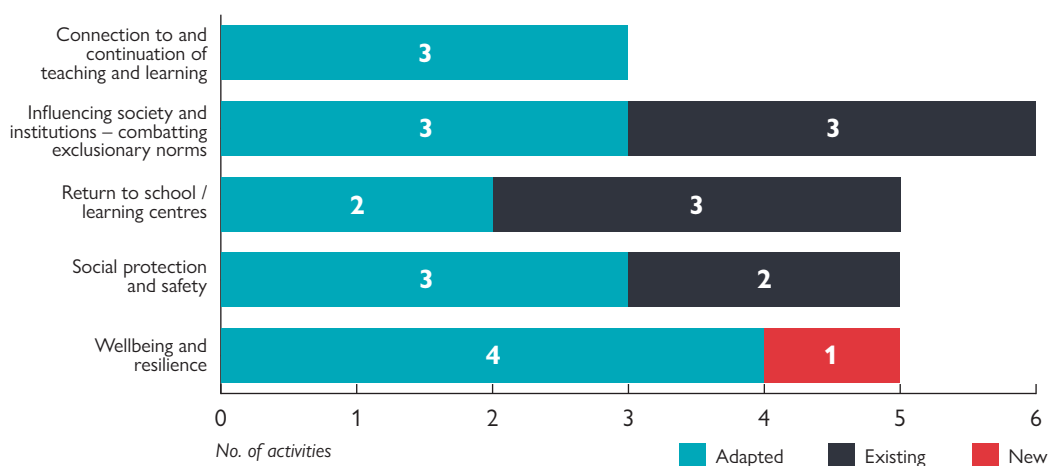
student kits distributed

Recent highlights

In response to these challenges, the REALISE project pivoted its activities to best meet the needs of the beneficiary girls. Some highlights include:

- **Production and broadcast of radio spots and Safe Back to School Campaign:** To reach the girls and other members of the community on the importance of keeping children safe, the project produced messages on child safeguarding, GBV and safe return to school, and broadcast them through local community radios in all six provinces. A total of 1,148 radio broadcasts were aired in French and local languages during July to September. The Inter-Agency 'Safe Back to School' guide was distributed to all schools and the project printed banners for all its schools.
- **Distribution of distance learning workbooks:** To support girls with distance learning, the project, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and UNICEF, produced workbooks to help Grade 6 and Level 3 Accelerated Education Programmes students prepare for their exams, and for Grade 4 and Grade 5 Learning Club students. A total of 19,837 learning packs were distributed to children.
- **VSLA groups:** 169 groups were supported directly (3,864 VSLA members, including 2,104 women and 1,760 men), and the project conducted refresher training to strengthen the capacity of these groups. An assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on the functioning of 134 VSLA groups found that overall the groups have mobilised a total of 355,167,450 CDF in savings so far, and 75% of the groups have survived the shock of the pandemic and are doing well; 42 (32%) groups are doing 'very well', 59 (43%) groups are doing 'well'.
- **Safeguarding:** The project has put in place safeguarding protocols and procedures specifically to ensure that their COVID-19 responses are safe for girls, other beneficiaries and staff members. Safety, as well as learning, continues to be a top priority for all GEC projects.* The project conducted refresher training on child protection, COVID-19 and GBV for 145 participants in Ituri, including Child Protection Focal Points, RECOPE networks, and social workers from Division Provinciale des Affaires Sociales (the provincial divisions of the Ministry of Social Affairs), as well as mandatory refresher training for all Save the Children DRC staff. The project has continued to build the capacity of RECOPE networks to own the reporting and case management process.

Figure 1: COVID-19 Response activities in DRC⁴



⁴ Projects began implementing the COVID-19 response activities from March 2020 and will continue or be adapted in accordance with the evolving COVID-19 situation in each context and in agreement with the Fund Manager.

* Please see the safeguarding section on the COVID-19 page of the GEC website for materials and guidance provided to projects: <https://girlseducationchallenge.org/#/article/covid-19-response>. The GEC expects our projects to be compliant with our 14 minimum standards on safeguarding.

Coordination and collaboration

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, coordination and collaboration efforts have increased. At national level, Save the Children co-leads the National Education Cluster and Child Protection Working Group with UNICEF. REALISE Education Advisor co-led the working group on distance education in areas with no access to technology, and supported development of the MoE national response plan. At the provincial level, Save the Children and World Vision⁵ are active members of provincial working groups ensuring coordination and providing technical support.

The project has adapted and translated two COVID-19 teacher professional development modules which were shared with the MoE and Cluster, along with the Inter-Agency 'Safe Back to School' guide. Project staff in Kalemie produced an advocacy paper on child safeguarding, where all authorities (ministry of education, social affairs, family and gender, religious and schools) committed to fight violence in schools and communities.

Lessons learned

The rapid assessment undertaken by the project in October 2020 had the following key findings:

- The most important determinants of participation in retention activities sit at the household level: the most vulnerable are those with higher levels of chore burden, and those with families that are unsupportive of girls staying in school.
- Girls in female-headed households had significantly higher learning retention scores than average. Girls with higher scores at baseline had significantly higher learning retention scores. This suggests that girls who belong to households where their education is prioritised tend to study more while in school and also practice and retain more while out of school.
- Caretakers reported an increase in girls with self-care, cognitive, and mental health-related impairments (using the Washington Group child-functioning questionnaire).

Priorities from January 2021

The project will focus on addressing the long-term impacts of COVID-19, and the disruption of learning to the current cohort of girls, including their vulnerability to early and child marriage, early pregnancy, GBV and migration, all of which may mean they will not return to schools.

The project will continue to focus on activities to support the safe return to school of their beneficiaries to mitigate the high risk of dropout. They will continue to produce and broadcast radio spots using local radio in order to keep communities informed and monitor access, reach, learner participation and engagement. Building on the midpoint analysis findings the project will tailor messages to heads of households on the importance of supporting girls learning and once schools reopen. The project will also undertake a Rapid Assessment of girls' wellbeing to understand the needs of vulnerable subgroups and use the findings to advocate for children's rights.



© Save the Children Fund

⁵ The REALISE project is implemented in partnership with World Vision.

.....
Contact: **Contact:** uk_girls_education_challenge@pwc.com | www.girlseducationchallenge.org
.....

Girls'
Education
Challenge



The Girls' Education Challenge is a project funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ("FCDO"), formerly the Department for International Development ("DFID"), and is led and administered by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP and Mott MacDonald (trading as Cambridge Education), working with organisations including Nathan Associates London Ltd. and Social Development Direct Ltd. This publication has been prepared for general guidance on matters of interest only and does not constitute professional advice. You should not act upon the information contained in this publication without obtaining specific professional advice. No representation or warranty (express or implied) is given as to the accuracy or completeness of the information contained in this publication, and, to the extent permitted by law, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP and the other entities managing the Girls' Education Challenge (as listed above) do not accept or assume any liability, responsibility or duty of care for any consequences of you or anyone else acting, or refraining to act, in reliance on the information contained in this publication or for any decision based on it.