

TRANSITION STRATEGY

Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient

Sierra Leone



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EAGER Project Overview

Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient (EAGER) is a 4-year (2019-2023) girls' education and empowerment project that was implemented in 10 districts of Sierra Leone with funding from FCDO¹ through the Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) initiative of the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC). Through a consortium led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in partnership with Concern Worldwide, Restless Development, and BBC Media Action, EAGER created new learning opportunities for 27,322 of the most marginalised out-of-school (OOS) adolescent girls ages 13-19² who lacked basic literacy and numeracy skills – including girls who were pregnant or already mothers, married girls, girls with disabilities, and girls who were heading their own households. The project aimed to equip these girls with significantly improved learning outcomes and enable their transition into further learning and/or earning opportunities within in a context of increased support from their families and community.

EAGER's Theory of Change guided the programme design around three core outcome areas: learning, transition, and sustainability. This design includes an 8-month integrated Learning Programme encompassing Literacy, Numeracy, Financial Literacy, and Life Skills, followed by an 8-month Transition period during which girls are encouraged to use their new knowledge and skills in different areas of their life. This is guided by an Empowerment Plan in which each girl sets her own learning, household, community, and financial goals. Trained Mentors and Facilitators recruited from the girls' communities guide them through their Learning, Transition, and beyond – serving as role models not only for the girls, but also for the community. To foster sustainability, the project engaged key members of girls' households and the wider community through structured dialogues and action planning, and broadcast weekly girl-centred radio programmes highlighting the barriers girls face whilst showcasing their agency and positive gender norms.

This programme was delivered through two cycles: the first cycle engaged 7,481 girls in a first cohort (Cohort 1), and the second cycle engaged 19,841 girls in a subsequent cohort (Cohort 2).

➤ Project Context

The EAGER programme design was based on a comprehensive situational analysis, and then further tailored in response to the findings of its own Baseline Evaluation in order to understand and best meet the needs and interests of the adolescent girls enrolled. The following contextual factors informed the project's understanding of the overlapping barriers faced by adolescent girls, and shaped its approach to both Learning and Transition.

¹ The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom.

² EAGER worked with girls ages 13-17 in the first cohort. For the second cohort, the age range was expanded to 13-19 to allow girls who were 17 during the pandemic to still participate in the programme.

Understanding the Country Context

In 2018, Sierra Leone's poverty rate was ranked amongst the highest in the world with real annual income per capita estimated at USD 469.80, and more than half the population living on less than USD 1.90 per day.³ This financial vulnerability is more pronounced in rural areas, where 74% of the population live below the national poverty line, as compared with 35% in urban areas.⁴ According to the 2020 Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis, 4.9 million people (nearly 60% of the population) were food insecure, and the number of people facing severe hunger tripled between 2010 and 2020.⁵

Poverty is a known barrier to education and in Sierra Leone, more than half (57%) of the population 15 years and above is illiterate.⁶ Gender differences are significant, and data from September 2021 places adult literacy rates at 52% for men and 35% for women; amongst youth, literacy rates are 71% for boys and 63% for girls.⁷ Much of the gender disparity in education begins in adolescence, when more value begins to be placed on girls' domestic roles, rather than their education. This is evident in the widening gender inequality later in the education system, with more girls than boys dropping out as they move through Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary School.⁸

Adolescent pregnancy and child marriage rates in Sierra Leone are amongst the highest globally, resulting in an estimated 20% of girls dropping out of the classroom.⁹ At the school level, gender-based violence is evident, with violence occurring both on the way to school and in school – by perpetrators including male teachers, peers, and older students.¹⁰ On a national level, approximately 45.5% of all women in Sierra Leone have suffered some form of violence.¹¹

Despite making up just over half of the country's population, girls and women remain marginalised across all sectors, and gender inequality and discrimination remain high. Sierra Leone regularly ranks at the bottom of global indices of gender inequality, such as the Gender Inequality Index (182 out of 189 in 2019)¹² and the Global Gender Gap Index (121 out of 156 in 2020).¹³ These indices are based on measures of health and survival, women's empowerment, economic participation, and educational attainment.

3 Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Study – (P162720) documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/354291578288053592/pdf/Sierra-Leone-Economic-Diversification-Study.pdf

4 Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS) 2018.

5 World Food Program and Government of Sierra Leone, "State of Food Security in Sierra Leone: Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis," May 2021, docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000129312/download

6 UNDP (2020) Human Development Report: Sierra Leone

7 data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.MAZS?locations=SL UNESCO Institute for Statistics

8 MBSSE 2019 Annual School Census Report

9 Statistics Sierra Leone and ICF, 2019. Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2019: Key Indicators, Freetown, Sierra Leone and Rockville, Maryland

10 UNICEF 2012 Sierra Leone Statistics

11 Ministry of Education Science and Technology, UNICEF 2016. A National Assessment of Out-of-School Children in Sierra Leone

12 hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII

13 World Economic Forum, "Global Gender Gap Report 2021: Insight Report"

Learnings from the EAGER Baseline Evaluation

Key findings from the EAGER Baseline Evaluation¹⁴ further informed the overall programme design including the approach to the Transition period.

¹⁴ The EAGER Baseline Evaluation was conducted in March 2020 by IMC Worldwide and Dalan Associates. The Baseline Research Policy Brief summarises the key findings.

Economic marginalisation:

Girls lacked key resources for daily living (key drivers of early marriage and transactional sex):

46% were food insecure

43% were impoverished

Girls lacked financial independence:

58% had no earnings

23% either worked for themselves

5% were employed informally or formally by others



Educational marginalisation:

Girls lacked key functional skills that limited their independence and confidence

45% of girls had never gone to school

45% went to school but dropped out before completing primary school

75% of girls were unable to read or comprehend proficiently

89% achieved a "non-learner" score



Girls experienced multiple barriers to education:

72% of girls reported that they were previously unable to attend school because their families lacked the money to pay fees.

23% because they needed to work at home

19% because they had a child or became pregnant

The same barriers were likely to complicate future schooling opportunities.

Girls had little decision-making power over their education:

66% stated that they could not choose their own educational path and were subject to the decisions of others.

Social marginalisation:

Many girls experienced social marginalisation, stigma, isolation from their peers, and heavy chore burdens due to life circumstances:

44% were married

58% were mothers

9% were their own head of household



Many girls were living with invisible disabilities:

15% self-reported to be living with a disability

60% of these were in whole or in part due to daily experiences of anxiety or depression



Girls were unaware of the gender norms that underpin their lives:

4% demonstrated awareness of gender norms

Men, especially male partners, supported education as a means to generate household income, but many did not approve of changes that would alter traditional gender norms.

0% 50% 100%

Framing Transition as Empowerment

Transition refers to the period of time immediately following the Learning Phase of the programme. In EAGER, Transition is approached holistically and conceptualised as empowerment, with girls encouraged to think about what they want their own empowerment to look like across the domains of learning, household, community, and finances. Central to this approach is reinforcing girls' sense of agency to make their own decisions and take action to move towards the changes they want to see in their lives. They are encouraged to reflect on the new knowledge and skills they have gained through their sessions, and to think about how they can use this to step into their own power in various aspects of their lives. Recognising that girls often live with families and that others depend on them, this integrated approach offers a framework for girls to think about how they can be change-makers for themselves as well as in their families and communities.

As part of this approach, the project carefully considered forms of support that would foster girls' sense of agency during this Transition process. Every girl received an Empowerment Package upon graduation, containing a *lappa* (traditional fabric), a drinking water bucket with a lid and tap, a portable solar light, and a lock-box with lock and keys. In addition, all graduating girls received a small conditional cash transfer of NSLE 390 (formerly LE 390,000) to support their initiatives, particularly their financial goal. The girls were encouraged to think through and plan out how they would use their cash in a way that felt empowering to them – for example, to start-up for a small business, support their further education, or for an important household need. This was each girl's choice. The intention was to create an opportunity for every girl to be able to make her own decisions with her own resources, and to be able to use this to take action in ways that were meaningful to her.

The following section outlines how the Learning Programme leads into the Transition Phase in EAGER, and the strategies and steps the project followed to roll out this model.

➤ Learning Programme Model

EAGER's integrated Learning Programme brings together Literacy, Numeracy, Financial Literacy, and Life Skills content into a complementary package of curricula that is tailored to the girls' learning needs, context, and lived experiences. Whilst each component is taught individually, they are linked through common language, themes, storytelling, images, and inclusive teaching practises. These connections create a holistic learning opportunity for girls to build new skills, to strengthen relationships with their peers as they practise together, and to gain confidence for interacting with the world around them.

The overall design and content is responsive to Baseline Evaluation findings that girls were most interested in building functional skills that would empower them in their daily lives – for example, to read signs and text messages, sign documents, review children's school progress reports, count money, and track finances. Such skills support independence, enable them to provide greater support to their families, and prevent others from taking advantage of them. Real-life examples, stories, and images are woven into every lesson to make learning relevant and engaging, and show girls how they can directly use the skills they are learning.

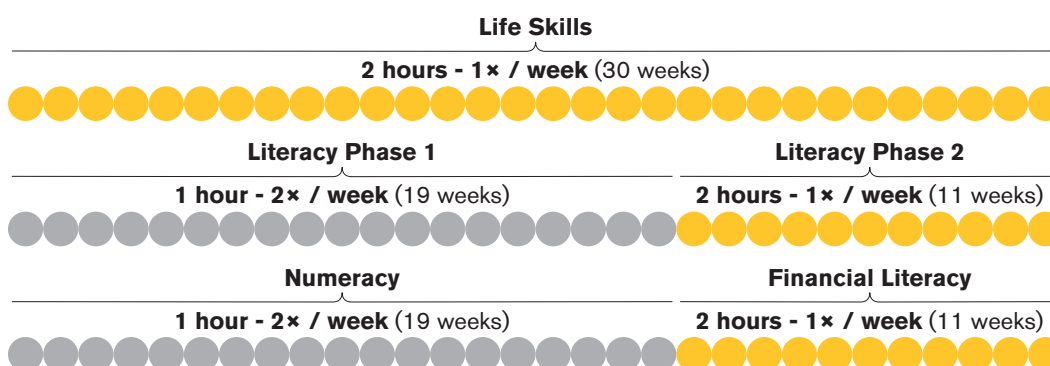
These sessions are led by volunteer Facilitators and Mentors, who are recruited from within the girls' communities and trained, supervised, and coached to create a safe and supportive learning environment. Female or male Facilitators lead the Literacy, Numeracy, and Financial Literacy sessions, whilst female Mentors lead Life Skills sessions and offer psychosocial support to girls outside of sessions. They are also present in any session led by a male Facilitator.

Sessions are held in Safe Spaces provided by the communities, and must meet a set of minimum standards to ensure the girls' safety, comfort, and privacy. Where available, additional Learning Spaces are used for Literacy, Numeracy, and Financial Literacy. This is typically a vacant classroom at the local school if space permits its usage outside of regular school hours. Otherwise, EAGER Safe Spaces are also used as Learning Spaces, as long as the female Mentor is present and male Facilitators seek permission from the girls to enter the space prior to each session.

Girls meet in fixed groups of up to 25¹⁵ and attend learning sessions 3 days a week for a maximum of 2 hours a day. Specific days and times for sessions are determined by each group of girls together with the volunteers to ensure this best suits their schedules and minimises conflict with their other responsibilities.

The Learning Programme takes 30 weeks to complete with sessions following the schedule below:

- Literacy: 1 hour twice a week for 19 weeks, then 2 hours once a week for the final 11 weeks
- Numeracy: 1 hour twice a week for the first 19 weeks
- Financial Literacy: 2 hours once a week for the final 11 weeks
- Life Skills: 2 hours once a week for 30 weeks



15 To ensure a manageable group size for Mentors and Facilitators, and enable them to use more inclusive and individually supportive facilitation practises.

Further details on the programme can be found in EAGER's Learning Strategy, which outlines the curriculum development process, adaptations, learning methodologies, and training approaches. In addition, EAGER's Protection Strategy explains how the project planned, mitigated risks, and worked to keep the girls safe through the process (find links to the EAGER Learning and Protection Strategies under Resources at the end of this chapter).

In addition to the infrastructure of the Learning Programme, supportive families and communities play a key role in creating a safe and enabling environment for girls to succeed in their learning and transition endeavours, and well beyond. To ensure their support, EAGER maintained contact with girls' caregivers and partners and engaged community leaders in structured dialogues centred on girls, with calls to concrete action to create a safer and more enabling environment for all girls. The multiple layers of this approach are discussed in more detail in EAGER's Community Engagement Strategy (find the link to the EAGER Community Engagement Strategy under Resources at the end of this chapter).

Resources

- [EAGER Numeracy and Financial Literacy Curriculum – Facilitator Guide](#)
- [EAGER Life Skills Mentor Guide](#)
- [EAGER Learning Strategy](#)
- [EAGER Protection Strategy](#)
- [EAGER Community Engagement Strategy](#)
- [EAGER Community-based Volunteer Model](#)



> Empowerment Plans

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. famously described how: “Power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, and economic change.”¹⁶

The concept of the Empowerment Plan is rooted in this understanding of power as a positive force for social good and the feminist critique that power is unequally and unjustly distributed by gender and must be reclaimed. Throughout the EAGER programme, various strategies have aimed to strengthen girls' sense of their “power within” themselves – to recognise their inherent value, strengths, and capabilities, and their ability to effect change. This sense of personal agency builds courage and energy to make decisions and act on them, increasing a felt sense of having “power to act.” Vital here is recognising one's right to take action, and having the freedom to make decisions and voice opinions. Building on this, “power with others” is when two or more people come together to do something they could not do alone, joining forces to create change.

The Transition period is an opportunity for girls to focus on using their new skills and knowledge in ways that are beneficial to them as they practise using their power to act and power with others to work towards the changes they want to see. To encourage the girls to think more concretely about what actions will be most meaningful to them at this point in time, the project created a simple goal-setting template that each girl could refer to as “My Empowerment Plan.” This becomes a bridge between Learning and Transition, and guides the girls to bring into focus key areas in which they want to take action. The aim is that girls will continue to see themselves as capable learners as well as agents of change and role models for those around them. Her own goals are what guide her, and the longer-term vision is to encourage goal-setting as a practise that girls can use throughout their lives to continue reinforcing their sense of agency. Goals can help strengthen focus and sense of purpose.

This approach also considers the socioecological model, which recognises the complex interrelationships between girls and the ecosystem around them – including their closest relationships, wider community, and society. Whilst the EAGER project used a variety of strategies to influence these different levels with the aim of fostering a more enabling and supportive environment for adolescent girls, the Empowerment Plan encourages the girls themselves to think about meaningful actions they can take at these different levels – no matter how small. At the individual level, they are guided to think about their own learning and financial goals. At the relationship level, they are encouraged to think about an action they can take within their household that will feel empowering to them. Then at the community level, they are encouraged to think about an action they can take to support positive change in the community. The idea is that setting realistic and actionable goals in these different areas will reinforce girls' sense of personal agency and collective power to influence change.

The Empowerment Plan is introduced to girls at the beginning of the second phase of the Numeracy and Financial Literacy programme (week 20). Between these and their Life Skills sessions, girls learn about goal-setting, are introduced to different examples of entrepreneurship, and explore themes of gender and power. The process of writing down their own goals on paper (as much as possible and with support from Facilitators and Mentors) reinforces their new literacy skills, and having a paper reminder to refer back to can be a motivating reminder to themselves.

16 The full text from his 1967 speech is available here: www-personal.umich.edu/~gmarkus/MLK_WhereDoWeGo.pdf

Working with their Facilitators and Mentors, girls identify goals that they can reach in one year or less, and think through key steps that they will take to reach these goals. Whilst examples of goals are shared to stimulate their thought process, the girls are encouraged to use their critical thinking and decision-making skills to reflect on what changes would feel empowering to them within the context of their own life. This approach allows for a range of interests, skills, ages, abilities, and situations. It also creates a space for girls to explore ideas for stepping beyond assumptions about what girls can and should do in their homes and communities. Given the tenuous economic circumstances that many EAGER girls live under, the project anticipated that they would be most excited about activities relating to income generation, as financial gains would have the most immediate impact on their daily lives. To encourage girls to also reflect on other areas of their lives where they wanted to effect change, the Empowerment Plan intentionally includes goal areas for learning, household, and community engagement.

During the last few weeks of the Learning Programme, girls finalise their own Empowerment Plans with goals in the four areas outlined below:



Financial Goal

To give every girl an opportunity to practise independent financial decision-making and use the planning skills she learnt during the program, the project provides each girl with a conditional cash transfer of the same amount. This was determined based on local costs as well as the girls' safety, to minimise risks and ensure that the project did not set girls up for failure. In their Financial Literacy sessions, girls learn skills for managing their own finances along with basic business skills. Building on these skills, girls are then guided by their Facilitator to identify a Financial Goal based on this set amount.

A Financial Goal does not need to be a business idea – this can be any goal that requires financial investment. The aim is for girls to use this cash as a start-up fund for an activity they feel will enable them to create positive changes in their lives. For example, it could be used to learn a new skill, go back to school, do something to improve the health of their family, or make a key improvement in their home. This approach ensures that every girl can use her cash for her own priorities, and that no girl is excluded. For those girls who do want to pursue an income-generating activity, they have the choice to work individually or with others, in which case they are guided to define how they will work in partnership and how they will pool their funds.

This personalised approach also recognises that girls face individual protection risks based on their different life circumstances and ensures that no girl is pushed into business or any other activity that may put her at risk. EAGER Mentors are trained to always keep girls' safety and wellbeing in mind, and the Mentor Guide that they use to support girls with goal-setting reminds them again to encourage the girls to think about their safety when setting goals. No goal should put her in danger. As with every EAGER initiative, Mentors are reminded to always put the girl at the centre by asking her what she wants, listening well, and following what she wants to do. This includes whether or not a girl wants to inform her partner or caregiver about her goals – this is her choice.

When setting her own Financial Goal and determining key steps she will need to take to achieve it, each girl develops a simple budget to guide her. It should be noted that although some basic business skills are covered in the Learning Programme, it is not assumed that all girls will want to start a business. However, many will have aspirations that involve the use of some finances. Completing the budget helps girls use the financial literacy skills they have learnt to plan how to use their finances. The Financial Goal section of the Empowerment Plan includes a market survey in addition to the budget. The market survey is completed only by those girls who are planning an income-generating activity, again using the skills they have learnt in the programme should they want to use their finances to start or grow a business. By the last session, every girl will have completed the Financial Goal section of her Empowerment Plan.

In a survey with Cohort 2 girls:

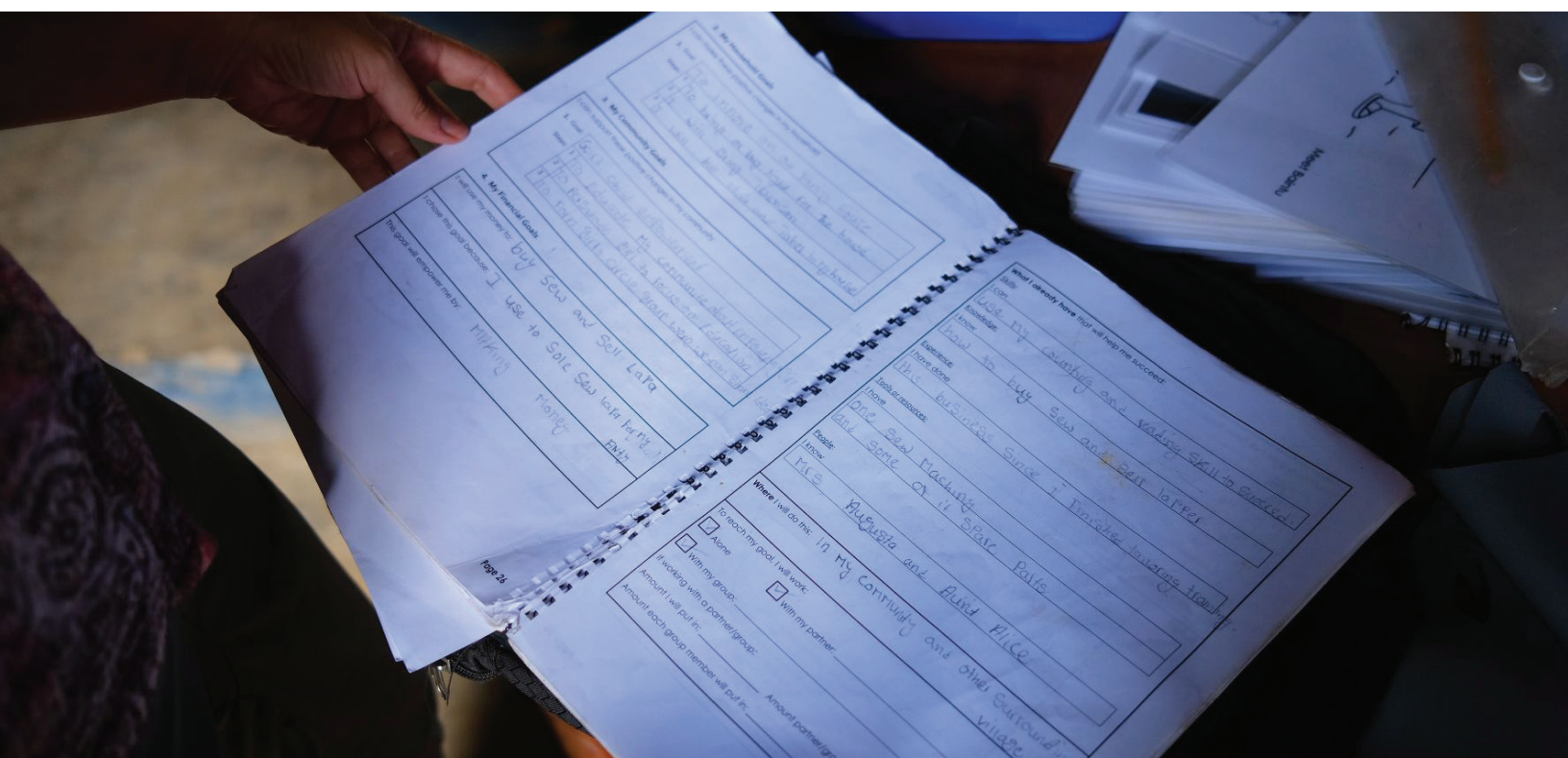


99.5% reported using their literacy and numeracy skills



93.3% reported using their life skills to help them in their lives

- Project Monitoring, Survey with Girls and Mentors, 2022





Learning Goal

The aim of the Learning Goal is to remind girls that the end of their EAGER sessions does not end their identity as a learner. This is important because nearly half of the girls never had the chance to go to school, and the other half only attended for a few short years. Realising that they have the ability to learn new skills that can be impactful in their daily lives is empowering for girls and encourages a growth mindset. Girls are first encouraged to think through the most useful skill they learnt in their Literacy and Numeracy sessions, and one specific way they want to use this skill to help them in their life. Then they go through the same reflections on their Life Skills sessions, and one way they want to use this knowledge or skill in their life. These are written down in their Empowerment Plan, along with steps to guide them.

After this, girls focus on identifying their Learning Goal. They are reminded that we never stop being learners, and that we can continue to learn from other people, from the radio, from books, and by practising our own skills. Their Mentors encourage them to think about one way they want to keep learning, and what specific steps they will take to enable this continued learning.



Household Goal

The Household Goal is intended to encourage girls to think about a meaningful change they would like to make within their home environment that feels empowering to them. The aim is to remind girls that no matter how small, they have the power to take action that can create changes they want to see in their lives, living spaces, and relationships. This encourages girls to reflect on the different life skills they have learnt, and how they can apply these in a concrete way. To foster a more supportive environment for girls to make decisions and take action in their homes, the project engaged with girls' caregivers and partners throughout the programme via household visits and Community Dialogues.



Community Goal

Girls are encouraged to think of a Community Goal as a reminder that they can be agents of change in their community and that their voices and actions can play a key role in creating the changes they want to see around them. They are asked to think about something they want to do or change to make things better in the community, including for girls. This could be anything specific to their communities, but a few examples could be talking to other girls about what they have learned, helping to start a Girls Club, or attending community meetings and speaking up on issues that matter to them. The aim is also to remind girls about the value of working in solidarity and using their power with others to bring about positive change that they cannot achieve alone – particularly positive changes for girls. To foster greater support for girls' participation and action at the community level, the project engaged community leaders and other influential persons through Community Dialogues and participation in key events, including the girls' graduation from the Learning Programme.

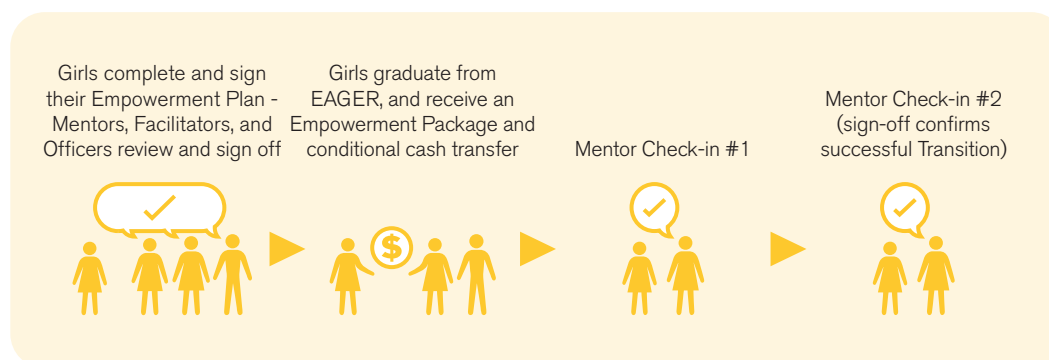


This integrated approach to goal-setting carries greater potential for transforming the gender narrative that prescribes certain roles for girls than a standalone financial intervention, and encourages girls to think about how they can step into their own power in various aspects of their lives. The focus on both individual and collective goals with potential to positively impact others also recognises that girls often live with families and that others depend on them. These are important aspects of empowerment in a collectivist society that tends to value the group over the individual.

During their one-on-one meetings with the girls, Mentors remind them that it is entirely their choice whether or not they want to inform any key people in their household about their specific goals. This recognises that girls may be living under difficult or controlling circumstances, and that caregivers or partners may pressure girls to change their goals, particularly their Financial Goal. Girls know their own situation best and are the only ones who can navigate it; therefore, this must be their decision.

Empowerment Plan Sign-Off

Once a girl has completed writing her Empowerment Plan, the girl, her Mentor and Facilitator, and EAGER project staff are involved in reviewing and signing off on her plan. The Empowerment Plan Sign-Off consists of a checklist whereby Mentors, Facilitators, and Officers agree that each girl has met the prerequisite criteria before the plan can be considered signed off on. These criteria focus on whether each goal is specific, realistic (based on considerations such as her assets, skills, and context), and achievable within one year or less. The aim of the time limitation is to encourage girls to set smaller goals so they can experience reaching them and be energised in turn to set new goals.



For the Financial Goal specifically, the sign-off provides an opportunity to confirm that the girl has completed a market survey (if she has decided to pursue a business activity as part of her Financial Goal) and has an accurate budget that reflects the amount of the upcoming cash transfer. Furthermore, due diligence on the Financial Goal also seeks to confirm girls' understanding about whether they are pursuing the goal independently or in partnership with another girl. If the latter, volunteers can take the opportunity to determine whether the partnership is functioning, and if the girl understands the commitment she has made to her partner. In the event that an Empowerment Plan does not meet the criteria, volunteers and staff guide the girls through a process of reconsidering and redeveloping certain aspects of the plan, without reducing her autonomy and leadership over the process. This emphasis on ensuring that the girl takes the lead is a key part of the training for staff and volunteers.

As noted above, girls decide whether or not they want to engage a caregiver or partner in the process by talking to them about their goals. For those girls who feel comfortable sharing their goals with a caregiver or partner and want them to sign their Empowerment Plan, the project team visits the home to request their signature on the plan as a sign of support for the girl's initiative. The aim is to ensure that girls have as much encouragement and support as possible from those around them, whilst not putting any girl at additional risk of harm. This completed Empowerment Plan is the first step in the Transition process, followed by their graduation from the Learning Programme and the distribution of in-kind material and cash support. Mentors then follow up with girls through individual check-ins.



99.5% believed that they could achieve their goals in their Empowerment Plan.
- Midline Evaluation, 2021

Of the **26,812** girls who graduated from the project, **26,793** developed and got approval for their Empowerment Plan, and **26,775** received a conditional cash transfer.

- Project Monitoring, 2021-22



Resources

- [EAGER My Empowerment Plan](#)
- [EAGER Mentor Guide to Girls' Empowerment Plan](#)
- [EAGER Transition and Empowerment Plan Training Guide](#)
- [EAGER Transition and Financial Literacy Training Guide](#)

➤ Empowerment Package

EAGER provided every enrolled girl with an in-kind Empowerment Package. The aim was to equip the girls with quality items that were more difficult to source locally, and which would directly support their health, safety, continued learning, and capacity to care for their families. By dividing the financial investment in each girl's Transition into an in-kind Empowerment Package and cash transfer, the project aimed to mitigate protection risks associated with providing a larger amount of cash to girls.

Ideally, the items selected would have been tailored to every girl based on her location and current needs. Due to the large size and complex scope of EAGER, it was necessary to select items based on the greatest needs and value to have a consistent package of items across consortium partners and districts whilst being mindful of operational challenges of large-scale procurements and distributions. Furthermore, by procuring items in larger towns, consortium partners were able to source higher-quality items with a greater chance of longevity.

Following consultations with EAGER Cohort 1 girl groups across the project districts, and aligning with the project's focus on girls' protection and wellbeing, this package was set to include a lockbox with lock, a solar light, a drinking bucket with lid and tap, and a *lappa* (traditional fabric). Girls were then informed about the Empowerment Package and the specific items it would include during their Financial Literacy sessions so that they would not include any of these items when budgeting for their Financial Goal.

Further details on the Empowerment Package items and justification are outlined below.



Item	Justification
Small wooden lock-box and lock	As many communities do not have access to banking, this enables girls to keep their cash (transfer from EAGER) as safe as possible at home. This can deter others from taking her cash and support her to reach her Financial Goal. She can also use this to safely keep future savings. These are locally crafted, with dimensions allowing the boxes to be discreetly stored in the home.
Water bucket with lid and tap	This supports girls and their households to store drinking water safely in the home and minimise risk of contamination from people, animals, and utensils. The lid keeps potential contaminants out of the water, and the tap enables easy access to the water without the need to open the lid. This can support the hygiene and health of the household through safer drinking water and can also serve as a handwashing station for household members.
Portable solar light	This supports girls' safety if they need to move around at night, and enables girls to practise their reading and writing after dark when they may have free time. It can also support children in the household to study at night.
<i>Lappa</i> (with the same pattern)	This supports girls' dignity by providing a new length of traditional fabric to wear during their Transition and beyond. Traditionally, wearing the same textile print expresses shared identity and solidarity between family and/or friends during a celebration. Providing girls with the same printed <i>lappa</i> creates a visible connection to each other as they celebrate their graduation and well after the end of the Learning Programme.

When considering and planning for these items, the project carefully considered girls' safety and potential risks of theft or violence that could be associated with their possession of these items. Mitigations included determining a box size that would be small enough to hide in the home but also large enough to safely store the portable solar light. EAGER staff and volunteers communicated directly with caregivers and partners to inform them about the distribution of the Empowerment Package and make it clear that these items were to be used by the girls and remain under their control. Community leaders were also informed about these items being distributed to the girls, and were requested to help ensure that they remained within the possession of the girls. This is further explained below under Safeguarding and Protection Protocols.

Following the distribution of the Empowerment Package to Cohort 1, Mentors led a check-in with the girls and asked how they felt about the items they had received.



Of the **5,835** girls who were available for the Check-in, **74.6%** reported that the Empowerment Package items were useful to them. Based on this confirmation, the same items were procured as part of the Empowerment Package for Cohort 2.



33.3% of girls found the Empowerment Package items to be helpful, while **61%** found them to be "very" or "extremely helpful."

- Endline Evaluation, 2022



Resources

- [Empowerment Package & Cash Distribution Guidelines](#)
- [Empowerment Package Safe Distribution Guidelines for Senior Managers](#)





➤ Conditional Cash Transfer

In addition to the Empowerment Package, every EAGER graduate received a conditional cash transfer to support her Transition. At this stage of the intervention, the girls will have already planned and budgeted how to use this amount to reach their Financial Goal. Giving every girl an opportunity to make her own financial decisions has the potential to be transformative in and of itself – both for the girl as she sees that she can make smart financial decisions, and for her household and the community as they see that girls can manage money. This has potential to challenge assumptions about girls' capacities, and to open up increased opportunities for their financial independence.

The project determined to give every girl NSLE 390 (approximately USD 30 / GBP 26) at the time of budgeting. This amount was based on local costs for commonly purchased items, considerations of girls' safety and mitigating risks related to holding larger sums, and overall budget availability. This also encouraged girls to pursue activities with a good chance to succeed and grow, rather than starting larger endeavours with a greater risk of failure. The cash amount was communicated to all girls at the start of their Financial Literacy sessions so that they could begin to think about what they wanted to do with this amount. If girls wanted to do something that required funding beyond this, they had the opportunity to think creatively about how they could add to this to maximise the cash transfer.

The conditional cash transfers were distributed to EAGER girls following the completion of all learning sessions and their graduation from the Learning Programme. Their completed and signed-off Empowerment Plan was a prerequisite for receiving the cash, and they had to present their Empowerment Plan at the cash distribution as part a two-step verification process that was required to collect the cash.

Protection and Safeguarding Protocols

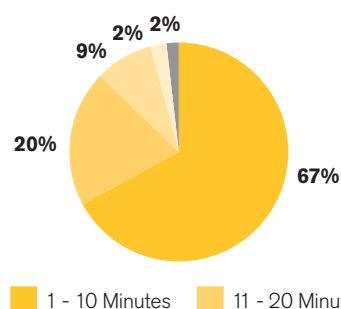
Protection and Safeguarding protocols were at the core of planning the cash distributions. As noted above, project staff and volunteers engaged with the girls' household members and community leaders well in advance of the distributions. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining both the responsibilities of the project towards the girl and of her parent/caregiver or husband/partner (where applicable) toward the girl was created to strengthen this accountability to girls from both sides. After explaining the purpose of the cash and Empowerment Package distributions, how they were linked to girls' goals and Transition, and why it was so important for girls to retain full control of them, teams asked these key household members to sign the MOU as a pledge of support to the girl. The aim was to ensure that those with the most power in her household understood the purpose of the distributions and committed to respecting her right to make her own decisions and to control and use her cash and materials in the way she had planned. Girls were consulted beforehand, and this step was waived in any case where girls felt unsafe with project staff approaching this person in their household.

In addition to the MOU, girls were asked if they wanted a parent/caregiver or their husband/partner to sign their completed Empowerment Plan as another opportunity to strengthen accountability towards the girl. It was up to each girl to decide if she wanted to share her Financial Goal and the specific amount of cash she would receive. If the girl wanted to, this provided another opportunity for the EAGER team to engage with these key people in a girl's household and emphasise the importance of supporting her to make her own decisions for how she wanted to use the cash.

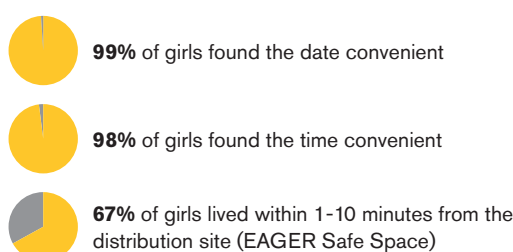
It should be noted that these distributions took place at a later point in the project, when EAGER staff and volunteers had already been engaging with girls and their key household members throughout the eight months of the Learning Programme. As much as possible, trust was built through this engagement. In addition, project teams had been simultaneously leading monthly Community Dialogues with community leaders and with caregivers. By emphasising girls' rights and the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment for girls, this regular engagement aimed to increase accountability for girls' protection at the household and community levels.

In the lead-up to the cash distribution, girls were consulted about the most appropriate date and time for the distribution. A key factor for the time was that girls would be able to reach their homes before dusk. Preparation for the distribution factored in the distance from the cash distribution site to mitigate protection risks upon departing the distribution. An exit interview was conducted following the cash distribution for accountability to the girls and to verify whether the procedures put in place for the distribution had ensured the girls' comfort and safety.

Distance to Distribution Site



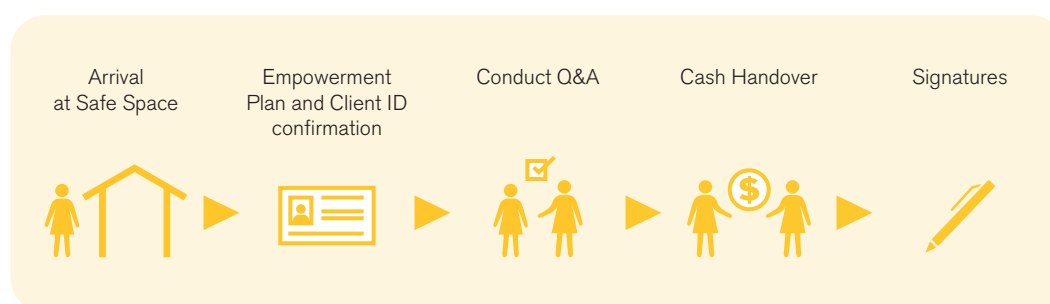
Cohort 2 exit interview data confirmed that:



To reinforce each girl's ownership and management of the cash, she was the only one permitted to collect it during the distribution. As a safety precaution for the girl, no other individual was allowed to collect it on her behalf. If any girl was not able to come for any reason, project teams followed up with her shortly after the distribution day to ensure that she received it. In addition, Safeguarding and Protection mechanisms were put in place to ensure that girls could report any instance where the money was requested or taken from them.¹⁷

All girls were asked to bring their backpack on the day of the cash distribution so that they could carry their cash home more secretly and not draw attention to themselves. According to the pre-agreed cash distribution guidelines implemented across all districts, girls were advised to stay in the Safe Space until all girls had received their cash. This ensured that everyone left together in the same way they normally left their sessions, thereby minimising unwanted attention on the way home. As an additional protection measure, girls were encouraged to purchase items or services they had budgeted for as soon as possible to mitigate risks associated with keeping excess cash at home.

A representative community leader and female caregiver were invited to the cash and Empowerment Package distributions as witnesses to verify from the community side that the distributions were conducted safely, fairly, and transparently with every girl receiving the same amount.



Financial Due Diligence

Cash distributions typically require some form of government-issued identification, such as an ID card or a birth certificate. In instances where clients do not have an ID card or number, programme ID cards may be issued and used for the duration of the cash intervention. However, due to the one-off nature of this cash distribution and the knowledge that most girls did not have any official form of ID, it was not practical to create special ID cards for 7,011 girls in Cohort 1, and 19,828 in Cohort 2.

Multiple methods were considered for creating a verification process that was sound and convenient for both girls and project staff. Ideas included photo identification, including individual or group photos in which staff could write client ID numbers next to each girl's image. This was determined to be too complex, with complicating factors including girls' potential absence on the photo day or girls in the photo dropping out of the programme before the cash distribution.

¹⁷ At the point of distribution, no girls reported that the money had been taken from them.



The project decided to create a two-step Registration and Verification Process to ensure that girls could receive the cash without ID cards, in a way that was compliant with financial due diligence and auditing requirements. At the beginning of the programme, EAGER assigned to every enrolled girl a unique Client ID number, to which all project monitoring data specific to the girl was linked.¹⁸ During the distribution, this Client ID number was used as the first identifying information for the girl.

To comply with two-step verification procedures and ensure that no other individual could receive cash on her behalf, each girl was supported to develop a Question and Answer (Q&A) that only she would know the answer to. The girls were supported with 15 question ideas that were adaptable to varying contexts across the country, and could have answers that only the girl would be able to provide (see Appendix 1: Question Suggestions for Q&A). Each girl's secret answer was then written down in a register and linked to her client ID, so that project staff would be able to cross-check and verify on the day of distribution that her stated answer was indeed correct.

Cash Distribution Logistics

As EAGER was implemented as a consortium of organisations, all consortium partners had their own additional internal protocols for cash distribution. Taking this into account, a standard procedure was developed for consistency across the consortium. To empower the programme teams and ensure quality across the many distribution sites, the project developed distribution plans with details about clusters, responsible teams, and key aspects for consideration, including arrival and departure times that took into account accessibility and safety.

¹⁸ This includes data on demographics, living situation, livelihood, disability, household status, as well as individual learning checks.

Critically, guidelines were required both to support a smooth planning and implementation, and to carefully consider risk factors, such as the distance to the distribution site, and the time of day that the distribution took place. Training on the Cash Distribution process for project staff included scenario modelling on best practises for issues such as girls forgetting their Cliend ID and/or their Q&A during the cash verification process, or if parents/caregivers attempted to disrupt the distribution. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) were created that could be referenced by all EAGER staff during the distribution (See Appendix 2: Frequently Asked Questions for Distribution).

Programme, Finance, and Logistics teams worked collaboratively to ensure an effective and safe distribution, ensuring a division of roles and responsibilities for additional controls. Finance staff withdrew cash from the bank first thing each morning to avoid large sums of cash sitting in offices overnight. This process took approximately 2-3 hours, meaning that alongside travel time to the community, teams had to balance the preferred schedule and time for distribution to girls alongside the logistics of obtaining the cash and bringing it to the community. This meant that project teams could cover on average two communities (with two girl groups per community) and distribute the cash to approximately 100 girls per day. Program, M&E, and Finance project team then worked together to count the cash, prepare pre-arranged cash envelopes (one for each girl in the group) and print and organise the Registration and Verification tools before heading to the distribution site each day. Following the cash distribution, teams travelled back to the headquarter office to ensure a safe return within daylight hours. At the office, project teams worked together to reconcile their cash records and prepare the documentation needed for the next distribution site the following day.

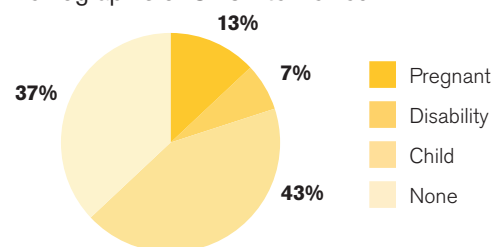


Once the girls were all gathered together in the Safe Space on the agreed day for the distribution, the cash distribution started. Girls were asked one at a time to present their Empowerment Plan and asked by the designated project staff to provide their Client ID. After that, they were asked their secret question and project staff confirmed that their answer was correct. In the instance that a girl forgot her Client ID or her Q&A, or the girls' Client ID or Q&A was not correct, distribution staff were trained to allow her to take a moment without pressure to try to remember. If she still could not recall the answer, the project staff working in that community were additionally asked to verify her identity. Cash was then handed over to the girl, and various signatures were collected in a distribution log to document the verification of her identity and the receipt of the cash. Signatures next to the girl's name on the distribution list included the girl, Mentor, Facilitator, one representative from caregivers/parents and from the community leaders (usually the *Mammy Queen*, the highest female community leader), invited as witnesses, and key project staff facilitating the distribution.

Exit Interview

The first girl to receive the cash was pre-identified to be surveyed for the Exit Interview. The Exit Interview is part of the Due Diligence of the cash distribution. In order to mitigate unintended consequences of delaying girls' safe departure from the distribution, only one girl per community (sample of 381 girls, which was 2% of the girls enrolled) was interviewed. The Exit Interview supports teams to implement immediate feedback loops if any issues related to the distribution are flagged during the interview and take corrective actions as soon as possible. No immediate issues were raised and none of the girls reported that anyone participating in the distribution had asked for a payment or favour from her before giving the cash. However, data from the Exit Interviews suggests that a small proportion (2%) of girls had anticipated risks before arriving at the distribution site. Six girls reported that they had feared robbery, and 2 reported a fear of tensions in the household. Nonetheless, no girls reported any of these issues taking place during the distribution, demonstrating that the risk mitigation put in place was effective for protecting girls.

Demographic of Girls Interviewed



Resources

- [EAGER Memorandum of Understanding with Caregivers & Partners](#)
- [EAGER Cash Safe Distribution Guidelines for Senior Managers](#)
- [EAGER Cash Distribution Exit Interview](#)



> Check-ins with Girls

Once girls have graduated from the Learning Programme and have received their Empowerment Package and cash transfer, they are encouraged to start working toward the goals they set for themselves. Their Empowerment Plan is a tool to guide them and remind them of their goals, and their Mentors and Facilitators continue to be present in the community as a resource and support for the girls. As female Mentors have built relationships with the girls and individual follow-up carries fewer Safeguarding risks, they are also encouraged to follow up with the girls informally to support and motivate them.

The girls were encouraged to set goals they believed they could reach within one year or less. As this timeline stretches beyond the 8-month Transition period and the project's capacity for measurement, EAGER assesses a successful Transition based on the number of steps a girl has taken toward her goals. Anticipating that girls may need to amend their goals and/or steps along the way to work around various barriers that may arise, this measurement of success also includes steps toward revised goals.

To better understand and document the girls' progress, Mentors led structured check-ins with every girl. This included 2 check-ins during Cohort 1, and 1 check-in during Cohort 2.¹⁹ Mentors were trained to lead these check-ins in a way that encouraged and motivated girls, rather than passing any judgment. This created an opportunity for the project to better understand girls' experiences through the Transition process, whilst reinforcing a sense of connection and accountability between girls and their Mentors.

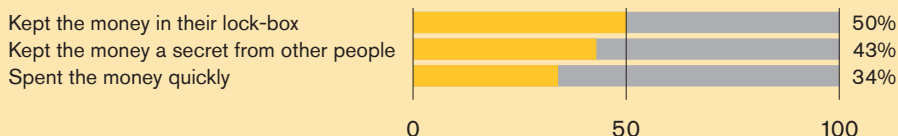
Cohort 1: Check-in 1

During the first check-in 3 months after the girls' graduated from the Learning Programme, Mentors discussed with girls how safe they felt during and after the cash and Empowerment Package distributions as well as questions about their progress towards reaching their Empowerment Plan goals.

When asked if they used any strategies to help them feel safer with their cash, 50% of the girls mentioned keeping the money in their lock-box, 43% mentioned that they had kept it a secret that they received cash, and 34% reported spending the cash quickly.



Strategies to Feel Safe with Cash

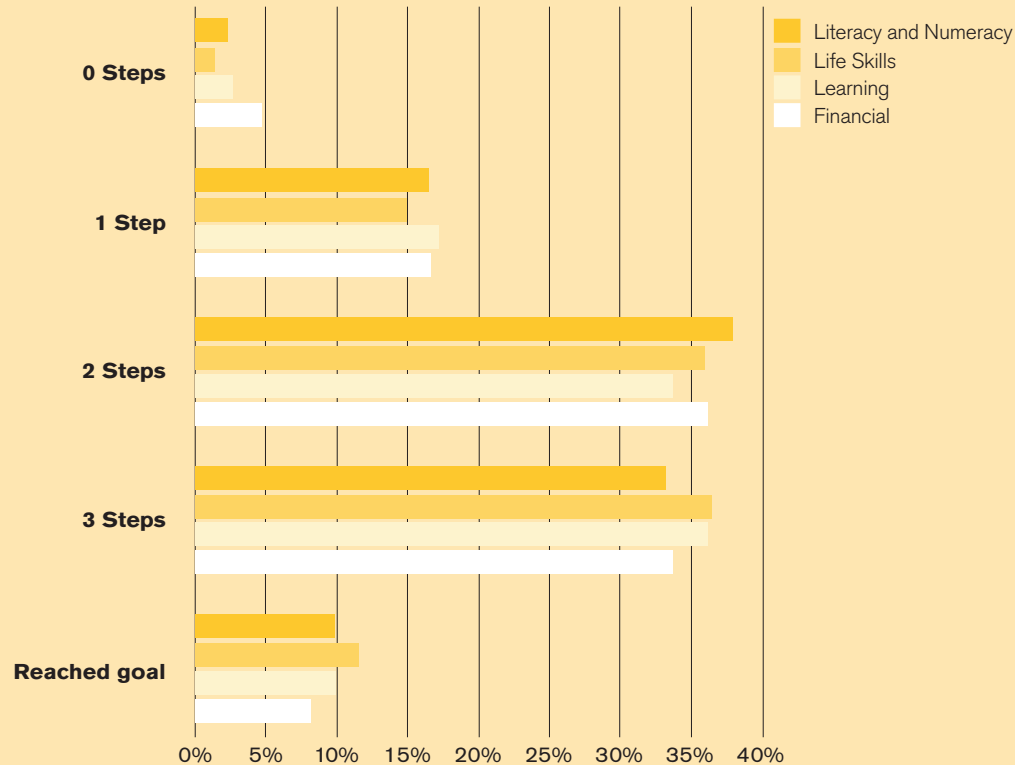


¹⁹ Due to the timeline of the second cohort, only one check-in was possible. Check-in 1 and 2 questions were consolidated, and Mentors were trained to offer additional support to mitigate the effects of reducing the number of check-ins.

The check-in found that 99.8% of girls were confident that they could reach their goals before the following July/August. At that point, 10% of girls had already reached their Literacy and Numeracy Goal, 11% their Life Skills Goal, 10% their Learning Goal, and 8.26% their Financial Goal. At the time of check-in, the vast majority of the girls assessed were working on steps 2 and 3 of their goals.



Number of Steps per Goal (Cohort 1)



Mentors also asked girls about any barriers they might be facing in working toward their goals. During the first check-in, 57% reported they did not face any barriers towards achieving their Financial Goals.

Cohort 1: Check-in 2

During the final check-in with Mentors at the end of the 8-month Transition period, Mentors asked girls about the usefulness of the items in their Empowerment Package and followed up on their progress towards reaching their goals.

For all goals, at least one-third of the girls surveyed reported that they had reached their goal. Similarly, at least one-third of all girls reported that they had completed 3 steps. Of all the goals, the Life Skills and Financial Goals were the ones with the highest percentage of girls who reached their goal (41% and 40%, respectively). In total, 4 out of every 5 girls surveyed had completed at least 3 steps towards these 2 goals.

Cohort 2: Check-in

With Cohort 2, only one check-in was conducted due to the fact that the EAGER project was coming to an end. Check-ins took place at least 1 month following the cash distribution.

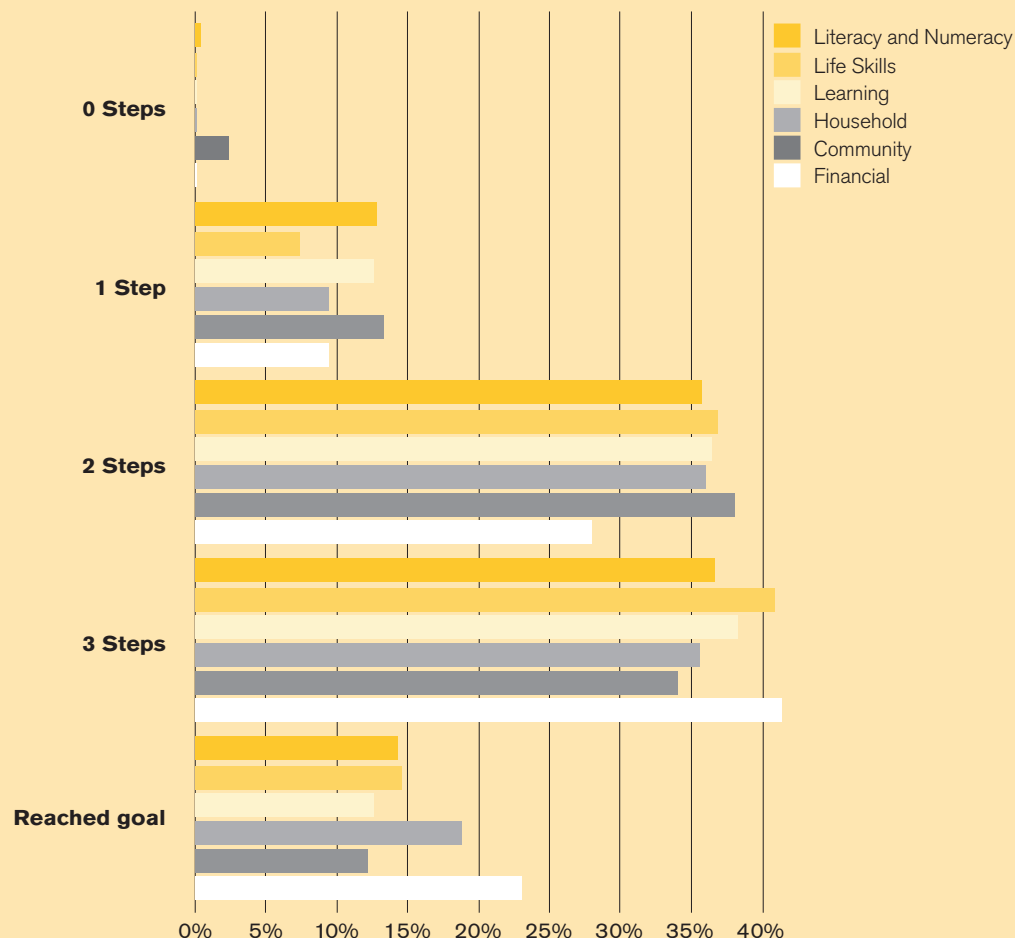
During the check-in, girls reported making significant progress towards their goals. Notably, 95.3% of girls had not changed any of their goals since their Empowerment Plan was validated, and the majority had reached steps 2 and 3. Girls had made the most progress on their Financial Goal, with 23% reporting they had reached their goal, and 41.3% reporting they had completed step 3. The most significant barrier noted was the increase in market prices, which reflects the significant recent inflation in the country.²⁰

For the Household Goal, 54.4% of girls had either completed step 3 or reached their goal. Nearly half (46.1%) of girls were either on the final step or had reached their Community Goal. This demonstrates that the girls are taking their goals seriously, and actively working towards them.

20 World Food Program, Market Prices Bulletin, Q3 2022



Number of Steps per Goal (Cohort 2)





At Baseline, **32%** of girls reported that they currently had some savings. This increased to **45%** at Midline, and **78%** at Endline.



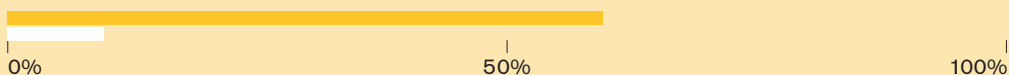
At Baseline, just over half of girls (**54%**) asserted that they had their own money to make decisions with; at Endline, that increased to **87%**.



86% of girls were working in one or more sectors at Endline, an increase from **39%** at Baseline.



Only **9.7%** of girls was neither working or enrolled in schools/educational institutions at Endline, a significant decrease from the 59.6% at Baseline.



0%

50%

100%

Source: Endline Evaluation, 2022

■ Baseline ■ Midline ■ Endline



99.8% of girls reported feeling confident that they would reach their goals by the end of the one-year time period.
- Project Monitoring, 2022



Resources

- [EAGER Empowerment Plan Assessment and Validation Tool](#)
- [EAGER Empowerment Plan Check-In Tools](#)



> Girls Clubs

EAGER was intentionally designed to strengthen girls' friendships and protective social networks for greater safety and wellbeing. To continue reinforcing the bonds and sense of solidarity that the girls built through their sessions, EAGER encouraged them to form Girls Clubs during the Transition period. The aim is to create an opportunity for girls to continue coming together as a group well beyond the project timeline.

The formation and participation in these Girls Clubs is voluntary, and the girls themselves are asked to take on leadership and decide what activities they want to do. EAGER provided guidelines on how a club could be formed, along with some ideas of what the girls can do when they got together. These guidelines include a template for a 1-page Group Agreement in which girls can take note of where, how often, and when they have agreed to meet, what activities they plan to do, who their group leaders will be, and any goals they want to set for their Girls Club. Mentors guided them through these initial steps to help get the clubs up and running, and were asked to provide specific support as needed. However, the aim is for the girls to practise their skills in working together, making collective decisions, and building their leadership skills.

As an incentive to start up these Girls Clubs, EAGER offered to provide two key items. The first item is a Bluetooth speaker and SD card uploaded with episodes of the EAGER factual radio programme, *Wae Gyal Pikin Tinap* (When the Girl Child Stands), so girls can listen together, learn, and continue discussing topics that are relevant to them. Cohort 2 girls also received the recordings of *Kotoku Baray*, EAGER's drama-discussion radio programme, which was completed by this time. The second item is a football and pump so the girls could play together.



95% of girls said that they had made a new friend who they could trust to talk to if they were feeling sad or worried.



70% of surveyed girls at the Endline Evaluation point in January 2022 also reported that there had been Girls Clubs meetings in their community.

- Endline Evaluation, 2022

Resources

- [EAGER Girls Club Guidelines](#)
- [Wae Gyal Pikin Tinap](#) and [Listening Guide](#)
- [Kotoku Baray](#) and [Listening Guide](#)



Conclusion

The EAGER project was designed to approach adolescent girls' education and empowerment in a holistic manner with strategies to enable learning, support an independent transition period, and mobilise community support for sustainability of these outcomes. The Transition Strategy outlined above was developed through a highly responsive process of learning and adaptations since the early stages of the project. It aligns with EAGER's overall approach to empowerment, which was to create a safe and enabling environment in which girls could build their sense of power within themselves to think critically, make decisions, and take positive action in their lives.

As girls built new knowledge and skills through their literacy, numeracy, financial literacy, and life skills sessions, this strengthened their confidence and power to act. The Transition design aimed to create an opportunity for girls to practise thinking about what they want to do to create a shift in their own life, practise making decisions for themselves, and experience how setting and focusing on a goal can support this process. The decision to give every girl an equal amount of cash was a critical one, despite the huge logistical effort this required from EAGER teams. Doing so demonstrated to every girl that her goals were equally valuable, and affirmed her ability to take the lead on her own Empowerment Plan. Whilst the amount of the cash transfer was small, it gave every girl a chance to practise her financial management skills and invest in something that was valuable to her.

EAGER's approach to Transition proved to be effective in the sense that girls felt confident and motivated to take steps forward toward their goals in different areas of their lives. Keeping girls at the centre of this process enabled them to think about what was meaningful and possible for them within their particular set of circumstances. A key factor in this approach was keeping girls' safety and wellbeing at the centre of every step in this process – from setting their goals, through engaging with their household members and community, to the distributions. The initial eight months of engagement with the community through dialogues and household visits helped to foster a more supportive environment for the girls to safely pursue their goals.

One of the core strengths of the EAGER project has been taking learnings from all of the external evaluation findings and project monitoring data to pivot and strengthen different areas of the programme design, both during the first cycle of programming and between cohorts. As specific learnings were gleaned through surveys and check-ins with girls, the project was able to improve on its Transition strategy and approaches in response. This enabled the project to remain girl-centred and ensure that it did everything possible within its power and resources to protect and empower the girls on their journey.

Appendix

1. Question Suggestions for the Q&A

1	What is the name of the community where you were born?
2	How many brothers and sisters do you have?
3	What is your favourite food?
4	What is your favourite Bintu story?
5	What community was your mother born in?
6	What is your favourite game?
7	What is your favourite song?
8	What is your favourite colour?
9	What is your favourite singer?
10	What is the name of your closest EAGER Padi?
11	What is your child's name?
12	What is the name of your mother?
13	What is the name of your father?
14	What is the name of your husband?
15	What is the name of your eldest sibling?

2. Frequently Asked Questions for Distribution

What do I do if a girl has forgotten her client ID?	<p>If the girl has forgotten her Client ID, do not panic or show the girl that there is distress. We will still find a way to give her the cash.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. First of all, be patient and give the girl some extra time to remember her Client ID, or find the piece of paper where she has written this down. When individuals are stressed, it's harder for them to remember. With this in mind, give her a second to remember. 2. Ask the girl if she can remember her secret question and answer, this is one way to verify her identity. 3. If she can confirm her secret question, use the Client ID linked to this question, find her name, and verify it is her.
What do I do if a girl has forgotten the answer for her Q&A verification?	<p>If the girl has forgotten her secret question, do not panic or show the girl that there is distress. We will still find a way to give her the cash.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. First of all, be patient and give the girl some extra time to remember her question. When individuals are stressed, it's harder for them to remember. With this in mind, give her a second to remember. 2. Give her some prompts. Remind her again of the question, and give her time to remember an answer to the question. 3. If both the Mentor and the LS Officer can verify her identity, consider bypassing the Question. Contact the District Supervisor before doing this, and log in the register that she could not remember the question.
What do I do if a girl speaks to me about her cash distribution going to someone else after the distribution?	<p>This will be specific to each organisation's compliance, safeguarding, and protection policies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It will need to be clarified at partner level what the correct course of action is according to reporting potential issues, such as (1) will it be escalated to someone or (2) staff will just make a note of it. If it's escalated, all teams need to be aware of the risk of retaliation against the girl for disclosing this, and have a plan in place for how to keep the girl safe. 2. From a compliance perspective, this will be reported as an incident and it will have to be escalated, but in consultation with the Safeguarding specialist or relevant parties engaged with addressing incidents in the organization, as it will be important to consider potential harm that the escalation may cause the girl.
What do I do if a girl tells me that she was asked to do something (aside from providing the ID and Q&A) in order to receive the cash?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If a girl discloses to you that she was asked to do something in exchange for the cash, you should report it as soon as possible through your organisation's reporting channels. 2. Do not push the girl for more details at the moment of the disclosure, if she is not willing to share it with you. 3. Do not share her details with anyone if she hasn't consented to this but encourage her to provide any additional details whenever she feels ready. 4. Share the information on reporting channels of the organisation with the girl. 5. Do not try to investigate or challenge the subject of the complaint, your only responsibility is to report. 6. Confidentiality and safety of the girl are paramount.



For more information, please contact:

Saffea Senessie

Country Director. Freetown, Sierra Leone

Tel: +232 76 622 998

saffea.senessie@rescue.org

To know more, visit the EAGER site:
www.rescue.org/eager-project



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