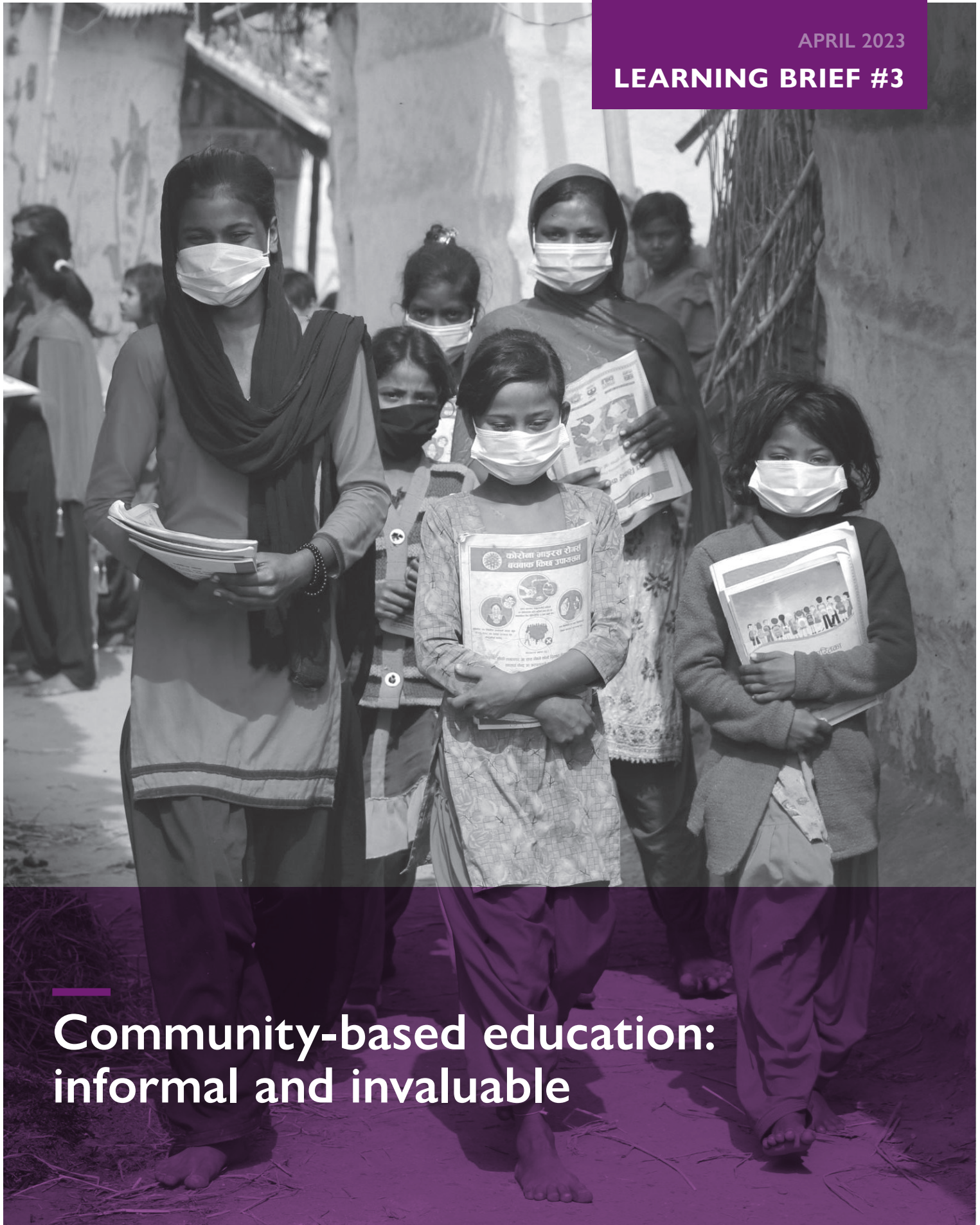


APRIL 2023

LEARNING BRIEF #3



Community-based education: informal and invaluable

Girls'
Education
Challenge



The **Girls' Education Challenge (GEC)** is the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's 12-year, £855 million Global Fund which aims to improve the educational opportunities of the world's most marginalised girls. The GEC is comprised of two types of project: 1) GEC-Transition (GEC-T) projects, which work within schools and support girls most at risk of dropping out; and 2) Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) projects, which target highly marginalised girls who have already dropped out or who have never been able to enrol in school.

Worldwide, around 244 million children and young people (aged 6 to 18) were out of school in 2021. For many, formal education is no longer (or never has been) a feasible option.¹ This may reflect the limited capacity of some governments to reach underserved areas, particularly in contexts of emergency and protracted crises, and remote and rural communities.

For some learners, especially those who are over-age for their grade, the formal system may not meet their needs. For example, the pedagogical approach in formal schools may not be appropriate for older learners who have never been to school, the course content may not be relevant to their everyday needs, or the learners may not speak the language of instruction. In these contexts/situations and for many other reasons, community-based education (CBE) can provide a tailored approach to meet the needs of, and fulfil the rights to education of marginalised groups – often in their preferred language. Thus, in many countries, CBE is valued as a way of reaching those whose needs are not met by the formal system, or those who have no viable access to formal education opportunities. While CBE can be a valuable long term offer, CBE can be a temporary solution to ensuring a cohort of learners who are out of the formal system are not left behind.

Formal education generally refers to the structured system that runs from pre-primary or primary to university and includes vocational and technical training. It takes place within schools and institutions which are owned, managed and financed by the government or by the private sector. Community-based education, on the other hand, generally takes place within local community spaces and is run and overseen by non-state actors, including local communities, community-based organisations (CBOs) or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). NGO and community-run schools can be found in 74 (of 196 countries analysed), and are often found in emergency and protracted crises contexts or contexts where the government has limited capacity.²

This Brief collates information on GEC project approaches to CBE and the lessons drawn from implementation. It is intended to support



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governments, donors and implementing partners in their efforts to design and implement effective CBE. It concludes with guiding questions to support reaching the most marginalised girls, ensuring access and retention, developing holistic CBE approaches, teaching and learning and working with government for sustainable solutions.

Funding, ownership, management and oversight

It is not always easy to make clear distinctions between government provision and CBE.

The government may provide no funding, some funding or may fully fund CBEs. There is also a spectrum of government involvement when it comes to management and ownership of CBEs from no involvement to fully managing and/or owning. For example, the government may supply textbooks and the curriculum, as well as quality assurance and oversight, while communities provide the learning space and pay the teachers. As a consequence, there are many hybrid forms of provision and sometimes it is not easy to distinguish between state and non-state actors.

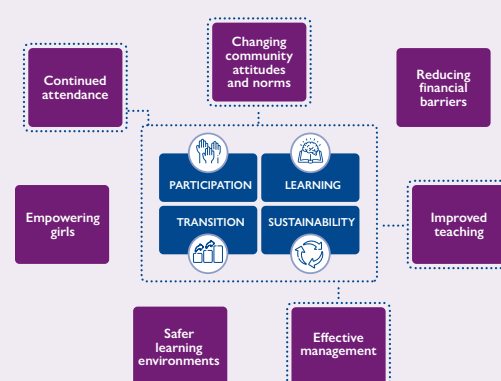
¹ <https://world-education-blog.org/2022/09/01/new-measurement-shows-that-244-million-children-and-youth-are-out-of-school/>

The GEC also works with girls beyond 18, as they have often been excluded from education or the formal system does not meet their needs or is relevant to their daily lives.

² <https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/en/non-state-actors>

The Girls' Education Challenge Learning Brief series:

To capitalise on its vast portfolio of 41 projects, operating across 17 countries, the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) has compiled a wealth of project learning regarding key interventions related to girls' education. While these Learning Briefs are rooted in both quantitative and qualitative evidence, they are not research papers or evidence reports. Rather, they provide a synthesis of learning from GEC intervention designs and implementation approaches that have been paramount for supporting improvements in girls' learning. The GEC projects take a holistic approach to improve the educational environment and conditions that support improved learning, participation, transition and sustainability outcomes. This Learning Brief is focused on community-based education interventions which contribute to achieving the highlighted outcomes:



GEC project approaches to community-based education

Across the GEC, CBE approaches have tended to fall into one of the categories outlined below. This Learning Brief captures insights across all four types.

Type	Community-based education ³
Extension CBE	Takes place within the community and follows the government curriculum and pace. In general, it is an extension of the government system.
Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP)	Follows the government curriculum but at an accelerated pace, with the aim of mainstreaming learners who have been out of school for some time (more than a year) back into the formal system.
Rapid catch up	Generally shorter than an accelerated education programme and supports children who have been out of school for less time but still need some support before they return.
Alternative education	Does not follow the government formal curriculum, and tends to focus on practical and everyday functional and/or vocational skills.

Across the GEC, CBE is generally managed and overseen by the project NGOs, CBOs and community structures. Where government curriculum and guidelines exist, these are adhered to. In some cases, adaptations are made to better suit the needs of the students (with the approval of government partners). In other cases – particularly with alternative education – the curriculum does not exist and so needs to be developed by the project.

Extension CBE is generally set up in communities that are underserved by the government system, but they mirror education in formal schools. They follow the same pace and the same curriculum, with the possibility of learners mainstreaming back into the formal system if schools are accessible. Some GEC projects have set up CBE in areas where the government is not working. In the [STAGES](#) project in Afghanistan for example (as illustrated in *Diagram 1*) CBE runs in parallel to formal

government schools. The project set up CBE at the primary level (Grades 1 to 6) and at the lower secondary level (Grades 7 to 9), after which learners are supported to transition into other pathways where feasible.

Accelerated Learning Programmes are for girls that are over-age for their grade. They are often the only appropriate option, as these older girls would not be comfortable learning with young learners, and their needs are different. The [TEAM Girl Malawi](#) project has set up a two-year ALP in communities that equips girls with the foundational learning skills needed to transition back into formal schools in upper primary. ALPs often move learners through a condensed government curriculum, focusing on core subjects and skills. For example, covering three years of formal education in a year and a half, after which learners are mainstreamed back into formal education.

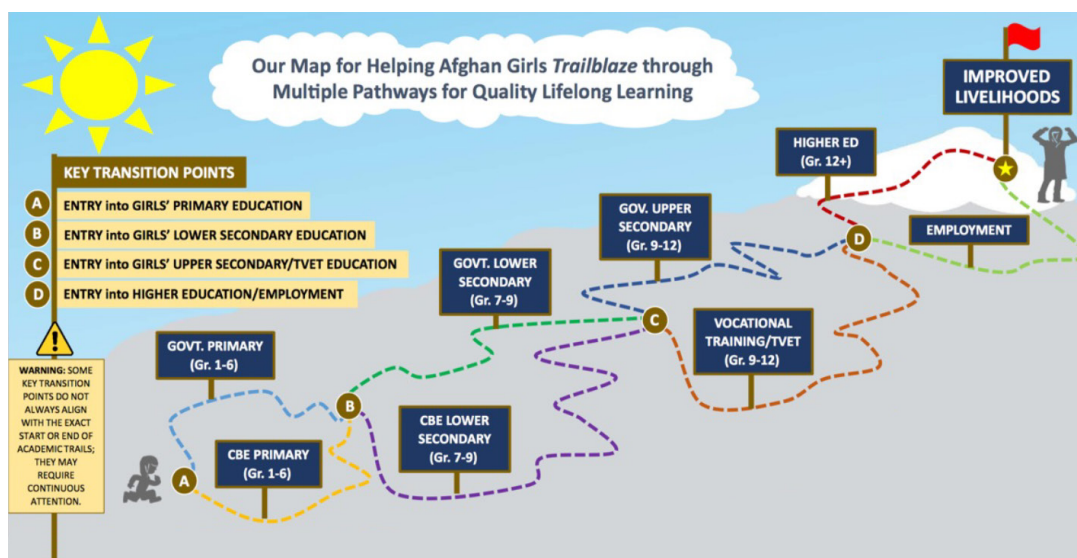


Diagram 1: Girls' education journeys

³ It should be noted however, that while the above aligns to commonly used definitions for example the Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG) definitions here, there has been some fluidity with definitions across projects (for example some projects use ALP for catch up, others use CBE for ALP).

Catch up programmes are generally shorter than ALPs (around six months) and are for girls whose education for some reason has been temporarily interrupted. For example, the [Live, Learn, Laugh... SCHIP](#) project in Uganda set up Creative Learning Centres (CLCs) which provided a six-month (on average) catch-up programme for out-of-school girls aged 10-18 whose schooling was disrupted⁴ and who needed intensive support to catch up before returning to mainstream school. The goal was to equip girls with the skills, knowledge and confidence to reintegrate back into mainstream schools. Each centre enrolled an average of 25 girls and there were two teachers and two family mentors assigned to each group of girls, which allowed for individualised support.

Alternative education programmes tend to focus on practical and everyday functional or vocational skills. The [ENGINE](#) project in Nigeria targeted out-of-school adolescent girls. For these girls, formal education was no longer the preferred pathway and a return to formal school was deemed unfeasible given their lack of formal education, their current situations, their educational needs and their aspirations. Girls attended an 18-month programme which focused on literacy, numeracy and life skills as well as asset-building skills and income generation. In addition to financial education sessions at the learning centres, the project supported beneficiaries to open bank accounts, form saving groups and access loans. The project also linked girls to vocational training institutes to complete skills training courses, as well as internships and work placements.

What does CBE achieve?

GEC projects take a holistic approach to their education programming and work across many areas that represent intermediate outcomes (as illustrated in [Table 1](#)). While all of these areas are important to ensure girls learn effectively in CBE, the work on changing community attitudes and norms, improved teaching, effective management and continued attendance are particularly relevant. The five projects referenced in the case studies in this brief are making good progress in all four of these areas. They are also projects that have impacted positively on learning

Across the GEC there are two main categories of girls that are being reached by CBE

- 1: Those that have fallen out of the formal system and need support to get back into formal school or to gain a formal school qualification. These girls attend community schools that bring them through the government curriculum, sometimes at an accelerated pace through accelerated or catch-up programs. These girls are generally in the younger age bracket (roughly 10 to 14 years old).
- 2: Those for whom the formal system is not meeting their needs or is not relevant to their everyday lives. They do not prioritise returning to formal school, or it may not be a viable pathway. These girls attend community schools that focus more on the practical literacy and numeracy skills needed for their everyday lives, often combined with vocational or business skills related to applied, practical skills and livelihoods. These are generally girls in the older age brackets (roughly 15 to 19 years old).

“CBE has improved the literacy and numeracy outcomes for girls across projects and there is some evidence that girls are doing better academically in CBEs than in government schools.”

outcomes as illustrated in [Table 1](#).

CBE has improved the literacy and numeracy outcomes for girls across projects and there is some evidence that girls are doing better academically in CBEs than in government schools. Significantly, projects also find that there is often increased and regular attendance in CBEs and girls consistently report that they are more motivated to attend as they are lower cost⁵ and the content is relevant for their everyday lives.

Strategic Approaches to Girls' Education (STAGE), Ghana	Improvement in literacy and numeracy from baseline to <u>midline</u> .
Street Child: Marginalised no More (MnM), Nepal	Improvement in literacy and numeracy from <u>midline</u> to <u>endline</u> .
Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient (EAGER), Sierra Leone	Improvement in literacy and numeracy from baseline to <u>midline</u> .
Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE), Zimbabwe	Improvement in literacy and numeracy from baseline to <u>midline</u> .
Education for Life (EFL), Kenya	Improvement in literacy and numeracy from baseline to <u>midline</u> .

Table 1

⁴ Disruption due to dropout from lack of fees/uniform, a need to support family incomes, drought, illness and early pregnancy.

⁵ CBE is lower cost in terms of fees, uniform, time and materials.

Factors for success

This section will explore factors for success under the following sections:

- *Reaching the most marginalised: ensuring access and retention*
- *Holistic approaches to CBE*
- *Teaching and learning*
- *Working with government for sustainable solutions*

Reaching the most marginalised: What do better performing projects do differently?

1. **Allow for flexibility in timetabling to suit girls' needs.** Projects quickly learned that the girls they were working with had many competing pressures on their time. Therefore, it was important to allow scope for flexibility and adaptability when it came to deciding when and where sessions would take place. Attendance tended to be better when timetables were co-created with communities and girls to best suit their needs and accommodate other responsibilities such as household work and childcare, which was sometimes provided onsite. Furthermore, when sessions took place nearer girls' home, attendance was better.
2. **Tailor delivery to suit the needs of girls.** CBEs have more scope to tailor and continuously adapt to the needs of marginalised out-of-school girls. With the closure of CBE spaces during the pandemic, many projects adapted their delivery modalities to ensure they reached the most marginalised girls. As many did not have access to phones, TVs and radios, providing alternative and multiple avenues for reaching girls often helped to reach those who could not easily travel to small group sessions, such as girls with childcare duties, girls with disabilities or girls from remote communities.



© Street Child

3. **Carefully consider language needs.** Many projects identified girls who did not speak the official language of instruction as a key marginalised group. Often girls dropped out of school as they struggled with learning due to the language of instruction differing from the language they spoke at home. Thus, many projects ran CBE classes in local languages, or used the local language to explain difficult concepts. In contexts where girls are being prepared to return to formal school, local language considerations had to be balanced against language of instruction considerations to ensure girls could access the formal curriculum when they returned.



CASE STUDY: SAGE, Zimbabwe

When schools were closed due to COVID-19, there was often more scope for CBE girls to continue learning (in small groups) than girls in formal schools. The SAGE project in Zimbabwe is an Alternative Education programme for marginalised adolescent girls. It decided to adapt the modes of delivering teaching sessions when schools and learning spaces closed. Before COVID-19 learning sessions were only delivered in CBE centres. During COVID-19 the project adapted to a four-pronged mixed delivery model which included (1) delivering lessons in CBE centres, (2) small groups in the community, (3) individual face-to-face sessions – often in girls' homes, and (4) the provision of virtual phone-based support. As formal schools and CBE centres re-opened, the SAGE project garnered feedback from girls. As a result, they decided to keep the mixed delivery model for girls who needed it. The Midline Evaluation (February 2022) shows learning gains in both literacy and numeracy (larger gains for literacy) despite the severe disruptions due to COVID-19.

4. Target the most marginalised. It is important to have clear and agreed selection criteria with a robust rationale that can be upheld for inclusion in the programme that outlines both general marginalisation factors (e.g. girls from the poorest households) and educational marginalisation factors (e.g. low levels of learning). Without this, programming runs the risk of not being contextual as marginalisation presents differently from place to place. There needs to be a thorough and transparent mapping at the community level, assessment of learning skills and screening process to ensure that the project is targeting the most marginalised. Girls then need to be placed in a programme that is at their level. If girls' learning levels are too high, they will not be engaged with the content – but if girls' learning levels are too low, they will not be able to access the content.

5. Create a safe and nurturing CBE environment (and all-female spaces where feasible). Across many of the projects, girls were motivated to attend CBEs because they felt safe. Project CBEs are generally all-female spaces which allow for girls to feel physically and emotionally safe. Projects tend to have direct control over recruitment and behaviour of CBE teachers (which are generally female), thus more safeguards are in place against abuse such as corporal punishment. Additionally, having the female-only spaces limits the potential for harassment and other types of sexual violence from boys and men.



CASE STUDY: Marginalised no More (MnM), Nepal

For marginalised and socially excluded groups, the formal system can replicate stigma and exclusion. For example, the Musahars in Nepal suffer extreme exclusion from education due to their untouchable status in communities. Musahar girls are impacted by their class, caste and gender. One Musahar girl recounts her experience of formal school:

'As soon as I restarted school, I became the victim of bullying. The boys and girls from other communities teased me just because of being a Musahar girl, saying: what will you do after studying? School is not for you? You people must go to the field for cultivation and harvest the crops.' (FGD participant)⁶

The MnM project runs ALPs for the most marginalised girls in very marginalised communities in CBE centres. Girls were motivated to attend these CBE centres because they were free of cost, the teachers were from their community, and lessons were conducted in their local language which made girls more comfortable to share their experiences.

'The fact that ALP classes are conducted in our own community area and only Musahar girls participated in the classes boosted our motivation to join the ALP classes.' (FGD participant)⁷

The proximity of CBE to girls' homes was also a key motivating factor, as it helped overcome barriers such as travel costs, or the need to have a male chaperone when leaving communities.

The project has demonstrated a positive impact on literacy and numeracy skills for girls who have attended CBE (see [Endline Evaluation](#)).

⁶ <https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/iz3aodmf/mnm-street-child-nepal-endline-report-cohort-ii-final.pdf>

⁷ [Ibid](#)

Common pitfalls to avoid

In one instance, girls were found to have left a formal school to join a CBE centre because parents perceived the NGO programmes to be better quality and lower cost than the government school. This highlights the need for careful targeting of girls and ensuring that CBEs do not pull learners from the formal system.

Location of CBE centres is important. One project found that locating the CBE centre within the school compound caused issues around bullying and stigma as school students could see the CBE students studying and there was resentment over the use of resources etc. This can work if the purpose is to transition the students back into schools and there is a concerted effort to demonstrate that intention (e.g. the CBE students have uniforms) and the school management committee is involved.

If there is no transition and bridging plan designed by the school which is the re-entry point, then transition back into school is likely to be unsuccessful.

Where policies advocate abstinence and this is translated directly into CBE provision without supplementary support of health workers, CBE girls found it difficult to feel included and therefore dropped out.

False expectations held by the girls, communities and facilitators can derail progress and act as a barrier to achieving outcomes. The pathways open to CBE students after graduating need to be clear, understood and relevant. Involving communities in downward accountability so they see the results of CBE will make it much more likely to be sustained.

Projects that used CBE curriculums from other settings found it harder to be relevant to girls' needs. The provision needs to respond to the particular barriers that the girls are facing, one size does not fit all.

Generally, setting up a new structure that is not linked to the current system in any way will not work. The more the CBE provision is embedded into structures that already exist the more likely it is to be successful. Be mindful of the pitfalls of setting up new structures, as they are less likely to be sustained.

Interventions that did not include local organisations as partners to support identification of girls found it much more difficult to get girls into the programme and maintain their attendance. Engaging people and organisations from the communities where CBE participants are located is key in reaching the most marginalised.



Holistic approaches to CBE: What do better performing projects do differently?

1. Analyse the intersectional barriers to education and design activities to respond to these barriers. It is important to recognise that out-of-school girls are not a homogenous group, and various factors will intersect to keep girls out of school. A careful (and on-going) analysis of barriers impeding girls access and learning is required to ensure that wider cultural, social or economic barriers are being addressed, as well as barriers to learning.

CASE STUDY: TEAM Girl Malawi

The project's Midline Evaluation found that the top educational barriers to girls' learning were:

- a lack of capacity in formal schools to address girls' individual learning needs, given a shortage of resources and large classes – and a lack of female-only sanitation facilities
- the inability of girls to attend classes full time due to other commitments such as income generation and childcare
- the reluctance of older girls to join classes with younger girls or where the pedagogy is inappropriate for their age
- limited resources for implementation, despite government policy on endorsing CBE

These educational barriers interact with social and economic barriers. For example, families generally place less value on girls' education than boys', and it is those girls from the poorest households that are most likely to be out of school. Thus, as well as responding to educational barriers, the project also responded to economic and cultural barriers.

Analysing barriers is key to supporting the most marginalised to attend and be successful in CBE. For example, facilitators from the local community attended CBE classes to offer childcare to ensure participants were able to focus on their studies. The project also worked with communities right from the start of the process to support the community to recruit CBE facilitators and trainers, and to determine the location of the CBE centres. Not only does this break down barriers and increase buy-in, communities are invested in realising the success of CBE and the graduates.

2. Ensure the active involvement and ownership of CBEs by community members and structures.

Across GEC projects, school management councils or committees have been established to oversee the smooth running of CBE spaces. They help manage the spaces, they hold teachers accountable and they often act as a bridge between the NGO and parents and caregivers. Community members have played a key role in profiling, targeting and reaching out to the most marginalised girls and working with their parents, caregivers and husbands to ensure girls are able to enrol and find support to attend regularly. Often their roles include reaching out to girls who have low attendance, by visiting homes, community sensitisation, overseeing the day-to-day running, conducting spot checks and checking on teacher attendance. It is important to involve high profile community members in the School Management Committees such as reputable and influential religious leaders, as their work with communities on placing value on girls' education has proved important.

CASE STUDY: Education for Life, Kenya

This project has run an Alternative Education programme in community centres in community spaces for girls who have little formal education, and has improved girls' literacy, numeracy and life skills. Once girls have completed this CBE programme, they are supported to transition to further education or (self)-employment opportunities. The Midline Evaluation found that there was low attendance at some centres and this was largely attributed to the girls' domestic burdens and need to fend for their families. As well as having domestic burdens, some young mothers were struggling to attend CBEs regularly due to childcare issues. Initially, the projects paid for a childminder in every centre but later the project worked with families and communities to come up with more equitable models that involved husbands looking after children more, relieving girls of some of her domestic work, older family members helping out and, in some communities, people grouping together to rotate responsibility for looking after several children at once. This has helped improve attendance, with the project reporting over 90% of girls attending the catch-up centres regularly.⁸

⁸ Project quarterly report Jan 2022. Improved attendance was also attributed to revisions to the curriculum.

3. Focus on changing the negative cultural and social norms that impede girls' learning.

Negative norms at the community level limit girls' potential and can create pervasive barriers to girls' education and empowerment. Sensitising communities and working on gender norm change can help transform existing power structures and relationships.

CASE STUDY: STAGE, Ghana

This project has addressed persistent negative cultural norms by working through community workers and sensitisation sessions that help ensure a more enabling eco-system for girls' learning.

This approach has helped to reduce girls' high chore burdens and increase support for girls' education. As outlined in the Midline Evaluation:

*'...girls shared that they are no longer overburdened with chores and farming activities which prevented them from attending school or training. Changes described by the girls include boys with motor bikes now helping to fetch water, husbands starting fires to help with cooking, husbands fetching their own water for bathing, and husbands also helping to prepare food such as pounding fufu.'*⁹



4. Integrate life skills which focus on empowerment, and respond to girls' safety, social and emotional needs.

The majority of GEC projects have integrated a life skills component into CBE which are generally delivered by a female mentor from the community. Many out-of-school marginalised girls suffered low confidence and morale due to exclusion and marginalisation, and lacked agency with regards decision making. Many had little or no exposure to knowledge on sexual and reproductive health. In addition, during COVID-19 there were rises in cases of gender-based violence, and girls reported increases in stress, anxiety and isolation. Because of this, many projects renewed their focus on life skills to help keep girls safe, regain confidence and self-esteem, and rebuild social connections.

CASE STUDY: EAGER, Sierra Leone

This project has run a 30-week Alternative Education programme for girls in community spaces with a focus on improving girls' numeracy, literacy, financial literacy and life skills. It has supported girls aged 13 to 17 who have never been to school, or have dropped out early. EAGER's life skills curriculum was designed to guide and encourage girls to value themselves, see their own strengths, and build their knowledge, confidence and resilience. They have also worked with girls to build their knowledge and skills on negative cultural norms, helping them to recognise and address the socio-cultural issues that stand in the way of their advancement.¹⁰ Mentors work with girls to challenge gender norms but also encourage girls to think critically about how they can safely step beyond the restrictions and assumptions around what they can and should do in their homes and communities. While there have been improvements in life skills outcomes and self-efficacy, girls are often still managing their lives within the boundaries of inequitable gender roles, as transforming culturally entrenched gender norms is difficult and takes time.¹¹



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⁹ <https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/op2bb2mh/stage-Ingbl-midline-evaluation.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/op2bb2mh/stage-Ingbl-midline-evaluation.pdf>

¹¹ <https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/vmspeutm/eager-Ingbl-midline-evaluation.pdf>

Teaching and learning: What do better performing projects do differently?

1. Tailor the content to meet the specific needs of adolescent girls and make it relevant to their lived realities. As previously outlined, the marginalisation factors that each girl faces will differ across contexts and across individuals, and it is important (where feasible) to adapt an existing curriculum or create a new curriculum based on the specific needs of the girls. There is generally scope to adapt existing, or create new curricula in CBE – which is often not the case in government schools.

In many cases, girls prioritised practical and vocational skills that link directly to income generation. For example, in the EAGER project in Sierra Leone, girls valued functional numeracy skills that helped them manage transactions and their businesses. In several other GEC projects, girls prioritised vocational skills over literacy and numeracy and projects adapted the program accordingly. For example, the IGATE project in Zimbabwe moved its focus from literacy and numeracy to vocational skills, and then to an accelerated and integrated learning programme which combined vocational and learning components with the aim of increasing motivation and attendance. In Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana and Malawi, girls viewed vocational skills as relevant to their everyday needs. Attendance in programmes often improved when sessions linked to income generation were integrated.

CASE STUDY: EAGER, Sierra Leone and Education for Life, Kenya

These projects have used storytelling in their learning and life skills sessions, creating characters that girls can relate to. In Sierra Leone, one of the main characters is Bintu who was developed to contextualise stories and introduce topics to learners through real-life experiences. Bintu is a 16-year-old girl with a six-month-old daughter named Sia. They live with Bintu's Auntie Hawa and her two younger cousins. Each week, learners hear at least two new stories about Bintu. Learners follow Bintu along with her family and friends through a variety of situations and experiences. Each story is introduced through an image depicting the situation in the story to help bring the story to life. In life skills sessions, Bintu's story sets a framework for girls to discuss sensitive topics and to explore together how Bintu and her friends can make decisions, solve problems, learn new skills and navigate difficult situations. This approach to learning has had very positive feedback from both the girls and the educators. In Kenya, when the project revised the curriculum to incorporate this approach, the project reported higher attendance and higher motivation of girls as a result.

2. Tailor the pedagogical approach so it is appropriate to the age and learning level of the girls. One of the challenges older girls face when they return to school is that they are learning with younger learners and the pedagogical approach is not suited to their age. CBE can provide an opportunity to create a learning environment that better meets the needs of older learners. Even though older learners may be learning the same foundational skills as a young learner in a formal school, the pedagogical approach should be different. Successful projects leverage girls' pre-existing and background knowledge, and their life experiences to make sessions meaningful and engaging. They also use a real-world approach which focuses on every-day problem solving, and active learning methodologies such as group work, project-based work, peer-to-peer learning, dialogue and questioning with a focus on developing higher order thinking skills. It is also important that content is matched to the learning level of the girls as illustrated in the example below.

CASE STUDY: Marginalised no More (MnM), Nepal

This project used the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach, which groups learners based on their learning needs rather than by age or grade, and by allocating time to build foundational skills rather than focusing on covering the curriculum. Students are assessed regularly and moved to appropriate groups if they have progressed sufficiently. The approach is informed by the global evidence that for effective teaching it is critical to use formative assessments in the classroom to guide differentiation and instruction at the right level for students. The community educators spoke with very simple and easily understandable local language during teaching and learning. During ALP classes, educators used games, word cards, pictures, sticks for arithmetic calculations, group discussions, etc. These methods encouraged girls to actively participate and engage in their own learning, class activities and interact with teachers and students to improve learning. As outlined in the Project Completion Report: 'TaRL/differentiated approach can be more effective than traditional non-formal pedagogical approaches in helping out-of-school girls from varied educational experience to achieve foundational literacy and numeracy.'

“Some girls did not see the value of the literacy, numeracy, and life skills portions of the ALP, rather wishing to focus only on vocational training for the purpose of income-generation.”
STAGE project report

3. Ensure an enabling environment that's supportive and increases girls' confidence in learning. Girls who have been out of school for extended periods may no longer identify as learners and may have lost confidence in their academic ability. It is important that teachers use approaches that create a supportive and enabling environment and build girls' confidence in their ability to learn.

CASE STUDY: ENGINE, Nigeria

This project has offered an Alternative Education programme which improved girls' learning and increased girls' confidence in learning. This was largely attributed to the teaching methods of the teachers and the enabling environment that they created. The Endline Evaluation consulted girls, who felt their learning and confidence increased because:

- teachers explained topics multiple times and worked with students who got answers wrong to help them arrive at the correct answer
- girls were encouraged to learn from each other
- teachers created a classroom environment where girls felt comfortable and were not afraid of making mistakes
- girls felt that they could participate in the sessions without fear, because teachers did not reprimand, punish or embarrass girls who made mistakes
- certain subjects and topics which were previously approached with fear were now better understood and approached with confidence
- girls felt confident to ask and answer questions in class. The teacher's approach to teaching was identified as the major reason for this.

4. Provide opportunities for continuous professional development for teachers, particularly peer-to-peer, and particularly for uncertified or unregistered teachers. Although CBE teachers often do not have any formal qualifications, many projects report that they are motivated and deliver quality lessons. What worked well across many projects to build teachers' confidence and capacity was having teacher learning circles (TLCs) with topics based on teachers' needs. Some project monitoring found that teachers needed more support in subject-specific teaching. In response, projects invited subject specialists to TLCs or trainings to deliver sessions or provided resources on topics that were complicated to teach. Some projects had coaching components and hired coaches that were subject specialists in the areas in which teachers were struggling.

For example, In Afghanistan, teachers found the TLCs to be the most beneficial model of professional development as they provided an opportunity to share and reflect on experiences of teaching, challenges in the classroom, and develop a network through which they can discuss education-related issues. Teachers felt they were able to resolve a lot of issues they faced in the classroom by meeting other teachers regularly.¹²

Other projects have supported female teachers to gain formal qualifications so that they can be employed by the government once the project finishes.



Working with government and school partners for sustainable solutions: What do better performing projects do differently?

1. Work closely with government partners and within existing CBE policies and frameworks from the outset, and find opportunities to strengthen CBE policies and approaches.

Where there were already strong policies, frameworks, existing curriculum and functioning CBE centres, it was easier to set up and run CBE – and this differed across project contexts. Government partners perceived their roles differently across contexts. In some projects, governments assumed a minimal role. In other cases, government partners were more heavily involved – for example in the development and approval of curriculum (in Sierra Leone), and the provision of textbooks (in Pakistan). Whatever the level of involvement, projects must adhere to existing policies, curriculum frameworks and standards, and involve government partners in project decisions from the outset. If adapting or developing curriculum, they should involve government partners in every step. By working with the government, SAGE in Zimbabwe received Ministry endorsement to make available to the country's 2 million out-of-school children and all educators their learning materials housed on the Open University, Open Learn Create (OLC) site.¹² The site has global reach and now provides educators with a range of materials to support learning for children and young people aged 10 to 19 years and for those working across Early Years to Grade 5. The learning materials (240 hours of learning) of this ALP are free to use.

Some projects also found opportunities to scale up CBE interventions or improve government policies and approaches.

- [TEAM Girl Malawi](#) worked with the government on their CBE approaches to help ensure it was more gender responsive and inclusive.
- [Closing the Gap](#) in Pakistan is now scaling their CBE intervention through the Non-Formal Education department and the Sindh Education Foundation to ensure access for more girls.
- [The ENGINE project](#) in Nigeria were successful in getting safeguarding referral protocols adopted by the four state governments in which they were working. The project also contributed to the adaptation of a code of conduct that provides guidelines for the behaviour of teachers and students in both formal and non-formal education. It is being used in the FCT, Kaduna and Kano.

2. Work with schools and government partners to ensure the smooth transition of girls to formal education. Agreeing on standardised procedures which supports assessment of girls' learning levels and helps and ensure they are placed in the most appropriate grade for their age and learning level. Projects that had good transition outcomes worked successfully with government and school partners to ensure there was no administration, attitudinal or policy barriers at the school level that would hinder girls' admission.

Another barrier when transitioning back to formal school is the cost. Girls generally attended the CBE at no cost, whereas at formal schools there are often indirect costs such as travel, learning materials and uniforms. Some projects provided girls and families with the materials needed to attend school to help ensure continued attendance.

¹² <https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=6892>



3. Work with schools and government partners to ensure girls have a positive experience once in school. A major issue in many of the contexts in which GEC projects work, is that once girls transition to a government school, many barriers resurface. For example, in Afghanistan, some girls were at risk of dropping out due to safety concerns and harassment when travelling to formal schools.

In other contexts, girls have struggled switching to formal school because of the large class sizes, the lack of individualised support, the lack of learner-centred methodology, the language of instruction and the sometimes harsher and stricter learning environments. It is important to ensure learning environments are inclusive and gender-responsive and girls are receiving the learning support needed. The [Viva Crane project](#) in Uganda trained and placed a Learning Support Teacher at schools who supports girls' learning when they transition from CBE. Other projects trained formal schoolteachers on learner-centred and inclusive teaching and learning methodologies.

CASE STUDY: STAGE, Ghana

To help girls transition from CBEs to formal schools, the STAGE project provided girls with 'transition packs' which included textbooks, uniforms and learning materials – and in some cases bicycles. The project advocated for enabling learning environments including basic school infrastructure such as chairs and desk. They also linked girls with disabilities with appropriate local or national social protection schemes.

The project worked with teachers in school who also provided remedial classes for the girls as they transitioned. They appointed trained female teachers, who were responsible for monitoring safeguarding, including bullying and other gender-based violence. The project also worked to strengthen the safeguarding reporting systems within the school and liaised with local actors in the government and health system to ensure that girls, including those with disabilities, were safe in these schools.

“Our school is far. It takes us 20 minutes to get to school and there we can’t study well because we are harassed by the boys on the way to school. We were secure when we were going to CBE class as it was inside our community.”

Girl, Kipisa

Value for money

There are some good examples of how value for money is driven through CBE programmes. Projects were able to improve learning outcomes and/or life skills for girls. The costs of CBE are influenced by at which stage of implementation the programme is. Effective CBE needs a process of design and test, learn and then adapt approach. Detailed costing and evaluation is needed to support programme scaling and funding. the costs of CBE are not fixed as they flex according to combinations of elements.¹⁴

TEAM Girl Malawi's CBE programme had a high annual cost per beneficiary of £183. Although the programme/model was expensive, it had a positive impact on girls' learning, helped girls to transition to a pathway of their choice and reduced barriers to regular attendance. The project also shows promising sustainability, as they are working with the Ministry of Education to form a single model of CBE that reaches the needs of the most marginalised.

The EAGER project spent £55 annually per beneficiary on all activities pertaining to CBE. EAGER's intervention demonstrated good value for money, as CBE activities had a positive impact on girls' literacy, numeracy and life skills scores. The project's Endline Evaluation also reported a statistically significant improvement of girls'

self-efficacy scores from baseline to midline, and improved communication skills amongst Cohort 1 girls due to CBE. The intervention was highly relevant too, as it specifically targeted girls who lacked a formal education.

The Education for Life project, delivered CBE through catch-up centres at an annual cost of £136 per beneficiary. Catch-up centres were very effective at driving positive outcomes for girls. Fully 94% of the girls surveyed at midline indicated that the learning and teaching received from the catch-up centres had helped them gain functional literacy and numeracy. Additionally, the intervention was highly equitable as the organisers targeted the most marginalised, and those in need of learning support (determined by those who failed a literacy/numeracy assessment). The project demonstrated good efficiencies too, as they were able to make use of existing community spaces (such as churches and community centres) to keep costs low. Overall, the project demonstrated good value for money, but the model is costly.

¹⁴It is difficult to compare costs between CBE and formal education but average estimates range from \$130 to \$167 across African countries. <https://www.unicef.org/wca/media/7131/file/Reimagining-Financing-for-Education-Policy-Brief.pdf> and <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/high-price-education-sub-saharan-africa>

Guiding questions to steer design and implementation of CBE

1. Reaching the most marginalised: ensuring access and retention

- What processes are in place to ensure the most marginalised are being reached and that they are placed in a CBE that meets their learning needs?
- What type of programme – catchup, accelerated, extension or alternative – is best suited to the learning needs and future goals of the targeted girls?
- What are the delivery modalities that are most likely to effectively reach the most marginalised girls?

2. Holistic CBE approaches

- How are the barriers to learning and learning needs of girls continuously assessed, and what opportunities are there to adapt programme interventions based on girls' needs?
- What steps are in place to ensure CBEs are effectively overseen and managed by community structures, and to ensure there are community-owned solutions to reducing barriers to girls' learning?
- How are negative gender and cultural norms that impede girls' learning and progress being addressed?
- What life skills are important for girls' learning and success and how are they being incorporated into CBE?

3. Teaching and learning

- To what degree are continuous professional development opportunities, such as TLCs, available, that enable teachers to liaise with peers and subject specialists if needed?
- How are teaching approaches tailored to the needs of older girls who have low levels of learning and/or little exposure to school?
- Is the teaching and learning approach ensuring the creation of an enabling and safe learning environment that builds girls' confidence?
- Are there opportunities to support CBE teachers to gain formal qualifications?

4. Working with government for sustainable solutions

- What is the plan for sustainability of CBE at the community, school and government level and how will it be achieved?
- Are there opportunities to improve national CBE policies and approaches to CBE? Can they be more inclusive and gender responsive?
- What steps are in place to ensure girls are placed in the appropriate school and grade, and that access barriers to admission are removed?
- What steps are in place to ensure girls have a positive experience once in school and that they continue to attend regularly?



Girls'
Education
Challenge



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