

# COUNTRY BRIEFING: SIERRA LEONE



The Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) was launched by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office in 2012 as a 12-year commitment to reach the most marginalised girls in the world and is the largest global fund dedicated to girls' education.

The GEC has had two projects in Sierra Leone. One GEC Transition (GEC-T) project focused on transitioning girls between basic and secondary education. One Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) project is supporting the most marginalised and vulnerable out-of-school girls to gain functional literacy and numeracy, as well as to increase agency and empowerment, to support positive transitions into safe livelihoods and safer and healthier households. The total investment in the two projects is £30,281,539, of which £23,615,053 has been spent to date.

LEAD PARTNER	PROJECT	WINDOW	START DATE	END DATE
International Rescue Committee (IRC)	<a href="#">Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient (EAGER)</a>	LNGB	February 2019	January 2023
Plan International UK	<a href="#">Girls' Access to Education</a>	GEC-T	April 2017	July 2021



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LEAD PARTNER*	GIRLS TARGETED	GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES TARGETED	BOYS TARGETED	SCHOOLS/ LEARNING CENTRES REACHED	TEACHERS TRAINED	GIRLS' CLUB LEADERS, MENTORS AND ROLE MODELS TRAINED (FEMALE)	COMMUNITY MEMBERS SUPPORTED	TEXTBOOKS/ MATERIALS DISTRIBUTED	SANITARY AND WASH KITS DISTRIBUTED
International Rescue Committee (IRC)	28,300	679	0	379	1,016	1,398	2,753	11,623	7,125
Plan International UK	11,012	1,652	3,056	467	2,485	373	9,235	23,657	9,268
<b>Total</b>	<b>39,312</b>	<b>2,331</b>	<b>3,056</b>	<b>846</b>	<b>3,501</b>	<b>1,771</b>	<b>11,988</b>	<b>35,280</b>	<b>16,393</b>

\*Project reported data is from the start of the project to December 2021.

## Highlights

**Strengthening a female teacher and mentor workforce:** GATE-GEC supported 704 young women in project communities to become Learning Assistants firstly and then qualified primary teachers after three years of study. In EAGER, the project has provided professional development and coaching to 1,395 female mentors to lead the Life Skills and empowerment components of the project. In both projects, these are young women from the community who were not able to finish their schooling. Evaluations have shown that these young women teachers and mentors now have increased capacity and confidence and act as positive female role models.

**Supporting girls with disabilities to participate in learning:** GATE-GEC trained 138 Community-Based Rehabilitation Volunteers (CBRVs) who supported girls with disabilities. GATE-GEC and EAGER trained all project teachers and mentors in inclusive education pedagogy. EAGER's evaluations showed a much higher prevalence of girls with disabilities than expected, up to 15%. The most prevalent disabilities identified amongst the girls were psychosocial, including anxiety and depression (affective impairments). For EAGER, girls with disabilities have positive learning outcomes, with the gap between average scores and the score of girls with disabilities declining since baseline. In addition, both projects' evaluations showed that prejudices against girls with disabilities had significantly lessened over the course of the project.

**Economic empowerment:** The GATE-GEC project successfully created over 200 self-sustaining Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). Over 91% of parents reported that they had successfully saved, and 61% reported spending more on their daughter's education. In EAGER, financial literacy outcomes are higher than at baseline. EAGER is currently working with 5,857 girls on creating Empowerment Plans to encourage girls to set their own goals. The project provides one-to-one coaching to each girl and provides small grants to girls so they can carry out these plans.

**Safe spaces:** Both projects created girl-only, safe, trusted and accessible spaces. In GATE-GEC, young female Learning Assistants led Girls' Clubs, assisted in remedial learning classes in primary schools, and provided psychological first aid (PFA) and psycho-social and safeguarding support. In EAGER, the project has developed 379 safe, females-only spaces where girls meet with female mentors who provide life, social and emotional skills and support in areas such as gender equality, gender-based violence (GBV), and sexual and reproductive health. The project also supported girls to build their social networks by creating a buddy system and peer learning. Both projects found that, due to this work, girls knew whom to contact when they needed help regarding their safety or mental wellbeing.

**Strengthening SG systems:** GATE-GEC and EAGER have strengthened linkages between existing community structures on child protection and GBV referral pathways. For example, the projects have partnered with existing government structures, such as Community Health Centres, the government's 116 hotline for reporting GBV, Family Support Units and Ministry of Social Welfare. They have also strengthened links between these structures and those in the communities.

**Addressing socio-cultural and gender norms:** GATE-GEC conducted Positive Parenting training, which involved reflective conversations on gender, power dynamics and GBV within the home. These conversations shifted attitudes and parents adopted more positive practices within the home, including gender-equitable distribution of chores, that enabled girls' return and retention in school. The midline showed that EAGER also contributed to social norms change. This has been done through working closely with the girls and conducting community dialogues and radio programmes.

The latter includes a national radio drama, radio discussions and training for local media, addressing gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and GBV. The radio programmes have showcased voices and experiences of girls living with disabilities, included girl co-presenters and included the voices of men and community leaders who champion girls' education. Changes in norms and behaviour were evidenced by increased community reporting mechanisms, development of by-laws and some indications of reduced early marriages and GBV. At the community level, girls are experiencing increased confidence in their abilities to have a voice (up 19% from baseline) and play a role within their communities (up 21%). At the household level, girls indicate greater awareness of family planning methods and prevention of sexually transmitted infections.

**Strengthening community engagement and ownership** – GATE-GEC engaged community members through VSLAs through conversations and messaging on mental health, equity in education and promoting safeguarding systems within communities. The project also established score-carding, a community-based feedback and accountability mechanism, that brought together project beneficiaries with school and local government leaders to develop and monitor action plans to improve girls' provision and quality of girls' education. In addition, EAGER has worked with communities to develop action plans promoting gender-equitable norms through community dialogues and caregiver groups. Finally, quarterly meetings are held at the chiefdom level to reflect on and share and mobilise action plans to protect and empower girls.

## Progress and learning

The two GEC projects have published robust evidence to demonstrate their impact:

LEAD PARTNER	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS*
<b>International Rescue Committee (IRC)</b>	Average literacy scores increased overall from baseline to midline. Midline literacy results demonstrate remarkable progression. For example, beneficiaries who were 15 or 16 years old at midline had an average literacy score of 47.4 compared to 19.8 at baseline. The overall numeracy score increased nearly five times the suggested target and 81.6% of the beneficiaries in both evaluations scored higher at midline than at baseline.
<b>Plan International UK</b>	The midline validated the importance of targeted support for marginalised girls and children with disabilities, with sub-groups such as girls with disabilities, double orphans, or girls from very poor families linked to lower learning outcomes. There was strong evidence that teachers' teaching practices and methods have improved due to teacher training and professional development activities.

\* Evidence in the table is from an evaluation point, baseline, midline or endline carried out by an external evaluator.

**Spotlight on the GEC and COVID-19 in West Africa:** This brief summarises emerging findings around the impact of COVID-19 on learning, wellbeing and return to school from GEC projects in Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. All projects in Sierra Leone were asked to participate in workshops and submit evidence around understanding the impacts of COVID-19 on learning, wellbeing and return to school. The brief was primarily aimed at national governments, INGOs and NGOs working in the region and it has continued relevance due to the ongoing uncertainty and continued impact on schools and, in some cases, school closures and learning. It outlines interventions that support the reopening of schools and the continuation of remote learning as schools remain closed.



## Sustaining results

- At the completion of GATE-GEC, teachers and head teachers expressed a strong commitment to professional development, new pedagogical practices and continued study. Educators valued the impact of study groups for marginalised learners and strongly supported their continuation. Community attitudes towards and the commitment to financially support the education of marginalised learners were strong.
- GATE-GEC's engagement and alignment with policies, practices and education leaders offer a strong opportunity for sustainable impact at the systems level for its model disability-inclusive schools, the female teacher model, and curriculum-aligned resources. For example, to support remedial and accelerated learning, GATE-GEC developed learning resources for students, including 'MyBook', a paper-based learning resource. In addition, the Learning Assistant/young female teacher model of bringing young women into the teaching workforce has had a demonstrable impact. The government has shown interest in this model and, through strong government engagement and financial commitment, this component has the potential for further adoption and scale.
- EAGER participates in several national-level workstreams, leveraging project learnings and evidence to influence. These include: i) the development of the Implementation Plan of the Radical Inclusion Policy; ii) the National Referral Protocol; and iii) the development and launching of the National Standard Operating Procedures for Safe Spaces. The project also contributed to reviewing the new 2023-2028 Education Sector Plan and the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Curriculum. In addition, the project works to disseminate project evidence about good practices and challenges on targeting and working with the most marginalised adolescent girls. The project contributed to the Ministry's COVID-19 response, and a selection of EAGER GBV prevention messages and psychological first aid materials were incorporated in the Government *Psychosocial Support Manual* and the *Message Guide on GBV, Teenage Pregnancy and Child Protection*.
- EAGER's learning, and COVID-19 adaptations featured heavily in Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary School Education's (MBSSE) e-book, *Transforming Education Service Delivery through Evidence-Informed Policy and Practice*.

## Resources

- [Emerging Findings: The impact of COVID-19 on girls and the Girls' Education Challenge response. Focus on West Africa \(Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone\)](#)
- [Country briefing Sierra Leone \(March 2021\)](#)
- [The power of girl-led approaches to monitoring and evaluation \(blog\)](#)
- [Getting girls back into school: strategies for successfully re-enrolling girls in Ghana and Sierra Leone \(blog\)](#)
- [Supporting young women to become teachers and role models in Sierra Leone \(Blog\)](#)
- [Using community-based education structures in education programming – a case study of GATE GEC](#)
- [Contextual Background and Learning Needs of Out-of-school Adolescent Girls in Sierra Leone](#)

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