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LEARNING BRIEF #5



Catching up on learning after COVID-19 school closures: Lessons from the Girls' Education Challenge

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.

Learning loss due to COVID-19 school closures has been a significant problem in most countries, with low-income countries hit the hardest. Many countries that had poor learning outcomes before the pandemic tended to have longer school closures. Among the 104 countries and territories analysed in the *Where are we on Education Recovery?* report by the World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO, four out of five had learning losses.

Before the pandemic, more than half of 10-year-olds in low and middle-income countries were unable to read or comprehend a simple story. After the pandemic it is estimated that this rose to 70%.¹ On average, across countries, a child lost six months of learning.² However, the magnitude of this loss has varied widely. With the prolonged school closures, education inequality has deepened, with disproportionate learning loss amongst those from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as children and young people living in rural areas, and those with disabilities.³

Studies suggest that girls have experienced greater learning losses than boys. This is partly as a result of gendered norms and community expectations that limited girls' ability to participate in learning when schools were closed.⁴ Analysis from the GEC has similar findings. Girls were often less likely to access learning than boys during

school closures. As schools closed, it was the girls from the most remote areas, the poorest households, those with disabilities, and those that had the most fragile education foundation before the closures, who were the most likely to suffer larger learning losses. Projects have reported limited learning opportunities for many of these girls during school closures, often due to a lack of resources or technology. There was increased pressure on girls to do housework, take on caring responsibilities and participate in income-generation activities. All of which limited girls' ability to engage in learning activities. Thus, for those that returned to schools and learning spaces, many have struggled to catch up on lost learning whilst keeping up with the curriculum, and this is particularly challenging given that many GEC girls already had lower levels of learning before school closures.

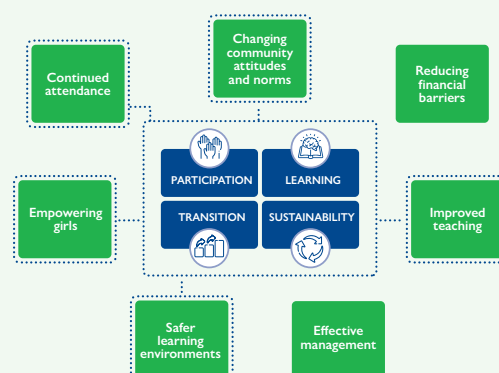


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- ¹ *Where are we on Education Recovery* (2022) World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO
- ² <https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org/en/library/an-analysis-of-covid-19-student-learning-loss>
- ³ *Where are we on Education Recovery* (2022) World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO
- ⁴ UNESCO (2021) *When schools shut: gendered impacts of COVID-19 school closures*

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 ALP and catch-up programmes which contribute to achieving the highlighted outcomes:



The RAPID Framework

Given the scale of the issue, UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank joined forces to compile [Mission: Recovery Education 2021](#), which has three priorities:

- All children and young people are back in school and receive the tailored services needed to meet their learning, health, psychosocial wellbeing and other needs.
- Students receive effective remedial learning to help recover learning losses.
- All teachers are prepared and supported to address learning losses among their students and to incorporate digital technology into their teaching.

To help achieve these priorities, the [RAPID Framework](#) outlines five key actions for education recovery:

1. Reach every child and retain them in school
2. Assess current learning levels
3. Prioritise fundamentals
4. Increase catch-up learning
5. Develop psychosocial health and wellbeing.

The [2022 GEEAP report](#) also emphasises the need to adjust instruction and support teachers, and recommends leveraging existing technologies and encouraging parental engagement in the school and learners' education.⁵ Governments have aimed to implement many of these key actions, although many have struggled. For example, of 122 low-income countries surveyed in March 2022, a quarter did not yet know how many students had

returned to school. Half had not conducted any surveys to measure student learning and only 40% were implementing learning recovery strategies at a national scale.⁶

The RAPID Framework provides guidance on addressing COVID-19 learning loss and what to build on moving forward. This Learning Brief aims to contribute further to this end. GEC projects have a wealth of learning and experience with regard to contributing to national plans and policy development, strengthening school responses, and supporting the most disadvantaged girls to go back to – and stay in – schools and learning spaces. This Learning Brief has collated and synthesised this knowledge in order to further support governments, donors and implementing partners in their efforts to mitigate learning loss.

This Brief collates information on GEC project approaches to Accelerated Learning Programmes (ALP) and catch-up programmes and the lessons drawn from implementation. It is intended to support governments, donors and implementing partners in their efforts to design and implement ALP and catch up programmes. It concludes with guiding questions to support the design and implementation of such programmes, ensuring that access and retention, teaching and learning and psychosocial, wellbeing and wrap around support activities are considered.

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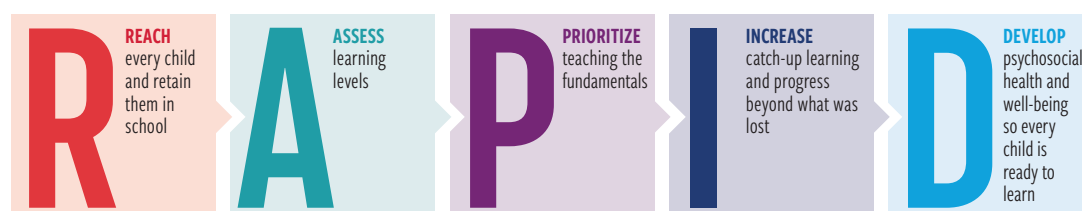


Figure 1: The RAPID Learning Recovery Framework



⁵ The Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel (2022) Prioritising Learning during Covid-19: The most effective ways to keep children learning during and post-pandemic

⁶ Where are we on Education Recovery (2022) World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO

GEC project approaches to catch-up learning pre and post COVID-19

GEC projects have drawn from broad approaches, which are represented in Figure 2. Because the GEC focuses on the most disadvantaged girls, many projects were already implementing most or all of the key elements of the RAPID Framework including remediation strategies with learners and were well placed to pivot their approaches. Before COVID-19, interventions included accelerated education, remedial classes, community-based study groups, reading camps, catch-up programmes and distance learning. These interventions were sometimes of a longer duration than post COVID-19 interventions (for example, the [SOMGEP](#) project was implementing a three year ALP). Post COVID-19, the ALP and catch-up offer became broader and included activities that addressed access and retention, teaching and learning and psychosocial, wellbeing and wrap around support activities. As schools and learning spaces closed, projects pivoted to remote or blended approaches with the aim of reaching the most marginalised girls, including those with disabilities. As governments and education stakeholders began to plan their school reopening and catch-up plans, GEC projects were well placed to contribute to key lessons, strategies and resources. The evidence in this learning brief is drawn from both periods of time.

- **Access and retention activities** focused on ensuring that students were supported to return to schools safely and to stay in school. In addition, projects worked with community members, parents and caregivers on solutions to mitigate learning loss and support the safe return to school.
- **Teaching and learning activities** focused on ensuring that learning loss was mitigated as much as possible during school closures, and on ensuring that students caught up with learning missed once back in school. Teachers were supported to teach during and post-pandemic via training, mentoring, coaching, peer support networks (both remote and in-person), and teaching and learning materials.
- **Psychosocial, wellbeing and wrap around support activities** implemented by many projects through working alongside government partners and other partners in the sector to help plan for safe school reopening and contributed to national catch-up plans. Successful projects also ensured that girls received ongoing mentoring and wellbeing support.

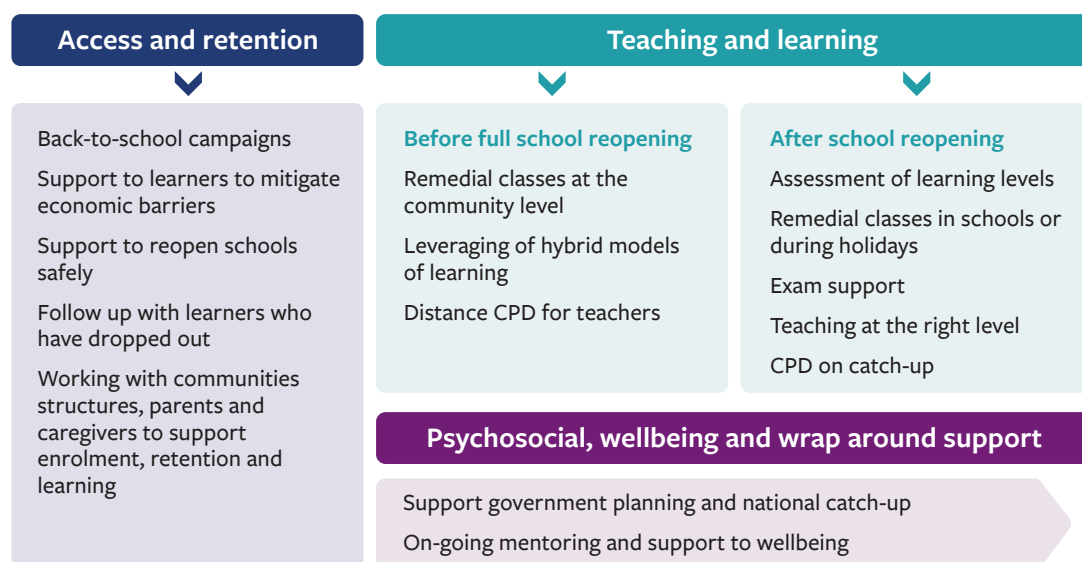


Figure 2: Approaches to assist recovery and mitigate learning loss

Factors for success⁷

This section draws out the core elements that seem to have influenced successful ALP and catch up programmes after COVID-19. It is structured to provide brief but important reflections on access and retention of girls, teaching and learning and psychosocial, wellbeing and wrap around support activities.⁸

Access and retention activities: What do better performing projects do differently?

1. Providing practical support and resources to girls and their families. Practical support helped to mitigate economic burdens on families, which was particularly important given the negative economic impact that COVID-19 had on households. For example, in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, the [Virtuous Cycle of Girls' Education](#) project (CAMFED International) provided resources for school boarding to enable girls to stay over rather than travel home in the dark after the elongated school day.

- 2. Leveraging support in homes.** Outreach and involvement of parents in girls' learning is an important element. Engagement at the household and community levels has helped to ensure that an enabling and supportive learning environment is maintained for girls at home, as well as in school. For example, some projects provided parents with packs as well as training for parents.⁹ Where possible, parents could therefore support their children (even just through motivation, chasing up on homework, and, where possible, helping them with actual work).
- 3. Working with community-based structures and government partners to monitor students' return.** Many projects leveraged their work with community structures and government partners to bring girls back to school who were struggling to return. This included home visits to families to help understand the reasons why girls were not returning and to work with them on ensuring they could re-enter education.

⁷ The six projects chosen for the case studies are making good progress in all four areas. They are also projects that have impacted positively on learning outcomes

⁸ For more detail on the interventions themselves, as well as additional evidence collected on these, please contact learningteam@girlseducationchallenge.org

⁹ Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE), Zimbabwe (Plan International); Making Ghanaian Girls Great!, Ghana (Plan International) & Girls Access to Education, Sierra Leone (Plan International)



CASE STUDY: Working with government partners for a safe return to school

In Ghana, the [Making Ghanaian Girls Great!](#) project (Plan International) worked with government partners and community structures to ensure as many children as possible safely returned to school. The first intervention was the back-to-school campaign which adapted back-to-school messages and broadcasted them through community radio stations and information centres. In addition, teams of school leaders and facilitators visited churches, mosques and homes to educate parents, caregivers and children about the scheduled reopening of schools and the safety and hygiene protocols put in place.

As schools prepared to reopen, the project collaborated with District Education Officials to monitor the extent to which schools were complying with pandemic protocols, adapting a UNICEF standardised checklist for safe school reopening. A total of 48 District Education Officials were involved. All schools that were identified as having gaps in their safety protocols were given extra support to ensure they were safe for the returning children. The project also distributed face masks, hand sanitiser and hand washing equipment. As illustrated in [this blog](#), 96% of project participants returned to school.

Upon return, in cases where children were absent or not attending regularly, facilitators linked up with district officials to follow up individual cases at the school and community level. The community-led early warning system, along with the project's follow-up efforts, were key to re-engaging children on the verge of dropout, contributing to the near-100% return rate seen by the project. This monitoring system also enabled the project to identify girls who were pregnant and to refer them to the appropriate services within the community. In all, 27 girls were identified and referred to community-based services.

CASE STUDY: Implementing a multi-pronged approach to reaching girls

In Zimbabwe, the **SAGE** project (Plan International) continued to implement their hybrid approach developed during lockdowns when learning hubs re-opened. SAGE runs an alternative learning programme that focuses on building foundational skills for girls with little or no formal education. As their learning hubs closed, it became evident that a multi-pronged approach to reaching girls was needed, whether by phone, in small groups or individually in their homes. As hubs re-opened, some learners preferred these delivery modalities – and particularly those from remote communities, young mothers and learners with disabilities. The multiple pathways have helped to ensure that all girls were able to catch up on their learning via a modality that was best suited to them. The project also adapted its approaches and resources to facilitate learning via these modalities. For example, teaching and learning materials were adapted to accommodate distance learning which meant re-formatting materials into ‘Learner Cards’ which helped the educators to deliver sessions across the four different modalities. The project team were heavily involved in the development of the national learning catch-up strategy. SAGE materials, including the Learning Cards, were approved for use in formal schools to support distance learning and hybrid models of learning as schools re-opened. The Midline Evaluation shows learning gains in both literacy and numeracy (larger gains for literacy) despite the severe disruptions due to COVID-19.

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

- 1. Leveraging hybrid models of learning when schools re-opened.** As schools re-opened, many projects continued to leverage hybrid models of learning that were initiated during school closures. Projects’ efforts to mitigate learning loss began when schools closed through remote, blended and community learning. This was via various methodologies such as small group learning at the community level, reading camps, distribution of printed material and provision of feedback on tasks, support to access radio and TV lessons, and the leveraging of other existing platforms such as WhatsApp. As schools re-opened, some took a staggered approach to bringing back learners and mixed face-to-face learning with distance learning. In this way, many of the remote and community level approaches continued to be leveraged.
- 2. Leveraging hybrid models of continuous professional development (CPD).** As the pandemic spread, the professional development needs of teachers changed rapidly due to the changing context and the need to quickly become familiar with pedagogical approaches for remote learning and digital platforms. This was combined with the need to address additional wellbeing and protection issues of their learners. Remote communities of practice became an important modality through which projects could connect with and support teachers. As schools closed, these communities were set up remotely and resources were shared and training conducted via platforms such as WhatsApp and Zoom. For example, the **TEACH** project (IRC) in Pakistan sent audio lessons on relevant topics to teachers via WhatsApp. As

schools re-opened, new challenges for teachers emerged around learning loss, often against competing pressures of preparing learners for exams and everyday teaching duties. While projects have been able to return to face-to-face training and meetings, many of the remote platforms continue to remain active, as trainers, project technical staff and teachers continue to support each other and share resources and ideas.

- 3. Providing remedial and/or itinerant teachers¹⁰ to support teachers and marginalised learners.** Some GEC projects have hired remedial teachers to provide support to learners (both during school hours and outside school hours) and to provide support to overstretched teachers. This is particularly effective when the classroom teacher and remedial teacher work together to identify individual learning strategies. Other projects provided roving and itinerant teachers to reach the marginalised girls in their homes and communities. For example, home visits helped reach pastoralist girls supported by the **Let Our Girls Succeed** project (EDT) in Kenya and girls with disabilities supported by the SAGE project in Zimbabwe.
- 4. Providing structured teaching and learning materials that focus on clear remediation strategies and core skills.** National catch-up strategies often required additional teaching and learning materials, particularly when schools were closed or were implementing hybrid models with learners in schools two or three days a week and studying at home other days. Projects helped with the development and distribution of materials such as remote teaching resources, exam preparation packs and past papers, and student self-study material.

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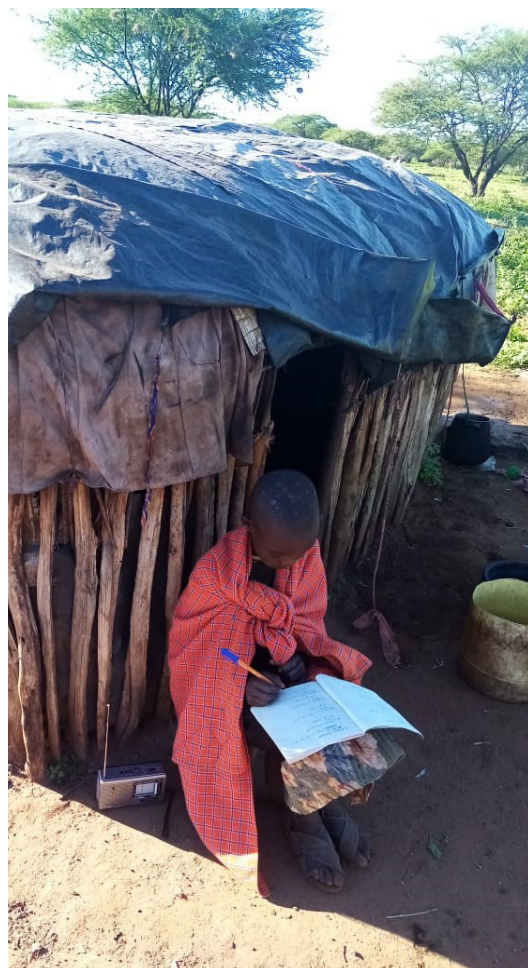
¹⁰ Projects use remedial and itinerant teachers as surge capacity, the main difference being that itinerant teachers were in projects that worked with pastoral communities

CASE STUDY: Implementing reading camps for catch-up

In Kenya, the [Let Our Girls Succeed](#) project implemented a catch-up programme for eight months to mitigate learning loss before schools re-opened and these sessions are continuing during the holidays. Each camp typically consisted of five girls from within a community coming together to engage in learning activities which included listening to radio lessons, group discussions and engagement with paper-based resources. Reading camps were facilitated by mentors and remedial teachers. The groups met about four to five times per week. Girls were assessed when schools re-opened and those who had attended the reading camps scored higher in literacy and significantly higher numeracy than girls who had not attended. They also said that they felt more confident and some said that group leadership responsibilities increased their self-belief in their learning abilities. In addition, participation in reading camps restored confidence and hope in progressing with their education.

The Reading Camps in Kenya found these teaching and learning strategies successful:

- Areas of focus were based on girls' assessed learning needs and gaps.
- Learning in groups provided a supportive learning environment for girls, particularly for those who did not have literate household members available to support. Girls used peer feedback to advance their understanding of education concepts. Also, listening to radio lessons as a group was more effective than listening to radio lessons individually at home.
- Having a variation in activities made learning in the Reading Camps more enjoyable than studying alone at home.
- Remedial papers helped to direct girls focus on relevant content. During group discussions, girls could agree on what concepts to focus on and this helped them to be more systematic in their learning.



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Catch-up programmes outside of school hours

5. **Providing catch-up programmes to mitigate learning loss before school re-opening or after school hours targeting the students most in need.** Projects also implemented remedial programmes which involve additional targeted support that run alongside regular classes or during school holidays (or when schools were closed) for students needing short-term content or skill support. Providing sessions that were close to girls' homes and had flexible schedules based on their needs worked well to get buy-in from caregivers, husbands and learners in Kenya which enabled higher attendance. In Nepal, the [STEM](#) project (Mercy Corps) ran remedial clubs for exam classes which focused on covering parts of the curriculum that may not have been covered during lockdowns, zoning in on problematic areas such as fractions, word problems and algebra.
6. **Focusing on language support where needed.** In many of the contexts where GEC projects work, the language of instruction is not the learner's first language. Thus, during school closures, many learners did not have much exposure to the language of instruction. In Kenya, the [KEEP](#) project

(WUSC) runs Kiswahili and English remedial classes, mostly attended by refugees. The rationale for focusing on languages is that a focus on strengthening language skills, as in the Kenya example, helps with language acquisition as well as opening up access to other subjects in the curriculum. In Tanzania, **Virtuous Cycle of Girls' Education** project focused on initiatives such as writing and speaking competitions, essay and story writing and debates and dialogue, recognising that the school closures had resulted in limited exposure to English among the poorest households.

7. **Prioritising exam classes.** While some education systems adjusted the exam timetables, others did not, leaving little time for students to catch up and prepare for exams. Many projects provided additional support for these students including resources such as revisions packs and exam papers, and rolling out exam preparation classes. For example, the **STEM Nepal** project successfully focused on helping grade 10 girls pass their Secondary Education Exams by providing intensive classes over a month-long period, focusing on maths, science, English, social studies and economics.

Catch-up strategies in the classroom

8. **Providing focused continuous professional development support and coaching to teachers specifically on teaching strategies to catch-up learners.** In some cases, it is not feasible to offer catch-up classes outside of the school day as some schools run double shifts and so have limited capacity. As schools re-opened, teachers were already under immense pressure and many did not have time to run extra classes. It was important to provide teachers with specific CPD support on catch-up strategies that they can use in the classroom with learners while at the same time moving forward with the curriculum. Areas of focus included: using formative assessments to diagnose learning gaps and adapting teaching strategies to address identified learning gaps; differentiation and teaching at the right level, active learning and inclusive education strategies. It has also proved important to provide teachers with opportunities to reflect together on implementation of these classroom practices in real time. The **Let Our Girls Succeed** project

in Kenya has subject specialists and coaches who observe teachers and learners and advise teachers on learning gaps and remedial strategies.

9. **Assessing students' learning levels and teaching to this level.** Projects supported teachers through CPD opportunities to assess the learning levels of students as they returned to school. The Zimbabwe, the **SAGE** project used learning progress assessments at key points rather than waiting until the end of a module, and teachers were trained on differentiating learning based on assessed needs.

10. **Consolidating the curriculum and prioritise the fundamentals.** Many projects consolidated curricula across subjects when schools and learning spaces re-opened. They prioritised the most important skills and particularly those that are pre-requisites for further learning, dedicating more time to basic skills rather than focusing solely on curriculum coverage. This was often easier in non-formal spaces where there was less pressure to adhere to formal timetables or exams.



CASE STUDY: Adapting the Teaching at the Right Level approach

When schools reopened in Nepal, the **Marginalised No More** project (Street Child) adapted their Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach with marginalised adolescent girls in non-formal spaces, for use with students in formal primary schools. This approach centres around grouping learners based on learning needs rather than by age or grade and 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 effective teaching requires formative assessments in the classroom to guide differentiation and instruction at the right level for students. The project has demonstrated positive impact on literacy and numeracy skills, which girls attribute to the teaching and learning approach. As schools re-opened, the World Bank provided funding to Street Child to further pilot this approach in 64 formal schools across three districts with the aim of fast-tracking learning recovery. This pilot has had a positive impact on learning outcomes: 79% of students were able to read at least a paragraph and 79% could perform basic maths operations – compared to 46% and 33% respectively at baseline. Street Child, alongside other education stakeholders, are currently advocating and advising government on strategies for further scale up.



CASE STUDY: Adapting curriculum to be relevant to needs

The **EAGER** project (IRC) in Sierra Leone, which delivers literacy, numeracy and life skills sessions to girls with little or no formal education, adapted their curriculum when learning centres re-opened. The project focused first on reviewing previously taught core literacy and numeracy skills and providing additional opportunities to practice foundational skills. Because girls had increased responsibilities after COVID-19, the programme was shortened to 30 weeks with sessions three times a week instead of four. Curriculum adaptations were made not to impact the overall learning outcomes. Adaptations were based on what girls felt was most useful and relevant for them. At midline, the majority of girls have improved their learning outcomes since baseline, exceeding targets. This progress was partially attributed to the culturally grounded and contextualised curricula and the real-life applicability of learned skills and knowledge.

Psychosocial, wellbeing and wrap around support activities: What do better performing projects do differently?

Support government national catch-up plans

1. **Gathering data and sharing evidence based insights and learning from project experiences to inform national catch-up strategies.** There are many examples across GEC projects where project evidence is being used to inform catch-up strategies, provide evidence-based recommendations and inform advocacy efforts. Because GEC projects work with marginalised girls, and have established monitoring and evaluation systems, they are well placed to gather evidence on what is working or not working for the most marginalised. Data and evidence on those unable to access learning during school closures, and data on learning loss (and gains) was especially important to inform national catch-up strategies.

Successful projects:

- Know which learners are unable to access learning during school closures
- Measure learning status, learning loss and who is most affected
- Assess socioemotional / psychosocial status and support needs
- Monitor progress and effectiveness

For catch-up strategies to be effective, it is necessary to know the learning gaps and learning levels of students. This requires continuous assessment and monitoring so GEC projects have ensured that diagnosis covers both the extent of the learning loss, as well as the distribution; how learning gains and losses have been distributed amongst the student population and which individuals and groups have the lowest levels of learning. Girls' learning losses have varied greatly across the GEC, both across countries, across schools and within schools. And in some schools, there have even been some learning gains.¹¹ In addition, projects have been assessing socioemotional and protection needs, and re-assessing barriers to learning in order to get a holistic understanding of challenges girls are facing as they return to school.

It is also necessary to monitor the effectiveness of remedial programmes and catch-up strategies. This can put additional strain on teachers and schools that are already stretched. Many GEC projects have helped with the assessment of learning levels, both while schools were closed and when learners returned to school. They have also closely monitored strategies such as remedial lessons and teaching and learning approaches, alongside government and school partners.



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“For catch-up strategies to be effective, it is necessary to know the learning gaps and learning levels of students.”

2. **Advocating for gender responsive and inclusive planning – jointly where feasible.** Again, because inclusive and gender responsive strategies are integral to GEC projects, they are well positioned to provide evidence-based strategies for including the most marginalised in planning. In some cases, GEC projects came together to advocate for the needs of the most marginalised. For example, in Zimbabwe, GEC projects facilitated key dialogue and progress towards a joined-up approach to teaching out-of-school young people.
3. **Providing practical support to government catch-up plans.** In addition to providing evidence-based insights and learning, there are several ways through which GEC projects provided practical support to governments to implement their catch-up plans. As schools re-opened, approaches such as parallel shifts, remedial classes and teaching at the right level put a strain on existing infrastructure and resources. Many projects continued their work with school boards of governors and parent-teacher associations to build capacity around school improvement plans and support efforts to expand their infrastructure. For example, CAMFED provided grants to schools, which boards of governors used to buy new furniture and provide electricity for evening study given that hours were added to the school day. Other projects provided supplies and support to ensure schools were safe and adhering to health protocols.

¹¹ As evidenced by EDT in a presentation to the Fund Manager on learning data



Holistic support for girls

4. **Focusing on the psycho-social wellbeing and physical safety needs of girls, as well as academic needs.** Projects such as **KEEP** (Kenya) and the **Virtuous Cycle of Girls' Education** (Tanzania and Zambia and Zimbabwe, provided trainings to focal teachers in schools on counselling, psychosocial support and child protection. In Ghana, facilitators and teachers were equipped with the skills to provide emotional and wellbeing support to students through basic training on psychological first aid, stress management and wellbeing to help them support children as they returned to school.
5. **Providing mentoring support from young women in the communities.** An important aspect of encouraging girls' learning and supporting their re-enrolment and retention in schools is the encouragement and emotional support they receive from female mentors. There are many examples of this across the GEC. In Nepal, the 'Big Sister / Little Sister' approach, where young women from the community provide academic and mentoring support to younger learners, continued as schools reopened. The [GATE](#) project (Plan International) in Sierra Leone used their young female student teachers to support girls in social emotional learning as they were reintegrating into school.

CASE STUDY: Female counsellors providing support

The **KEEP** (Kenya) project has employed a number of female counsellors and trained them on counselling skills who work across schools. The counsellors have set up communities of practice which they support at the school level and these consist of the Head of Department of Counselling and other selected teachers. The Heads of Department and teachers have received several training sessions run by project staff and counsellors. Their role then is to provide counselling services to the student population on any issues that may arise. They have duly provided emotional and psychosocial support to girls as they returned to school. Many teachers and project staff attribute the combination of counselling and remedial sessions as integral to improved confidence, and improvements in retention and learning (project technical monitoring report). A key lesson from the project's Endline Evaluation was, *"A combination of material, moral and remedial support can improve girls' attendance, retention, performance and overall wellbeing."*

Value for money

There are some good examples of good value for money through using catch-up learning across the GEC portfolio, at a cost ranging from £2 to £194 annually per beneficiary. These were estimated by isolating the direct and indirect budget lines that reflected ALP activities, dividing by the direct beneficiaries covered by the activities and annualised. The wide range reflects the variation in activities and interventions that are included in the ALP offer and the different contexts in which they are implemented, for example in refugee camps or the number of highly trained teachers compared to facilitators present and relative remuneration.

Let Our Girls Succeed's (Kenya) catch-up programme demonstrated good value for money at very low annual cost of £2 per beneficiary. The intervention was highly cost-effective and efficient, as it was able to group together a small number of girls in 'camp', with concentrated support of mentors and remedial teachers, whilst also being low cost. The learning material was also highly relevant, which drove substantial learning gains in literacy and numeracy for girls who attended the camps, over those who did not.

The **SAGE** (Zimbabwe) project was able to support girls' learning successfully through their alternative learning programme at an annual cost of £52 per beneficiary. The Midline Evaluation evidenced positive learning gains in literacy and numeracy for girls. It was likely that the slightly higher costs were driven by the multi-prolonged approach to reaching girls through the phone, in groups, individually, and reformatting materials to accommodate to the learning modality.

Marginalised no More's (Nepal) delivery of TaRL, which is based on an existing design by Pratham, displayed good cost-effectiveness with an annual cost per beneficiary of £13. The intervention was highly relevant as it did well to address very low literacy levels. This is reflected in its positive impact on learning outcomes for the beneficiaries supported by the project. The project was highly efficient in its delivery of TaRL. They were able to pilot and scale this pre-existing intervention that was based on global evidence, and they secured funding to further pilot the approach in 64 formal schools, which shows promising sustainability.

The **KEEP** (Kenya) project's remedial classes were effective, but costly at £194 per beneficiary per year (when compared to other projects). This higher costs here include additional salary as the project hired two extra full time teachers with salaries (projects usually use stipends). These teachers taught both extra and regular classes. The classes were highly relevant as the project targeted low performers, and this is also a likely contributor to the high costs. The classes were very effective as they had a significant, positive effect on girls' literacy and numeracy outcomes from baseline to midline.

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Recommendations for the design and implementation of catching girls up on learning

This section synthesises findings from this Learning Brief and offers guidance on how practitioners can support remediation and catch-up learning. Guiding questions, which can form the basis of a situational analysis, structure the following sections that offer practical tips for those aiming to implement ALP or catch-up learning interventions either as the main focus of a programme, or as a complement to activities aiming to improve learning outcomes.

Guiding questions to determine how to support access and retention

1. **Are there systems in place to identify students at risk of dropping out that consider a variety of factors?** Having early warning systems in place that identify and analyse the pre-cursors of drop out, such as low learning levels and poor attendance, can help improve attendance. This data should be analysed alongside wider barriers that affect learning such as economic barriers, home learning environment and lack of support, and protection and wellbeing issues. In addition, community structures can be used to follow up on those with low attendance and at risk of dropping out.
2. **To what degree and how are parents, caregivers and community networks encouraging attendance and learning – and what support do they need?** COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of having close collaboration between schools, community structures and parents/caregivers. Clear communication and outreach to communities on homes on the safety of schools, the value of learning and on enabling a supportive home learning environment, can help sustain study habits and learning.
3. **What support is in place to mitigate economic barriers for the most disadvantaged?** While all efforts should be made to mitigate all barriers to attendance and learning at the home and community level (such as harmful gender norms), economic barriers are the most prominent barrier for disadvantaged learners – and this was exacerbated during school closures given the negative economic impact that COVID-19 had on families. The GEC experience suggests removing school fees, offering school meals or giving families cash transfers.



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Guiding questions to determine how to support teaching and learning

1. **What assessments are taking place as schools re-open to identify re-entry learning levels and learning needs?** GEC projects supported with two types of assessments that are important to assist recovery: the gathering of data to inform policy at a regional level and the collection of data on learning levels at the school level. Many projects supported school leaders and teachers to carry out diagnostic and formative assessments, which help teachers and schools to provide targeted instruction at the right level, and to monitor progress.
2. **To what degree are teachers equipped to adapt classroom practices to respond to assessed learning gaps and needs?** Learning across GEC projects highlighted the need to provide CPD opportunities to teachers so they are be equipped to adapt classroom practices as needed. Peer networks established during COVID-19 (including remotely connected networks) can continue to be leveraged as schools re-open.
3. **What catch-up opportunities are available for learners outside school hours to mitigate learning loss?** A successful approach across projects was to provide catch-up sessions targeting those most in need. The content of these classes should match learning levels and address gaps in prioritised subjects (such as literacy, numeracy and language of instruction). Classes should be timetabled to ensure that children can cope with additional learning time and teachers/facilitators can manage the additional teaching load.

Guiding questions to determine how to support psychosocial, wellbeing and wrap around activities

1. **To what degree are national catch-up plans inclusive and gender responsive – and are they targeting the most marginalised?** It is those that have had few learning opportunities when school were closed that have required the most support to help them readjust, catch up on lost learning and get back on track. Thus, particular attention needs to be placed on the most disadvantage when putting together national catch-up plans. As development partners generally work with the most marginalised, they are often in a good position to identify – and advocate for – the unique needs of various groups of disadvantaged children and young people.
2. **To what degree are catch-up strategies (at the school and system level) considering the wellbeing of learners as they return to school?** COVID-19 has rapidly changed the context in which girls live. School closures and restrictions on mobility meant that girls faced increased protection risks. There was a sharp rise in cases of gender-based violence and early marriage. There were increases in stress and anxiety levels. As household economic circumstances became more challenging, girls were required to play a greater role at home or outside the home to find a way to supplement income.¹² It is important to equip teachers to deal with both learning recovery, and students' mental health and psychosocial needs.
3. **To what degree are monitoring systems capturing learning loss and learning gaps of students, and attendance?** It is important to have robust monitoring systems that track attendance, drop out and reasons for drop out, as well as ensuring there is an effective system of assessing the learning gaps and learning progress of girls. This information should then be used to inform and adapt the content and delivery of catch-up and CPD approaches.

What limits the success of ALP and catch-up interventions?

- Without clear articulation of the purpose of the ALP/catch-up programmes misunderstandings are common which reduce impact. For example, programmes need to make sure they supplement education provision that already exists and have a clear remit, focus and time frame targeting learners appropriately i.e. work at their learning level.
- Often weaker ALP and catch-up interventions repeat the same lessons/content that learners found hard to access. A skillful approach is needed to ensure the content and delivery mechanism is fit for purpose.
- Without well-designed and appropriate summative and formative assessments it is hard to gauge the impact of ALP/catch-up programmes. Often these are short interventions and assessment is not seen as critical, which causes problems in understanding impact and also makes it difficult for students to transition to other education provision.
- If communities are not engaged around the selection of girls and setting criteria, participation in programmes can be problematic. ALP and catch-up programmes that rely on self-selection for participation can end up missing learners that need support more.
- Without a clear transition path into schooling, the impact of programming is reduced. For example, schools need to have a good placement strategy with clear criteria to make sure that learners re-enter at the right time and at the right learning level and age. Highly successful projects also ensured that they engaged with schools to follow up after transition. Furthermore, programmes that do not engage schools can experience resistance to accepting learners.

¹² Girls Education Challenge, [Emerging findings: the impact of COVID-19 on girls](#)

Girls'
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