

12 YEARS OF THE GIRLS' EDUCATION CHALLENGE

Girls'  
Education  
Challenge



# IN THEIR OWN WORDS: THE GIRLS OF THE GEC





# GULWARI'S STORY

Fifteen-year-old Gulwari was supported to go to school through an accelerated education programme. She is now skilled in tailoring and business and wants to support other girls in her community by passing on these skills.

Through the support provided by the Community-based Education for the Marginalised Girls in Afghanistan project, Gulwari was able to complete Grade 6 by attending an accelerated education programme. Her goal is to complete Grade 12 and to become a tailoring teacher.

The Community-based Education for the Marginalised Girls in Afghanistan project aimed to improve the life chances for 49,150 marginalised girls who studied in lower primary schools in community-based schools. Girls who graduated continued in several transition pathways: 31,856 girls were registered in 300 government hub schools; 7,675 girls were registered as continuing in 263 community-based schools; and 9,616 girls were enrolled in one of 40 technical and vocational education and training centres.

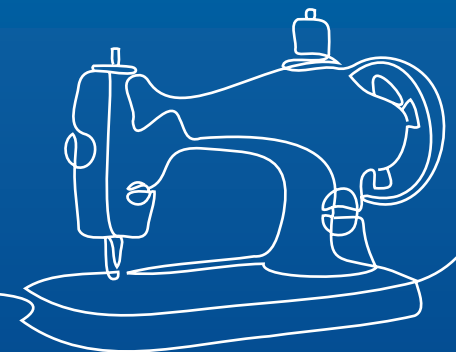
Gulwari is 15 years old and has six siblings. She is one of the girls who enrolled in a technical and vocational education and training centre. She studied tailoring and entrepreneurial skills, including how to develop a business plan and manage her business finances. Through attending the technical and vocational education and training centre

she also developed her life skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving. She is now clear on her goal and is determined to continue her education.

The project worked hard to engage with family and community members. A total of 693 community-based teachers, 2,050 government-school teachers and 3,000 mentors were directly engaged in supporting /delivering transition pathways during the lifetime of the project. Engaging Gulwari's family members was key to help her focus on her education, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gulwari was particularly supported by her mother.

*"I am proud of Gulwari's achievements. She is learning how to tailor, she is very motivated and capable. I am helping her as much as I can to achieve her goals."*

*"I would like to create new designs and become the best tailor teacher in the world."*





# MAPENZI'S STORY

Mapenzi lived in conflict-affected region in DR Congo. Her parents sent her to live with her grandparents to keep her safe. Her grandparents could not afford to send her to school but the REALISE project funded her education and provided the supplies she needed to study.

Through the REALISE project, Mapenzi was given the chance to continue her education through their Accelerated Education Programme. She is now studying to get her state diploma and wants to become a nurse.



Mapenzi is 17 years old and lives in the Ituri region of DR Congo. She was separated from her parents due to the security crisis and conflict. She went to live with her grandparents but they could not afford to send her to school.

Her grandmother heard about Save the Children's REALISE project which was providing school supplies, bursaries and technical support to saving and loans groups to increase families' financial capacity to pay for girls' education.

Operating in six provinces of the DRC, REALISE (which translates as 'success and fulfilment through learning') provided direct support to 69,460 vulnerable girls and their families through 455 schools and 16 alternative education institutions in community-based education centres.

*"I dream of becoming a nurse, which would allow me to help people in pain. This work will allow me to be autonomous, and to provide for those in need. I know that studying is very important, that is why I am confident that no matter what the circumstances are, I will manage to get my state diploma. I will be able to take care of my grandparents and all the people around me."*

Mrs. Henriette, Mapenzi's grandmother, cannot hide her joy when she says: *"The Accelerated Education Programme has been very beneficial for my granddaughter. Although we did not have enough money, she was able to continue her schooling and even benefited from school supplies that allowed her to study in good conditions, like other children in the world."*

*"I dream of becoming a nurse, which would allow me to help people in pain. This work will allow me to be autonomous, and to provide for those in need."*







# MIMI'S STORY

Mimi was unable to attend school due to her disability but with the support of the CHANGE project in Ethiopia she is joining an Accelerated Basic Education programme to get her into the classroom and making friends.

Through the GEC CHANGE project, Mimi is receiving an education and psychological support that will enable her to live a more independent and fuller life. She is no longer limited by her disability, and her ambitions are shared by her family and community.

People In Need's CHANGE project aims to support up to 31,000 girls over five years. The project increases enrolment, attendance and learning by providing safe and inclusive alternative learning programmes, and training teachers in child and gender sensitive education.

15-year-old Mimi lives in Beloya Kebele. Mimi is the youngest child in her family. After she was born, she became paralysed and is unable to walk. She was unable to attend school because of her disability.

*"I was always curious about the outside world. The only friends I had were my family. My peers didn't want me to be their friend. Yet, all these things hadn't kept me from dreaming about school. I daydreamed about going to school and becoming a successful, educated businesswoman."*

People with disabilities tend to face more challenges in rural areas than urban areas. They are less likely to attend school, be employed or get better health services. The CHANGE project works to bring vulnerable girls back to school. Mimi was one of the girls supported by the project. The CHANGE project arranged for a qualified teacher to teach and provide psychological support for Mimi and girls with similar conditions. Community Action Groups also worked to change the community's attitude toward girls' education, including towards those who live with a disability.

*"Now, I have received a crutch and solar lamps from the CHANGE project. In the coming year, I'll join the level one Accelerated Basic Education programme. I'm so excited to make friends and attend my education in the classroom like any other girl."*





# REGINA'S STORY

Aged 19, Regina, who has a visual impairment, had dropped out of school and had no literacy or numeracy skills, but with the support of the STAGE project in Ghana she enrolled in a 9-month community-based learning programme.

Through the STAGE project, Regina was supported to go back into education. She joined a Learning Centre and was given eyeglasses and materials so that she could learn to read and write, do maths and build important life skills.

World Education Inc's Strategic Approaches to Girls' Education (STAGE) project supported up to 17,000 10 to 14-year-old, out-of-school girls and 15 to 19-year-old teenage mothers and other highly marginalised girls across Ghana. The project adapted learning materials and established designated Learning Centres for these girls which delivered literacy, numeracy and life skills training. They helped to establish pathways for girls' successful transition into formal and informal education programmes, vocational training and eventual employment or self-employment.

After Regina enrolled in the programme, she was supported by a facilitator and a Community Oversight Committee and was able to go to the Learning Centre every day. A local artisan trained Regina and five of her peers to make beads, sandals and other products. She also provided business counselling to them, teaching them skills like how to properly record cash flow.

World Education Inc has worked with communities to develop support for girls to achieve their aspirations. Using their disability screening protocol, they found that around 10% of the girls have a functional impairment and, as with Regina, STAGE works with government partners to provide assistive devices. Inclusive pedagogical approaches ensure that all girls are able to join and learn.

*"I think I have benefited more than my other colleagues,"* Regina remarks with a broad smile on her face. *"I could not see very well or read when I started. Today, with the eyeglasses provided, I no longer have that difficulty with seeing, reading and walking without stumbling."*

*"We were happy when the STAGE project was brought to our village. We took advantage of it and enrolled her onto the programme. Today, we are here for the graduation, the beginning of good things to come."*  
Regina's father

*"I could not see very well or read when I started. Today, with the eyeglasses provided, I no longer have that difficulty with seeing, reading and walking without stumbling."*





# DEBORAH'S STORY

Deborah became pregnant at a young age and dropped out of school but with the support of the Making Ghanaian Girls Great! (MGCubed) project, she was able to restart her education and learn skills which will help her earn her own income.

Through the MGCubed project, Deborah joined catch up classes which enabled her to go back to junior high school. From there, she enrolled in the Growth ICCES Training Institute where she learned fashion design. She now aims to start her own business.

Deborah is 22 and lives in a community in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. In 2010, when Deborah was in Primary 6 she became pregnant and dropped out of school. In 2014, she was approached by the MGCubed project staff, who were organising classes for girls who had dropped out of education. Deborah joined the MGCubed class and went back to Junior High School in 2017.

The MGCubed project, led by Plan international, supported supported 8,780 girls in the Accra and Volta regions of Ghana. The project offered catch up classes and after school clubs, and trained teachers, school leaders and government education staff. A stipend scheme addressed financial barriers to girls' attendance and served as an incentive to families to ensure girls make the transition to secondary school.

The MGCubed project offered Deborah guidance and encouragement and supported her by providing access to a school uniform, books and a school bag.

The project trained teachers who were able to give Deborah the support she need. She attended classes which helped her catch up on the education she had lost throughout her pregnancy and childbirth period.

Deborah completed Junior High School in 2017 and gained admission into Growth ICCES Training Institute in 2018 to learn fashion design. She completed Growth ICCES Training Institute in September 2021.

*“My plan now is to start my own fashion design business. I am currently waiting for my results. I also aim to further my education to the tertiary level one day.”*





# AKINYI'S STORY

When her mother died, Akinyi had to take responsibility for caring for her father and three siblings and was unable to go to school. Now, even as a young mother, she was able to join a Catch-Up Centre for out-of-school girls and young women to go back to education.

Through the Education for Life project, Akinyi gained the skills and confidence to start her own tailoring business. She is now able to earn a steady income and help support her family.

ActionAid's Education for Life (EFL), Kenya project worked with up to 5,000 highly marginalised 10 to 19-year-old, out-of-school girls in the counties of Isiolo, Garissa, Migori, Kisumu and Kilifi. The project provided out-of-school learning activities and contributed to improved life chances of marginalised girls by tackling barriers such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, gender norms, stigma, discrimination and violence.

Akinyi is the only girl in her family. When her mother died, Akinyi left school to take responsibility for the home and take care of her father and three brothers.

She is now married with one child and has had the opportunity to go back to her education. Akinyi came to learn about ActionAid's Catch-up Centre from a team that was working in the neighbourhood looking to enrol out-of-school girls. They explained what the Centre would offer and encouraged Akinyi to enrol, which she did with the support of her husband.

At the Centre, teachers offered training on life skills, English, Kiswahili and mathematics. There were also child minders to take care of the children at the for the girls and young women who had to bring their children.

Akinyi learned how to make clothes and make financial transactions. She has set up a tailoring business.

*"The Centre has been very beneficial to me. I have learned a lot. I could have done tailoring before, but we did not have the finances. However, this dream came true after I came to the Catch-Up Centre. I enrolled in the tailoring course and I now know how to make school uniform, dresses and blouses. I did not know how to operate the sewing machine or read the tape measure but the teacher taught me and now I can make clothes."*







# EFFIE'S STORY

When Effie's parents separated, she was worried that she would have to leave school to help support her family, but with the support of the Jielimishe project in Kenya, she was able to complete her secondary school studies.

Through the Jielimishe project, Effie received scholarship support and mentorship. She found employment and has now been supported by the project to access tertiary education and study at a college of beauty and hairdressing.

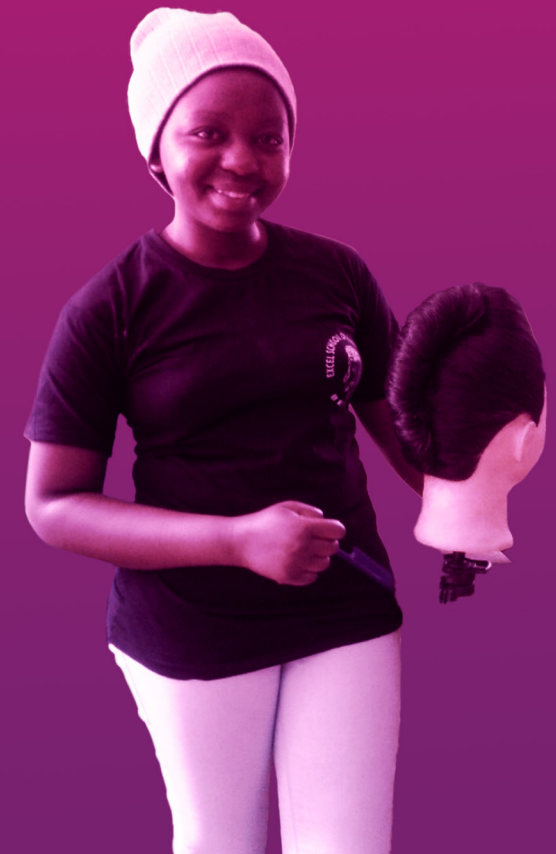
I Choose Life's Jielimishe project supported 10,120 marginalised girls in primary and secondary school, allowing them to complete a full cycle of education and transition to the next level. This included alternative pathways such as technical and vocational education and training (TVET). The approach focused on increasing girls' motivation to learn through girls' clubs and mentorship schemes, improving the quality of teaching through teacher training, coaching and mentorship, and encouraging local communities to support girls' education.

Effie was supported through secondary school but when she completed this level, she was concerned that she would be expected to start working rather than continuing with her education. She had a deep desire to work into the cosmetic industry but did not know how to create opportunities for herself. She was supported to get a job in a cosmetic shop. With this job, Effie was able to contribute financially to the family. Her passion for the cosmetic industry deepened even more.

Effie was then supported by the Jielimishe project to study at a college of beauty and hairdressing. She is saving to further her studies and become a hair and beauty teacher.

*"She is a good performer, self-driven and always eager to perfect the skills she is taught. We have a lot of hope in her."*  
Effie's TVET teacher.

*"Most of my close friends lost hope while others got pregnant and dropped out of school but through mentorship I felt encouraged to hold on in spite of the situation at home."*







# SOPHIE'S STORY

Sophie is 24 years old. With the support of the Jielimishe project in Kenya, she received training that enabled her to go to university and find employment.

Through the Jielimishe project, Sophie was given sponsorship for short courses in vocational training. From there, Sophie transitioned to university. She now has a job as a finance and administration assistant and is a project volunteer, mentoring other girls and young women.

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Sophie was chosen by the Jielimishe project to be sponsored under TVET in Mombasa. She took short courses in various fields, including bookkeeping. After graduating from the short course, she joined university and was able to successfully attend classes. The project had also worked with Sophie's parents to help and encourage them to support this stage of her education.

Sophie is now a mentor and volunteer for the project, helping and supporting other girls.

*"I am proud to say that I now have recently found a job as finance and administration assistant. To say the least, my dreams are coming true by the day. The sky is the limit."*





# BOKE'S STORY

Boke became pregnant during the COVID-19 school closures and was at risk of dropping out of the school forever. Support from her family, teachers, the Leonard Cheshire project and community leaders convinced Boke to remain in school. Now a young mother, she is successfully balancing her education with looking after her one-year-old son.

As a young mother with a disability, Boke's prospects were limited. However, through the support of Leonard Cheshire's GEC project, Boke did not have to drop out of school, providing her with greater opportunities for a more independent future, providing for her family.

Leonard Cheshire's project increased the educational and vocational opportunities of 2,260 girls with disabilities in Kenya. The girls were helped to transition through primary into secondary school, vocational training and self-employment, or adult education and home learning programmes. The project also built positive attitudes and community support for disabled children.

Aged 17, Boke was considering dropping out of school forever. Not only did she face barriers and stigma in her community because of her visual impairment, but she was also pregnant. Her community was shunning her. At the time, Boke's education had already been disrupted by the COVID-19 school closures. The Leonard Cheshire project provided vital support for her to continue learning

at home, including learning materials, reading glasses, and regular home visits for psycho-social support. Now, at a time when Boke was very vulnerable to leaving the education system forever, the project played an important role in helping her back into school while raising a young child. The project team facilitated counselling and psycho-social support for Boke throughout her pregnancy and following the birth of her son. And, after they had helped Boke manage these massive changes, Boke was convinced that she had to return to school.

Now, Boke is back in school and keeping her dreams alive. She shares parenting duties with her mother, and the school has given her permission to go back home at lunch and break time to breastfeed her son. And she believes that neither being a child with a disability nor a young mother should prevent anyone from accessing an education.

*"It was very hard to face my fellow learners. But after getting support, I saw sense in going back to school and not putting my life on hold."*





# MIRIAM'S STORY

Miriam comes from a single-parent household had dropped out of school early, but with the support of the Education for Life project in Kenya she joined a Catch-Up Centre for out-of-school girls and young women.

Through the Education for Life project, Miriam has learned skills that have helped her and her mother make a success of their business.

ActionAid's Education for Life, Kenya project worked with up to 5,000 highly marginalised 10 to 19-year-old, out-of-school girls in the counties of Isiolo, Garissa, Migori, Kisumu and Kilifi. The project provided out-of-school learning activities and contributed to improved life chances of marginalised girls by tackling barriers such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, gender norms, stigma, discrimination and violence.

Miriam had not been in school because she lived in a single-parent household and had to help her mother in her shop so that the family, including several siblings, had enough income to buy food and other essentials.

She encountered ActionAid when they came to her village looking to enrol out-of-school girls aged between 15 and 20 years.

Despite facing some community concerns – members were worried that girls who joined would 'lose their morals' – Miriam joined a Catch-Up Centre for six months. She was taught English, Kiswahili and mathematics and offered a choice of practical courses including business start-up and management, hair/beauty salon, and tailoring. Miriam opted for the business course so that she could help her mother with her business.

*"The programme has been very beneficial and has impacted my life greatly. After I joined ActionAid, I was able to save some money that helped in boosting my mother's business. Other than helping me with finances to boost the business, I am now in a position to read and write. I feel empowered. I can confidently speak in front of an audience and before I could not do that. Alhamdulillah!"*





# MALADITSO'S STORY

When Madalitso was 15 years old she had never been to school but with the support of the TEAM Girl Malawi project she was enrolled in a Learning Centre. Here, she was carefully supported to gain the basic skills and confidence that she needed to work and live more independently and safely.

Through the TEAM Girl Malawi project, Madalitso learned to read, write and gain numeracy skills. She received guidance and knowledge about sexual and reproductive health and rights. She now has opportunities and choices about how she wants to live her life.



At 15 years old, Madalitso was an orphan with three younger siblings for whom she was responsible. She had never been to school earned money to support her family by working at a bar, usually late at night. Madalitso had little knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and was at risk of various forms of abuse.

Madalitso's joined the TEAM Girl Malawi project, led by Link Education International, and was enrolled in a Learning Centre. Here, the Facilitators – trained secondary school graduates from the local community – deliver an accelerated literacy, numeracy and livelihoods curriculum. Madalitso attended classes for two hours on four days each week.

The TEAM Girl Malawi project supported 6,000 girls and 1,200 boys to study reading, writing and maths and go onto new opportunities such as further study or setting up their own business. Many of the girls had never been to school or had dropped out early because of early motherhood or poverty.

Madalitso had difficulty concentrating but she had a teacher who understood this. She allowed her to take extra breaks and repeated key concepts using different techniques to help her learn. Madalitso also attended a Girls' Club once a week which provided comprehensive sex education in a safe space.

After participating in the project for one year, Madalitso made great progress in her learning and is starting to plan for her future. She is reading and writing and uses her numeracy skills to check her wages and to get the best prices at the market. Madalitso has become more confident and now volunteers to lead activities in class as well as ask questions.

When Madalitso graduates from the Learning Centre, she can choose to learn sewing skills and will have a local market for the products she makes. Alternatively, she can choose to enrol in primary school or become a trainee in another business with the support of local teachers, government staff, and business owners.

*"I am now able to believe in myself and I am now able to make good decisions about my life."*





# PUPSA'S STORY

Pupsa had to drop out of school because her family could not afford school fees and supplies but with the support of the Marginalised no More project in Nepal she was able to go back to school.

Through the Marginalised no More project, Pupsa was given the confidence and support to go back into education after three years out of school. She is thriving and sharing her new knowledge with other members of her community.

Street Child's Marginalised no More project supported 7,500 of Nepal's highly marginalised, Musahar girls who, due to their low-caste, face complex, often interrelated barriers and experience limited or no access to education. The project aimed to improve learning outcomes for these girls with a specific focus on functional literacy and numeracy.

Pupsa lives in a small village in Nepal. Three years ago, she had to drop out of school as her family were unable to pay her school fees and cover the cost of school supplies. She was identified for support by the Marginalised no More project team who built her confidence and helped to go back to school. The project tackles obstacles faced by girls like Pupsa, which include fears for safety and security, out-of-school affordability and in-school gender-related exclusion from curriculum and instruction.

*"After joining the Marginalised no More programme, I regained my confidence and wanted to go back to school. It felt like I was being given a second chance."*

Pupsa was given ongoing guidance and support, including by her teachers. She was given life skills along with catch up classes in numeracy and literacy. Pupsa is now sharing these skills with her family members and others in her community.

*"Since I joined the programme, I am more confident when I talk to others. I also teach others from my community what I have learned."*





# RADHA'S STORY

Radha was married at 13 years of age and had to leave school after Grade 7. With the support of the Aarambha project in Nepal she joined a Community Learning Centre and is back in formal education.

Through the Aarambha project, Radha was able to enrol back in Grade 9 and has passed her Secondary Education Examination in 2022. When she completes Grade 12, she aims to become a Female Community Health Volunteer in her own village. She is a role model to other girls and young women.

People In Need's Aarambha project is supporting up to 8,500 married, out-of-school adolescent girls from the central Terai region, one of the poorest regions of Nepal with the highest rates of illiteracy, innumeracy and early marriage. The project works to address the issue of girls' low social status – the principal barrier impeding their safety, health and education – and to improve their learning outcomes through formal and non-formal education methods.

Radha is 23 years old and is from the marginalised Dalit community. She was in Grade 5 when she was married at the age of 13. After marriage, she lived with her parents for two years and completed Grade 7. Radha has four children between two and eight years old.

*"I had dreams of becoming a teacher and marrying an educated person, but my parents wanted me to get married before they passed away."*

In 2019, Radha joined a Community Learning Centre (CLC) run by the Aarambha project. She was able to continue her passion for reading and learned about social issues, as well as gaining literacy and numeracy skills. She successfully convinced her husband and her in-laws – who were initially resistant – to support her to continue her formal education at a regular school. Radha successfully passed the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) in 2022.

Radha's determination and hard work has not gone unnoticed by her family and the community. Her mother-in-law is proud of her achievements and expressed her gratitude.

*"There is no other daughter-in-law in our community who goes to school. I am proud that my daughter-in-law is studying."*

Radha continues to study. Her ambition is to become a Female Community Health Volunteer (FCHV) in her own village after she completes Grade 12. She is determined to pursue her education and provide a better future for herself and for her children. She has enrolled her three eldest children at a nearby school.

Radha has also become a role model for other young women who face similar challenges. She shares her knowledge and experience and has become a mentor for girls who have sought her counsel, encouraging them to pursue their dreams and break free from social norms.

*"After completing the CLC programme, all the other married girls went for vocational training, but my only objective was to continue my formal education, which I had left behind four years ago. I joined Grade 9 and continued my studies."*





# RAJANI'S STORY

Rajani worked as a Kamlari (bonded labourer) in Kailali, Nepal, but was able to enrol in the vocational training programme implemented by STEM project and received a loan from a local cooperative as part of STEM Girls' Transition Fund. She now runs a successful tailoring shop, training other young women.

Through the STEM project, Rajani's prospects have flourished. Her vocational training has allowed her to start her own business and become self-reliant and successful. She is now passing these opportunities on to younger women in her community. She is a role model and a passionate advocate for marginalised girls.

Mercy Corps' STEM project empowered 4,460 Nepali girls to safely access education and economic activities. It increased attendance and created positive community attitudes towards girls' education, offering out-of-school girls the opportunity to become entrepreneurs, equipping them with academic and income generating/technical skills, whilst dispelling misconceptions about their ability to manage commercial loans.

Rajani was born in a poor family with five sisters and a brother. She worked on their small piece of land, carried out household chores and worked for another family in her community. She was unable to graduate from school.

However, Rajani was able to enrol in the vocational training programme implemented by STEM project. After her training she started working as an apprentice in a tailoring shop and with these skills and experience, she opened her own small tailoring shop in her village. She started planning to expand her business and secured a loan from a local cooperative as part of STEM Girls' Transition Fund. The Fund provides girls who dropped out of school with access to finance resources needed to start their businesses. Rajani now earns a regular income and also trains young girls. She also advocates passionately for girls' rights and education, not only as a former Kamlari turned entrepreneur, but also as an emerging girl champion and a voice for marginalised girls in the southern rural communities of Nepal.

*"I am where I am now because of the loan STEM provided girls. I am very motivated and inspired and I wish to become a role model for young girls who want to do something for themselves."*





# AMAN TARA'S STORY

Aman Tara is 18 and lives in Rajpur, Nepal. Like many girls in her community, Aman Tara's studies stopped when she was 11 years old. When she turned 13, she was engaged. With the support of the Aarambha project, Aman Tara enrolled in a community learning centre. She completed the catch up course and wanted to return to public school. Her prospective in-laws were resistant but she persuaded them to support her decision. She is now in Grade 7 and her marriage has been postponed.

People In Need's Aarambha project is supporting up to 8,500 married, out-of-school adolescent girls from the central Terai region, one of the poorest regions of Nepal with the highest rates of illiteracy, innumeracy and early marriage. The project works to address the issue of girls' low social status – the principal barrier impeding their safety, health and education – and to improve their learning outcomes through formal and non-formal education methods.

Aman Tara is the sixth child in a family of nine and due to financial difficulties, she and her siblings could not attend school. She dropped out aged 11 and was engaged to be married at 13. However, the Aarambha project were working in her village and approached Aman Tara's family, offering support for her to return to education.

Aman's parents supported her idea of attending the Community Learning Centre (CLC), but were hesitant. As Aman was already engaged, they needed to consult her

future in-laws. Her father-in-law was opposed, but Aman Tara spoke with her fiancé and he supported her decision.

She finally enrolled at Samriddhi CLC, established by the Aarambha project and led by People in Need in partnership with Aasaman Nepal and Social Organization District Coordination Committee. At the centre, along with her primary education, she learned about health, hygiene, and the consequences of child marriages.

Once she completed the course, she wanted to attend a traditional public school, but her in-laws wanted her to participate in vocational training instead. Aman held her ground and talked to her fiancé.

Her fiancé agreed, and her in-laws followed.

Aman found support for her educational journey through government scholarships, waived admission fees, and the opportunity to enrol in a free five-month bridge class run by the learning centre that included a school uniform and stationary materials. She is now studying in Grade 7 and aims to complete a master's degree. Her wedding was approaching, but both families have agreed to postpone the date.

*"I told [my fiancé] everyone in his family has an education; even my younger sister-in-law is in Grade 12. I don't want to feel inferior when I join your family. I also aspire to be a good mother and provide a better future for our children, and education is crucial for that."*





# REBECCA'S STORY

Rebecca is married with children. She was reluctant to join the ENGINE project's Learning Centre in Nigeria because she could not read or write. However, though the work the project carried out in the community, she was persuaded to enrol and gained essential skills.

Through the ENGINE project, Rebecca gained numeracy and literacy skills. She learned how to tailor and was supported to start her own business. She also aims to take her Secondary School exams and go on to tertiary education.

Through innovative partnerships with communities and the public and private sectors, the ENGINE project, led by Mercy Corps, supported 18,050 marginalised girls and young women aged 17 to 23 years old. Out-of-school girls were given educational opportunities through flexible learning with tailored modules in government centres or ENGINE learning spaces. ENGINE also worked with government centres to provide better access to childcare. Additionally, girls were supported to set up their own micro-businesses, through help to obtain government ID registration and bank accounts, enabling access to capital.

Rebecca loved the functional literacy, financial and life skills classes because, though she could not read or write, listening in class and interacting with other girls helped her develop her self-esteem, self-confidence, and other essential life skills. With the encouragement of her Learning Centre facilitator, she developed her literacy skills.

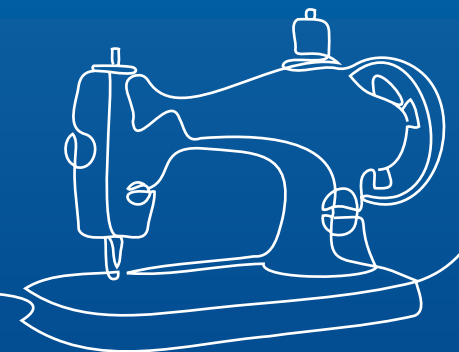
*"Every time I saw an educated woman, I said to myself, Oh Rebecca! I wish it was me. After two years of learning, I can now help my children with their homework instead of waiting for their father to come and teach them when he comes back from work."*

Through the ENGINE project Rebecca learned tailoring and, after she graduated, she was given a start-up grant to set up her business.

Rebecca is now an advocate of girls' education in her community. She advises girls and young women to get an education and life skills training to help them fulfil their dreams and meet up with the expectations of today's world.

Rebecca is planning to take the West African Examination Council's Senior Secondary School Certificate Exams (WAEC/SSCE). She is confident she will pass and gain admission to study Law at the Kaduna State University.

*"My confidence has improved because I am productive and contribute to my family financially. I feel recognised because I now have a voice."*





# MEHRUNISSA'S STORY

Mehrunissa's family could not afford to send her or her siblings to school but with the support of the Closing the Gap project in Pakistan she gained literacy, numeracy and business skills which have enabled her to start a business and support her family.

Through the Closing the Gap project, Mehrunissa graduated from a Literacy and Numeracy Centre in Jacobabad, gaining the skills and confidence to become financially independent. She is also changing attitudes in her community and is a role model for younger girls.



ACTED's Closing the Gap project supports over 5,000 out-of-school girls and is implemented in areas of Pakistan with some of the lowest learning outcomes and challenging social environments for girls and women. It tackles the barriers to education that the most marginalised girls face in

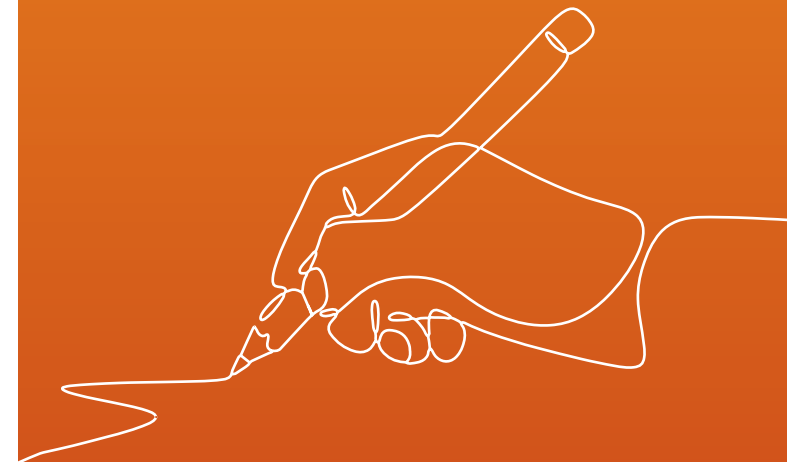
Pakistan, including financial barriers. Through its literacy and numeracy component, the Closing the Gap project provides basic literacy, numeracy and life skills to adolescent girls aged between 14 and 19. This component is followed by vocational training. The aim of this transition strategy is to ensure sustainable livelihoods for girls by helping them gain financial independence and economic empowerment.

Mehrunissa's family were not able to afford to send her and her siblings to school. Her father was the sole provider for a household of 11 people and his work was insecure, especially during COVID-19. Mehrunissa wanted to help her family and contribute to the household income.

With the support of her parents, she enrolled in the Closing the Gap learning centre that opened in her village. She was taught basic numeracy and literacy and then, through the vocational training programme, she gained dress-making skills. After completing the programme, she was given Knowledge about Business training and orientation to MicroFinance Institutes and lending systems. She also obtained a small business start-up grant from the project.

Mehrunissa is now financially independent, with a voice in her family and community. She feels more heard and respected. Entrepreneurship and financial independence have transformed her into a confident young woman who has become an advocate of girls' education by encouraging community members to get their daughters educated and by practically setting an example. She has become an inspiration for girls around her.

*"Mehrunissa is now financially independent, with a voice in her family and community. She feels more heard and respected. She has become an inspiration for girls around her."*





# SADAF'S STORY

Sadaf is an inspiring teacher who works with the Closing the Gap project in Pakistan to teach girls in the Jacobabad District.

Through the Closing the Gap project, Sadaf received training and support so that she could teach girls in a way that was relevant to their lives. By providing life-skills and using the 'Right to Play' learning approach, Sadaf has improved her students' learning outcomes and future opportunities.

ACTED's Closing the Gap project supports over 5,000 out-of-school girls aged 10 to 19 and is implemented in Sindh and Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA), two areas of Pakistan with some of the lowest learning outcomes and challenging social environments for girls and women. It tackles the barriers to education that the most marginalised girls face in Pakistan, including a lack of qualified female teachers.

Sadaf was inspired to join the Closing the Gap project as a teacher on their Accelerated Learning Programme. She was trained in pedagogy skills and how to deliver life skills education.

*"I have gained technical knowledge from ACTED, but the practical and real-life change began when I was being trained during the life-skills sessions. In reality, the most important thing is how we communicate with people, care about other's feelings, collaborate with others, and promote diversity, inclusion, acceptance and equality."*

She was also trained to use a play-based education approach. Right To Play's methodology gives children the opportunity to learn different things. Inside the classroom, games help children to actively engage in their lessons, enhancing their learning. Outside of the classroom, they play through performance, music or dance to gain critical life skills.

Sadaf is now an (unconventional!) primary school teacher in a government school. She continues to use the Right To Play's approach and has contributed to children's positive learning.

*"I do activities with my students in school because I personally experienced the positive changes among learners and in myself while I was running the ALP centres."*



# UZMA'S STORY

As a young, divorced mother, vilified by her community, Uzma saw an opportunity to turn her life around through education. With the support of the Closing the Gap project in Pakistan she has gained basic skills and an opportunity for financial independence.

Through the Closing the Gap project, Uzma was supported to gain literacy and numeracy skills. She graduated with flying colours and is continuing her education. She is looking forward to financial independence to support herself and her son.

ACTED's Closing the Gap project supports over 5,000 out-of-school girls and is implemented in areas of Pakistan with some of the lowest learning outcomes and challenging social environments for girls and women. It tackles the barriers to education that girls face in Pakistan, including a lack of access for marginalised adolescents. The project particularly targets rural areas with girls who are unable to attend government or private educational institutes.

Uzma comes from a poor farming family living in a small village. At 17, she was married to an older man, in accordance with local customs. Uzma was subjected to emotional and physical violence by her husband and they divorced. At that time, she was mother to a baby boy.

Uzma saw the opportunity for a new start when she learned about the establishment of a learning centre in her area. Closing the Gaps' Community Meetings were advocating for the importance of girls' education and Uzma approached the ACTED team while they were identifying learners, expressing her interest to be involved. She was enrolled in the programme and began her journey to becoming a skilled, confident and financially independent young woman.

Uzma faced challenges at the learning centre. She was mocked for being a divorced mother who was studying. Parents and community members were hostile towards her as they believed she would corrupt their daughters, who were also learners at the centre, influencing them to becoming culturally defiant and against getting married.

However, Uzma's determination to provide a better life for her son and her teachers' constant support helped her to persevere and she graduated with flying colours. Since graduating, she has continued her education through additional sessions with her teacher. During her lessons, she helps her teacher check the work of students from the beginner's classes. She receives a small monthly stipend for this work.

*"I feel alive now. I feel like I have a purpose and I want to use my learning to make a better future for my son and I and become financially independent."*







# CLAUDINE'S STORY

Claudine is 16 years old and is a Senior One student in Rwanda. She lives with her mother who is unwell and was often unable to work and fully support her daughter. Health Poverty Action's Mother Daughter Clubs supported Claudine and her mother to start a small business and join a savings scheme.

Through Health Poverty Action's GEC project, they both became involved in the Mother Daughter Club which provided business and practical skills and support in setting up income generating activities.



The REAP project supported 8,268 marginalised girls in 28 poor and rural schools in Rwanda. By improving student enrolment and retention, and the quality, governance and budgeting of education, the project helped girls to complete their level of education and

transition to the next stage of education, technical and vocational training (TVET) and/or employment opportunities.

A proportion of the money that Claudine's mother makes is invested in the Mother Daughter Club (MDC) savings scheme and the remaining part is used to feed them and buy some school materials for Claudine.

Claudine takes her studies seriously and is one of the best performing students in her class. She is confident in class and takes extra time to study with her peers.

*"Before my mom joined Mother Daughter Club (MDC), my life was so hard; I could not easily find school materials and sanitary materials because my mom couldn't find money to support me. After joining MDC, my mom started saving as part of the Income Generating Activities for our MDC."*

*"To me, it was a dream to be the best performer in National Examination. I used my time perfectly; I never missed classes and I got strong encouragement from my mom."*





# ISATU'S STORY

Isatu is 11 years old and has a visual impairment. She lives with her parents and siblings in Port Loko, Sierra Leone. She was struggling to learn and did not enjoy school but the GATE programme offered medical and social support which have helped her to integrate and succeed.

Through the support of Humanity and Inclusion, a consortium partner within the GATE project, Isatu's condition was diagnosed and she was provided with medicine which helped her to see better. She also received support in the classroom and at home.

The Girls' Access To Education (GATE) project led by Plan International in Sierra Leone supported over 11,000 marginalised girls and children with disabilities in five districts in Sierra Leone. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the project worked at the individual, school, home, community and policy levels to ensure sustainable support to, and investment in, education. The project's work helped to shift the attitudes of teachers and families towards marginalised children, particularly children with disabilities.

From an early age, Isatu had difficulties with her vision, but when she started school, her impairment became more challenging. She struggled to read the words on the blackboard and the words within her textbooks. Itasu's condition was identified and treated, and she had some improvement in her vision.

Isatu also attended after-school study groups, an initiative to support improved learning and transition outcomes for children. Isatu found the study groups to be helpful as they involved different methods and activities from those used in the regular classroom, such as real-life examples, group work and games.

*"In the study group, they use real situations which helps me understand better. We also sit together in groups and work, and they include everyone. I feel they have helped me get better with my reading and I am confident to read and be a part of the classroom."*

Isatu also received support from female teacher-led Girls' Clubs and a Community-Based Rehabilitation Volunteer.

*"It was good to have only girls and to talk about things that affect us. The leaders involved everyone, and we played games and talked to each other to learn new things. I felt included and have a new person I can go to for help."*

*"Before I found school hard and other children made fun of me. My teachers and my friends help me and encourage me, and I am learning. I am excited to go to school."*





# WARDA'S STORY

Warda is 15 years old and is in Grade 8, the last grade of primary school, at a primary school in Somalia. She lives with her grandmother and has missed some of her schooling due to drought. She has been supported by the SOMGEP project to stay in school and build her confidence and her network of peers.

Through the SOMGEP project, Warda joined a Girls' Empowerment Forums. She is a confident and active participant, supporting other girls and raising funds for education in her community. She is now Deputy Chairperson of the forum.

The SOMGEP project supported 32,860 girls living in rural and remote areas, many of whom lacked access to education beyond primary level. It worked to improve the quality and relevance of learning and build a strong foundation for transition into secondary education and employment.

Warda is one of 12 children. Seven of her siblings live with their parents. The remaining siblings live with relatives in different parts of the country. Warda lives with her grandmother. She and her grandmother have had to move twice due to severe water shortages and Warda missed a year of education, as one location had no school.

*"Growing up, my family always faced financial difficulties. At times, my family tried to make me drop out of school, but through determination and perseverance I am now in Grade 8, and very soon I will be starting my secondary education."*

Through the SOMGEP project, Warda joined a Girls' Empowerment Forum. She takes part in home visits to encourage other girls to enrol in school, fundraises money for school improvement projects, follows up with girls who have dropped out from school, engages with female students on the topic of menstruation and resolves conflicts among students at the school. The Forum has also given Warda an opportunity to expand her networks within her schools, building peer support.

Warda, who used to describe herself as shy, feels the Forum has had a tremendous positive effect on her confidence.

Warda's aspirations for the future include becoming the first Somaliland female pilot.

*"All pilots in the world were born after nine months just like me. I have never seen a female pilot here and I will be the first one. I want to look after my siblings and take them from the village to the city. I would also want to help members of my community who are struggling with life."*

*"Being a member of the Girls' Empowerment Forum has built my confidence. Now, I can attend any kind of meeting, be it with CECs, government officials, parents or teachers, and I am able to air our concerns as students. I am a poet and through the confidence I got from the GEF, some of my poems have been recorded."*





# MARIAM'S STORY

Mariam was raised by her older sister and almost dropped out of education on many occasions but with the support of CAMFED in Tanzania she was able to stay in school and now runs her own successful business.

Through the CAMFED project, Mariam was offered support to stay in school. After completing her studies, she joined the CAMFED Association of women leaders and trained as a Learner Guide, helping girls like herself. She was also supported to start her own hairdressing business and employs three people, including another CAMFED Association member.

CAMFED International's project aimed to enable 269,390 marginalised girls to transition to, progress through and succeed at secondary school. It then helped them to transition from school to a secure and fulfilling livelihood.

Mariam is from Shinyanga district in Tanzania. She was raised by her older sister after their mother died when she was only six years old. Their situation meant there were many times she almost dropped out of education. However, during Form 4 of secondary school, her teachers and community members recommended her for CAMFED support.

In 2019, after she had completed her studies and joined the CAMFED Association of women leaders, she trained as a Learner Guide. She returned to her former school to deliver life skills and self-development sessions. The topic of entrepreneurship got her interested in starting her own business so she could now help her sister.

*"It was my dream to start a women's hairdressing salon. However, I faced the challenge of not having enough capital to rent a room and purchase the equipment. Instead, I started by selling shoes and clothes, with the goal of saving money for a permanent hairdressing salon."*

While Mariam was saving money, CAMFED offered her an interest-free KIVA loan which was being offered to Learner Guides. She was able to combine this loan with her savings and opened her salon in December 2019.

***"My business is doing very well and keeps growing. I have employed three people, including one other CAMFED Association member, and I have formally registered my business with the Tanzania Revenue Authority. I have also added new services including direct mobile money payments and bridalwear rental. The income generated has enabled me to clear all my KIVA debts."***







# KHADIJA'S STORY

Khadija lives in Morogoro Rural District in Tanzania. Her parents are farmers and were unable to afford school uniform and materials. With the support of the CAMFED project she was able to access the items she needed to attend school confidently and regularly.

CAMFED International's project supported 269,390 marginalised girls to transition to, progress through and succeed at secondary school. It then helped them to transition from school to a secure and fulfilling livelihood.

When Khadija started school, she did not dress like her peers because her parents could not afford to buy her a uniform. This affected her confidence. She was also missing school every month as she could not afford menstrual pads.

When Khadija was in Form 2, she was selected to receive support from the CAMFED project. She was given a new uniform, exercise books and pens. Khadija was also supported by Madam Dotto, a CAMFED Learner Guide. Madam Dotto provided mentorship and guidance – and when she noticed Khadija's monthly absences, she made sure she was provided with menstrual pads and no longer missed school.

*"I know education is important and will help me in life. My favorite subject in school is Swahili because it is my language, and one that is used by all people here in Tanzania. I want to study hard so that I can become a teacher like my teacher Madam Mukanda, or a nurse or doctor. I want to be a role model to the community, like Madam Dotto, and work with CAMFED so all children can have an education."*

***"CAMFED changed my life. I could go to school wearing uniform and feel equal to my fellow students. I have changed through this programme because I have learned how to value and support others. Now, if I discover that another girl does not value herself, I can talk to her and help raise her self-esteem. The programme has also given me confidence to ask for help when I need it."***





# PETRONELLA'S STORY

Petronella left school at Grade 7 owing two years of school fees but she was supported to return to school by the CAMFED project and now runs a business and supports other children in her community.

Through the support of the CAMFED GEC project, Petronella has been able to change her life. Her education has allowed her to start a business, employing other members of her community. She is also using her skills and enthusiasm to ensure that many other children are supported through their education and beyond. Educating one young woman has benefitted a whole community – and generations to come.

CAMFED International's project enabled 269,390 marginalised girls to transition to, progress through and succeed at secondary school. It then helped them to transition from school to a secure and fulfilling livelihood.

When Petronella's father died, there was no one to cover her school fees and she had to drop out. However, she was supported by CAMFED to return to secondary school and, after she graduated, she joined the CAMFED Association – the network women leaders educated with CAMFED's support. Through the network, she had the opportunity to train as a Learner Guide and started volunteering four times a week, delivering the project's My Better World life skills curriculum to 60 students.

*"I work closely with the headteacher, the CAMFED-trained Teacher Mentor, and the school-based Committee, to understand in detail the day-to-day challenges that learners and teachers encounter, and what needs to be done to address them. The approach is different from that of a teacher, whose focus is the child's academic performance. As Learner Guides, we take an interest in each child's life. We become the friend and sister they need, creating the necessary support structure until they finish school."*

In exchange for volunteering as a Learner Guide, Petronella was able to apply for an interest-free loan through CAMFED and Kiva. It allowed her to shift from selling groceries from home to opening a tuck shop. She has two employees and hopes to save money, expand her business, employ more people from her community, and support vulnerable children's education. Even before opening the tuck shop, she was able to cover fees for a boy whose mother died and ensure he could progress to secondary school.

***"I know that there are many other vulnerable and disadvantaged girls, who may be going through situations like, or worse than, mine. I want to inspire them not to despair – your background should not determine your future!"***





# MAUVIS' STORY

Mauvis has a visual impairment. She was removed from school as her father and step-mother did not believe that she would be able to find work. Her aunt supported her enrolment in the Cheshire Services Uganda project which brought her back into education.

Through the Cheshire Services Uganda project, Mauvis was supported to go back to school and is now pursuing her studies at Makerere University. She aims to become an officer administrator.

Mauvis is 24. She left school at an early age as her father and step-mother did not believe she would find work with her condition and that it was not worth continuing her education. However, her aunt learned about the project being run by Cheshire Services Uganda and supported her to enrol. This allowed her to return to school after a prolonged absence.

The project addresses the educational marginalisation of 2,560 children with disabilities with a focus on girls. It is working to improve the teaching and learning environment for children with disabilities in mainstream schools. It also encourages families and communities to appreciate the need to send children with disabilities (especially girls) to school. It addresses the educational needs of individual children, including education costs, safety and self-esteem. It advocates for more inclusive policies and practices at the regional and national level.

The project helped Mauvis with her eye rehabilitation and her learning needs. They provided financial support to meet her personal needs and offered targeted counseling and psychosocial support.

Through the project's transition plan, Mauvis successfully applied for affirmative action at the university, earning a three-year scholarship to pursue a degree in Information Management. Today, Mauvis is filled with hope, aspiring to become an office administrator. She also harbours dreams of furthering her studies in law in the future.

*“Any girl, regardless of their ability, can study and can be productive in the community. Let us support every girl to be in school.”*





# BETTY'S STORY

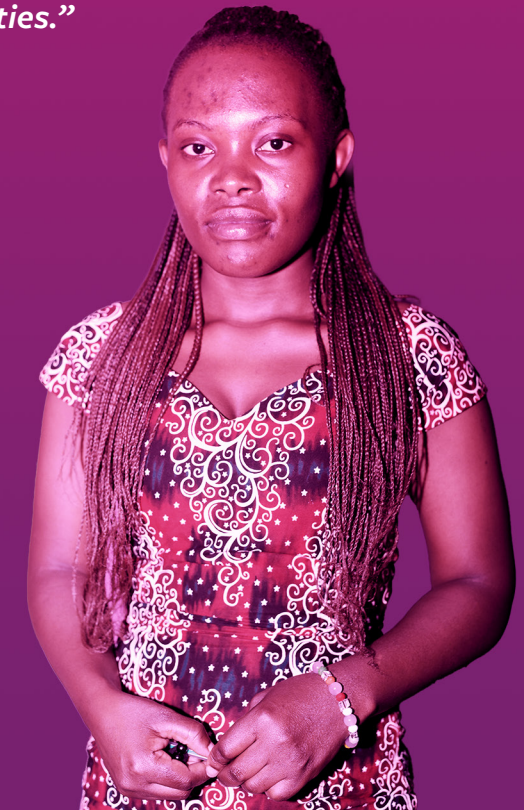
In 2014, Betty had to drop out of school as her parents could no longer afford to support her education. A year later, she was back in school with the support of the Viva CRANE project in Uganda.

Through the support of the Viva CRANE project, she received literacy and numeracy training and is on track to get a teaching qualification. She is also an ICT intern with the Children at Risk Action Network (CRANE), teaching young people basic computer skills.

The Viva CRANE project has supported 9,890 marginalised girls, through mother-daughter and peer clubs and 18 Creative Learning Centres. Career development and work-based learning opportunities are provided, as well as catch up classes and learning assistance in literacy and numeracy. The project also focuses on strengthening links between the school, community and local government to protect children from abuse. Children learn their rights and responsibilities in protecting themselves and their peers in 'Safe Clubs'.

Betty joined the project and spent three months training in numeracy and literacy with additional hands-on skills like bookmaking and shoe making. Her confidence bloomed, and she regained the hope that she could achieve something for which she so longed: a teaching qualification. In 2017, Betty was sponsored for a Certificate in Child Development Studies so she could pursue her dream of becoming a teacher. She is determined to use her skills for the good of others.

*"If it wasn't for the Children at Risk Action Network, I wouldn't have become the teacher I am today, and I wouldn't have acquired more knowledge and skills for public speaking. This has also helped me learn better ways of dealing with children with different learning abilities."*







# NAOMI'S STORY

Naomi was about to drop out of school at Grade 8 when the CAMFED project supported her to stay in school in Zambia. She joined their Learner Guide programme and is supporting many other girls in her community. She has a job and is still studying – and aims to be a teacher.

Through the CAMFED project, Naomi was able to stay in school. Naomi is a game changer in the CAMFED Association of women leaders. She is respected in her community and beyond for her activism on issues like girls' exclusion from education, early marriage and climate change. She is also working with the CAMFED's first climate-smart demonstration farm and passing her knowledge on within her community.

Naomi's father died when she was a baby and her mother had to raise her alone. They experienced much poverty and hardship. When she reached secondary school, where families have to pay school fees, she feared my education would be over. The CAMFED project provided the necessary financial and social support to allow her to complete my education.

Camfed International's project supported 269,390 marginalised girls to transition to, progress through and succeed at secondary school. It then helped them to transition from school to a secure and fulfilling livelihood.

After completing secondary school, Naomi joined the CAMFED Association of women leaders and began training to become a Learner Guide. She led sessions to improve students' confidence and their knowledge about themselves and the world around them, to help them study, plan for their future, and solve problems.

In training as a Learner Guide, Naomi could also work towards a vocational (BTEC) qualification to help her become a teacher. She is frequently invited by local traditional leaders and school-based committees to speak publicly on issues concerning the wellbeing of youth and girls.

Naomi has also had a role at the Chinsali farm — CAMFED's first climate-smart demonstration farm. To reduce the negative impact of unpredictable weather, CAMFED Association members learn climate-smart farming techniques such as water management and crop maximisation.

*"As a community, we have been deeply affected by climate change, whereby changing rainfall patterns and drought have led to increasing food insecurity."*

*"I am passionate about supporting girls and young people to stay in school and reach their potential."*





# NELLY'S STORY

Nelly became pregnant before finishing school but with the support of the IGATE project she was offered community-based education and gained the skills she would need to earn a stable income and invest in her own further education.

Through the IGATE project, Nelly was able to enrol on a hotel and catering course. She started a home-based baking business and her profits enabled her to re-enrol in the formal school system. She is also sharing her knowledge with other girls in the community.

Nelly is a teenage mother is defying the odds to pursue her education and self-development. She had dropped out of school after having her daughter but was supported by World Vision's IGATE project. Their CBE initiative equips out-of-school girls with functional literacy, numeracy, business skills and vocational training in a non-formal community setting to enable them to transition to the next level of life.

Nelly joined a hotel and catering course where she was provided with the skills and equipment – a start-up baking kit – to support her new home-based baking business. She promoted her baked goods on posters at borehole points and shops and advertised her confectioneries in different community WhatsApp groups.

With the profits Nelly made, she raised enough money to re-enroll into school as profits have allowed her to pay for school fees, uniforms and stationery.

*"I learned from this experience that if you really want something, nothing can stop you. I went back to school because I want a better life for myself and my daughter. I am proud that I was able to do it with my own money without having to bother people or rely on anyone."*

Nelly is now sharing her knowledge with other girls in the community where she is teaching the elements from the hotel and catering course. *"These girls have done well in the theory that we have covered, and I am looking forward to starting practical sessions with them as soon as I find breathing space in my studies."*

She is registered to write her advanced level (A-Levels) this year and plans to resume and improve her business, which will allow her to continue funding her own education.

*"I always had big dreams and they did not include me getting pregnant before finishing school. When it happened, I was so deflated I almost gave up and would have, if it was not for my mother's support and community-based education."*





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