

LEARNING STRATEGY

Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient

Sierra Leone



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 3 |
| Sierra Leone | 4 |
| EAGER Project Overview | 6 |
| 1. Learning Programme | 8 |
| Overview and Timeline | 8 |
| Curriculum Development and Adaptions | 9 |
| Learners Profile | 12 |
| Learning Approach | 13 |
| Core Principles | 14 |
| Learning Environment | 15 |
| Teaching and Learning Methods | 16 |
| <i>Discussions</i> | 17 |
| <i>Explanations</i> | 17 |
| <i>Group Work and Pair Work</i> | 18 |
| <i>Role Play</i> | 18 |
| <i>Homework</i> | 19 |
| <i>Bintu's Stories</i> | 19 |
| Literacy | 21 |
| <i>Literacy Teaching Aids</i> | 21 |
| Numeracy and Financial Literacy | 24 |
| <i>Numeracy Teaching Aids</i> | 25 |
| Life Skills | 27 |
| <i>Teaching Aids</i> | 27 |
| Check for Understanding | 29 |
| 2. Quality and Inclusion – Continuous Professional Development | 31 |
| 3. My Empowerment Plan | 34 |
| Transition | 35 |
| Conclusion | 37 |
| Appendix | 38 |
| Literacy Sessions and Outcomes | 38 |
| Numeracy and Financial Literacy Sessions and Outcomes | 39 |
| Life Skills Sessions and Objectives | 41 |

Introduction

Globally, an estimated 258 million children and adolescents (ages 6-17) were out of school (OOS) in 2018, representing one-sixth of the global population of this age group.¹ This is supported by findings of global literacy rates for youth aged 15-24 years at 92% in 2019, equivalent to 100 million youth lacking basic literacy skills. The literacy rate drops to 76% in sub-Saharan Africa.²

More than 617 million children and adolescents around the world do not achieve minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. This trend suggests that globally, 56% of all children will leave primary school without minimum proficiency levels in literacy and numeracy, and the figure for adolescents could reach 61%. In sub-Saharan Africa, up to 88% of children and adolescents may not be meeting minimum proficiency levels in literacy and numeracy.³

Poverty is one of the greatest barriers to education. In most countries, children from low-income households in rural, urban, and metropolitan slum areas are more likely to be OOS.⁴ In addition to income, access needs to be considered. A 2013 study by UNESCO found that 1 in 10 children in rural areas spend more than 45 minutes getting to school, compared to just 3% of children in urban areas.⁵

Gender inequality exacerbates existing access issues due to poverty, such as transactional sex, early marriage, and the burden of having to perform a disproportionate share of household chores.⁶ Over the next decade, as many as 13 million more girls could be forced into early marriage as parents struggle financially.⁷ As a result, girls from low-income families are less likely to receive an education than their male counterparts.

Education is known to be one of the best routes out of poverty and is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁸. SDG 4 highlights the commitment to: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all: Education liberates the intellect, unlocks the imagination and is fundamental for self-respect. It is the key to prosperity and opens a world of opportunities, making it possible for each of us to contribute to a progressive, healthy society. Learning benefits every human being and should be available to all.”⁹ In conjunction, SDG 5 is also considered in its pursuit to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls:

1 UIS (2019) New Methodology shows that 258 million children, adolescents, and youth are out of school: Fact Sheet no.56. Montreal: UIS.

2 en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ild-2021-fact-sheet.pdf

3 UNESCO (2020). Global education monitoring report, 2020: Inclusion and education: all means all. Paris: UNESCO.

4 UNICEF, The Out-of-School Children Initiative, Evaluation Report, February 2018, pg 26.

5 Sierra Leone. Ministry of Education Science and Technology, UNESCO Office Dakar and Regional Bureau for Education in Africa, Pôle de Dakar, 2013 : Sierra Leone: education country status report; an analysis for further improving the quality, equity and efficiency of the education system in Sierra Leone, World Bank, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, United Nations Children's Fund. unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000226039

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

7 UNICEF, Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children: A National Assessment of the situation of out-of-school children in the Sierra Leone, July 2016, p 4.

8 sdgs.un.org/goals

9 www.globalgoals.org/

Gender bias is undermining our social fabric and devalues all of us. It is not just a human rights issue; it is a tremendous waste of the world's human potential. By denying women equal rights, we deny half the population a chance to live life at its fullest. Political, economic and social equality for women will benefit all the world's citizens. Together we can eradicate prejudice and work for equal rights and respect for all!"¹⁰

> Sierra Leone

Educational attainment and literacy levels across Sierra Leone are low, and even more so for women and girls. Data as of September 2021 reports literacy rates for adult males at 52% and for adult females at 35%; youth literacy rates are 71% for males and 63% for females.¹¹ Much of the gender disparity in education begins in adolescence, when more value begins to be placed on girls' domestic roles, rather than their education. This is evident in the widening gender inequality later in the education system, with more girls than boys dropping out as they move through Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary School.¹²

Analysis of the Out-of-School Census (OOSC) survey in Sierra Leone revealed that 79-81% of households in the poorest wealth quintile have out-of-school children, compared to 19-21% of affluent households with out-of-school children.¹³ Adolescent pregnancy and child marriage rates in Sierra Leone are among the highest globally, resulting in an estimated 20% of girls dropping out of the classroom.¹⁴ At the school level, gender-based violence is evident, with violence occurring both on the way to school and in school – by perpetrators including male teachers, peers, and older students.¹⁵ On a national level, approximately 45.5% of all women in Sierra Leone have suffered some form of violence.¹⁶

The West Africa Ebola outbreak from 2014-2016 compounded many existing barriers to education. During the endemic and closure of schools for 9 months, many families lost a primary earner, leading to an increase in child labour.¹⁷ The rate of teenage pregnancy spiked, as school closures likely resulted in reduced protection of girls.¹⁸

Historically, pregnant girls were not allowed to attend school or sit for examinations whilst visibly pregnant. In March 2020, the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) changed this so pregnant girls were no longer banned from school and public examinations. Despite the spike in school attendance and retention among pregnant girls, the stigma, discrimination, and a lack of integration mechanisms for pregnant and parent learners remain as a barrier to their full participation in school, especially in rural areas.

¹⁰ www.globalgoals.org

¹¹ data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.MAZS?locations=SL UNESCO Institute for Statistics

¹² MBSSE 2019 Annual School Census Report

¹³ UNICEF, Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children: A National Assessment of the situation of out-of-school children in the Sierra Leone, July 2016, p 4

¹⁴ Statistics Sierra Leone and ICF, 2019. Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2019: Key Indicators, Freetown, Sierra Leone and Rockville, Maryland

¹⁵ UNICEF 2012 Sierra Leone Statistics

¹⁶ Ministry of Education Science and Technology, UNICEF 2016. A National Assessment of Out-of-School Children in Sierra Leone

¹⁷ Ministry of Education Science and Technology, UNICEF 2016. A National Assessment of Out-of-School Children in Sierra Leone.

¹⁸ Ministry of Education Science and Technology, UNICEF 2016. A National Assessment of Out-of-School Children in Sierra Leone.

Although there are many challenges and barriers to education for girls in Sierra Leone, the GoSL has shown commitment to SDG4 and SDG5 to tackle the challenges girls face. This includes the National Teenage Pregnancy Reduction Strategy (2013-2015) and its successor, the National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage (2018-2022), that were developed to guide the prioritisation of all evidence-based adolescent pregnancy and child marriage reduction interventions. Their aim, during their respective tenures, was the reduction of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in the country.¹⁹ Furthermore, the Persons with Disabilities Act (2011) affirms the rights of people with disabilities to free education and commits the GoSL to adapting educational institutions, providing learning facilities, and formulating a suitable curriculum.²⁰

The GoSL's Free Quality School Education (FQSE) policy aims to achieve greater access to education by reducing financial barriers to school enrolment and improving teaching and learning outcomes for all students. In addition, the GoSL's Radical Inclusion Policy emphasises the inclusion of pregnant girls and parent learners, children with disabilities, children from rural and underserved areas, and children from low-income families.

This Policy on Radical Inclusion aligns with a number of international and regional human-rights agreements and obligations to which Sierra Leone is a signatory, including: the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; the Salamanca Statement, 1994; the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1999; the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006; and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Right on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol), 2003.²¹

19 Government of Sierra Leone, National Strategy for the reduction of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage, 2018-2022.

20 Report on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Sierra Leone (OHCHR), 2011

21 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Right on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003), Article 24 (1) (2) (3). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999), Article 11 (1) (6). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994), Article 2, 3. The Sustainable Development Goals, SDG 4 (4.a). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), Article 24 (1) (2) (3). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 28.

EAGER Project Overview

EAGER (Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient) is a 4-year (2019-2023) project designed for out-of-school (OOS) adolescent girls ages 13-19²² who have missed out on formal learning opportunities. Through a consortium of 4 partners (International Rescue Committee, Concern Worldwide, Restless Development, and BBC Media Action), project teams in 10 districts delivered a Functional Literacy, Numeracy, and Financial Literacy curriculum alongside weekly Life Skills sessions. According to the EAGER Baseline Evaluation,²³ many of these girls never had an opportunity to go to school (45%) or dropped out early (43%) without learning functional reading and writing. Many were already married (44%) and/or already had the responsibilities of caring for their own children (58%). Heavy chore burdens isolated girls from their peers, and access to information, resources, services, and opportunities were limited by literacy and financial constraints as well as gender norms that impact girls' self-determination in their homes and community.

The EAGER project aimed to address the multiple barriers to participation and learning that many OOS adolescent girls experience, and to create accessible opportunities and supportive spaces for girls to build practical and empowering skills. These skills were tailored to the girls' context and daily lives so they could be practised and utilised to create positive changes for themselves, their families, and communities.

The EAGER programme consists of multiple interventions to support OOS adolescent girls at various levels individually, within the home and in the community. The Learning Programme is the foundation that builds girls' Literacy, Numeracy, Financial Literacy, and Life Skills. Girls attend the Learning Programme for 30 weeks in girls-only, community-based Safe Spaces (and where available, in additional Learning Spaces) and strengthen the skills needed to complete their own Empowerment Plan. This is a tool girls will use to identify goals they want to work on with ongoing support from their Mentors. In addition to these aspects that are covered in this document as part of the overall Learning Strategy, EAGER works with communities through Community Dialogues that open discussions with community leaders and caregivers on how they can actively support girls in their community. Although this document focuses on the Learning Strategy within the EAGER programme, this is integrated with other programme components – including the Community Dialogues, Protection Strategy, M&E framework, and feedback loops – to ensure a holistic approach for supporting girls to reach their own goals and for the project to meet its objectives.

The EAGER programme was designed to reach the most vulnerable OOS girls in Sierra Leone. This means reaching more remote areas where literacy levels are generally lower as the probability of completing primary education is estimated at 89% and 56% for urban and rural children, respectively.²⁴ EAGER supported a total of 27,322 girls across Sierra Leone and was delivered through two cycles:

22 Cohort 2 includes girls up to 19 years old. Girls mapped in Cohort 1 and who were 17 at the time were waitlisted and enrolled in Cohort 2 accounting for the age variance.

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

24 Education Sector Analysis Report- Sierra Leone 2020

the first cycle engaged 7,481 girls in a first cohort (Cohort 1), and the second cycle engaged 19,841 girls in a subsequent cohort (Cohort 2). To reach the most marginalised girls on this scale, EAGER recruited local Mentors (919) and Facilitators (935) to lead sessions. This also enabled Mentors to provide ongoing support to girls between sessions when EAGER staff were not available. These volunteers, and especially the female Mentors, were the first line of contact for girls and responsible for building a relationship of trust.

Facilitators were recruited to teach Functional Literacy, Numeracy and Financial Literacy sessions, and Mentors were recruited to lead Life Skills sessions. The national literacy rate of 43% for adults and the youth (15-25) literacy rate gender parity index of 0.89²⁵ (lower in rural areas) presented an additional challenge for the programme to find volunteers with the capacity needed to successfully implement sessions and support the girls. By project design, all Mentors must be female because they facilitate sensitive Life Skills sessions with girls in the EAGER Safe Spaces. The lower levels of literacy amongst females made it challenging to find qualified female volunteers, but ultimately project teams succeeded by striking a balance between mapping locations where female Mentors could be identified or located, and the remoteness of target areas.

Delivering sessions in Literacy, Numeracy, and Financial Literacy requires that Facilitators must have a minimum level of education.²⁶ As there are generally more males than females with higher literacy levels, especially in rural areas, this meant that most Facilitators that qualified for the position were male, making up 95% of Facilitators. Even when meeting the minimum level of education required, Facilitators did not necessarily have a background or experience in facilitation.

Although Mentors and Facilitators were capable of guiding the girls in their learning journey, the overall literacy and capacity of the volunteers was lower than originally anticipated. All training materials for the Learning Programme had to be tailored to the capacity of the Mentors and Facilitators, ensuring curriculum and training guides used simple vocabulary, shorter sentences, and easy step-by-step instructions. Continuous professional development was prioritised for all volunteers as a key strategy to upskill them and enhance the quality of teaching and learning for the girls in the programme.

²⁵ data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.MAZS?locations=SL UNESCO Institute for Statistics (uis.unesco.org)

²⁶ At a minimum, Facilitators need to have completed Senior Secondary School. During recruitment basic numeracy and literacy skills are assessed through a selection test.

1. Learning Programme

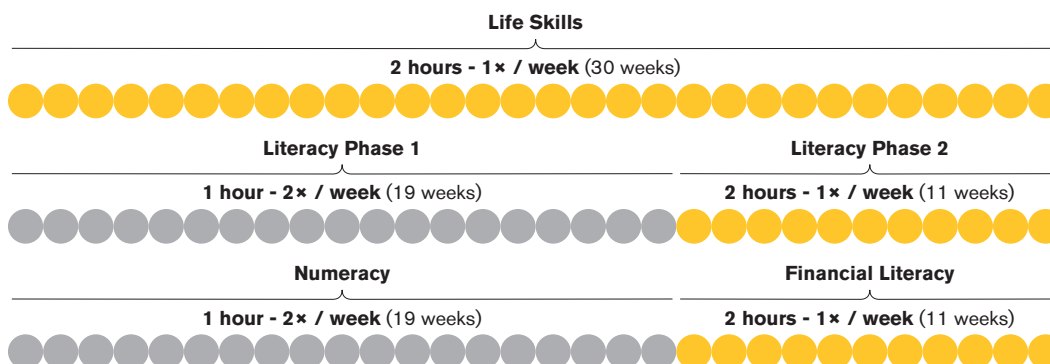
> Overview and Timeline

The EAGER Learning Programme has 4 components: Literacy, Numeracy, Financial Literacy, and Life Skills. Each component is taught individually and linked to the others through consistent use of language, themes, topics, stories, images, and teaching practises. These connections create a more holistic learning opportunity for girls as they build new skills, strengthen relationships, and more confidently interact with the world around them.

Girls are organised into groups of 25 or less and each group attends learning sessions 3 days a week for a maximum of 2 hours a day. The specific days and times for sessions are determined by each group of girls together with the volunteers to ensure that these best suit their schedules and minimise impact on the responsibilities that girls have at home.

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

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



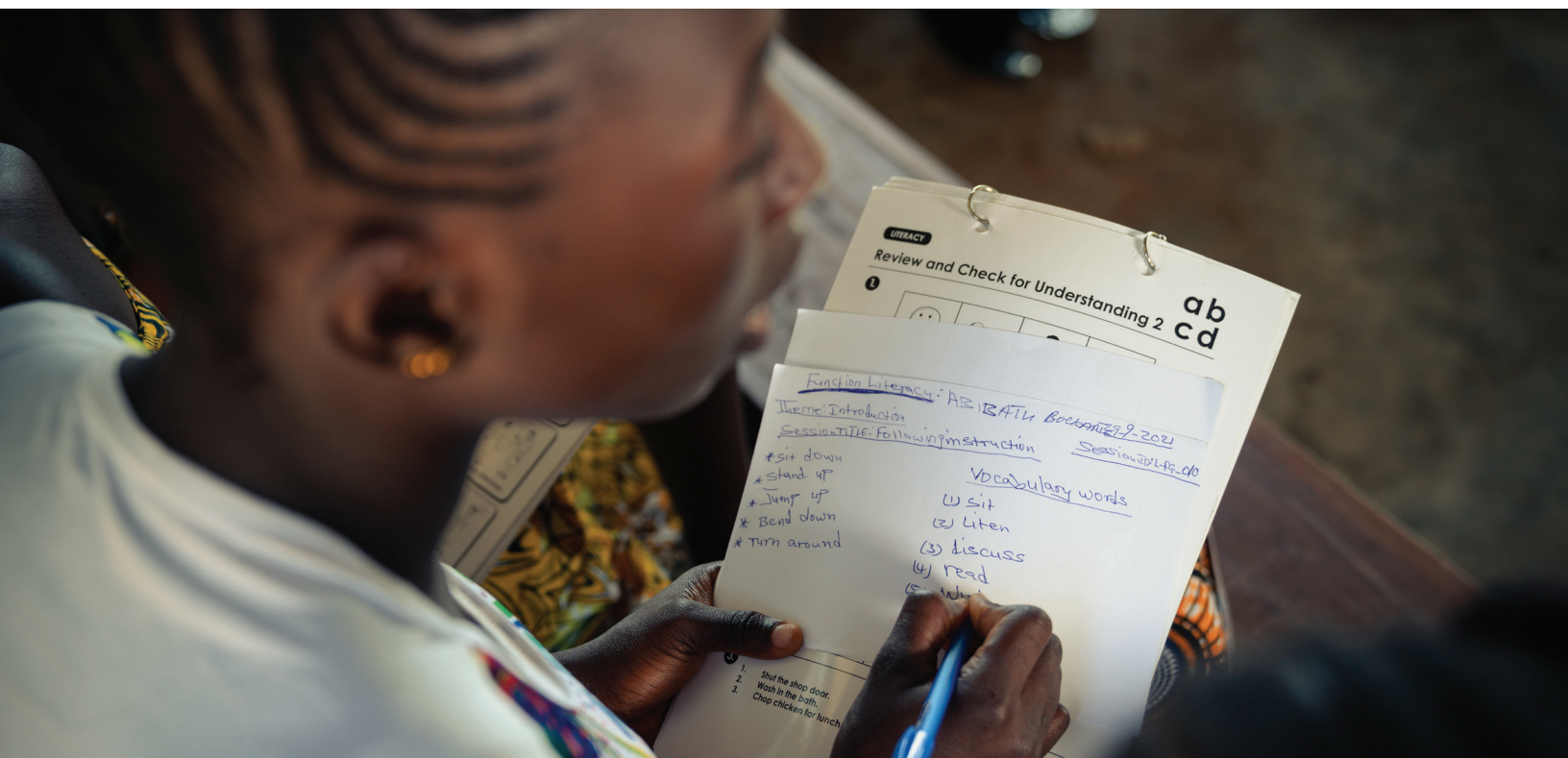
Literacy, Numeracy, and Financial Literacy sessions are led by Facilitators, while it is mandatory that a female Mentor is present in every session where the Facilitator is male to ensure girls' comfort and safeguarding. Life Skills sessions are all led by the female Mentors.

By the end of the Learning Programme, every girl will have completed her own Empowerment Plan with self-defined Learning, Household, Community, and Financial Goals. After graduation, this plan will guide girls through a Transition phase where they will use the skills they have learned to work toward their goals. The Empowerment Plan and Transition phase are expanded on in Section 3 of this Strategy.

➤ Curriculum Development and Adaptions

The EAGER project engaged consultants with specific expertise in designing literacy and numeracy curricula, who also delivered tailored trainings to consortium partners and relevant project staff. The Life Skills curriculum is based on the IRC's Girl Shine curriculum, which is a recognised, evidence-based program model and resource package that seeks to support, protect, and empower adolescent girls in humanitarian settings. EAGER's Life Skills curriculum includes, among others, sessions on trust and friendship, emotions and stress, and gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual and reproductive health (SRH). Overall, it aims to build girls' knowledge and skills to navigate challenges in ways that feel empowering to them.

To ensure the EAGER curriculum was targeted to meet the needs of girls in the programme, an extensive baseline questionnaire was conducted to collect information on girls' specific barriers and vulnerabilities. Further details on these barriers can be found in the Learners Profile section below. EAGER then developed feedback loops alongside a Midline and Endline Evaluation to continue program improvement. The feedback loops played a key role in making sure that the curriculum was relevant to Sierra Leone's context. As the curriculum was being drafted by the consultants, national context reviewers from within the EAGER consortium looked at every session and provided feedback on stories, vocabulary, and overall relevance that fed back into the curriculum before it was finalised. The Ministry of Education was engaged in the reviews of the first pilot phase (2019) of the curriculum through the support of the Basic Education unit. This ensured that the curriculum was in line with national curriculum frameworks and key priorities and objectives of the Education agenda of the Government of Sierra Leone.



The first phase of the curriculum started to be implemented before the second and final phase was written. This phased approach meant that learnings from the sessions – through observations and feedback loops from both girls and volunteers – could be incorporated in the second phase. As such, session outlines were adapted along with developing the Financial Literacy curriculum.

The original project design for EAGER included a focus on business training. Although these skills are important, this emphasis did not consider the reality that not all girls would want or have the opportunity to start a business, and that girls may have different types of goals that would also benefit from financial support. A redesign shifted the emphasis to Financial Literacy so girls would learn key skills for making smart decisions about how to use money if they were starting a business or managing their personal or household finances. The Financial Literacy component of the programme was developed based on IRC's Economic and Social Empowerment (EASE) curriculum and OneVillage Partners Nurturing Opportunities for Women (NOW) curriculum. The EAGER Financial Literacy curriculum was drafted by the project's Education Specialist with input from the Protection and Empowerment Specialist and support from IRC's Economic Recovery and Development Technical Unit. The curriculum writers worked closely with the same consortium context reviewers and feedback loops as for the Literacy and Numeracy curriculum development.

After the completion of the programme by the first cohort of learners, a second cohort (Cohort 2) of girls was mapped and enrolled. Prior to implementing Cohort 2, structured feedback was sought on curriculum sessions from programme teams. This informed adaptations to further ensure that the curriculum was responsive to learnings, evidence-based, and continuously effective and relevant to the girls attending sessions.

Covid-19 Adaptions and Impact on the Learning Programme

The Learning Programme was originally designed to be implemented 4 days a week for 2 hours per day for 30 weeks. Girls would attend functional Literacy and Numeracy sessions 3 times a week (2 hours each) and Life Skills sessions once a week (2 hours). Unfortunately, like many programmes around the world, Covid-19 shifted the way EAGER could operate. Sierra Leone went into a nationwide lockdown in early March 2020 after the Learning Programme had started in January that year. As schools were closed in Sierra Leone, EAGER also paused sessions to keep volunteers and girls safe as more was learned about how to prevent the spread of the virus.

In June 2020, EAGER carried out a survey with 585 girls enrolled in the programme across the 10 districts, to understand the impact of Covid-19 and the challenges girls were facing. Of these, 82% reported experiencing an increase in stress and anxiety during the pandemic. This aligned with increased household economic stresses (70% reported a lack of food, and 67% reported a lack of money), increased responsibilities on girls (reported by 41%), and an increase in violence against girls (reported by 19% of girls, with intimate partner violence and early marriage most frequently mentioned).

Volunteers worked to maintain contact with girls whilst the Learning Programme was put on hold, and the EAGER project worked to design new ways to bring girls back together safely to continue learning and be able to offer psychosocial support to girls. Remote learning was not a practical solution given how few girls had access to mobile phones, how few girls could read text, and limited network coverage and electrical charging stations in the more remote areas.



Whilst the EAGER Consortium Coordination Unit (CCU) redesigned the curricula to respond to the pandemic and the most urgent needs of girls, project teams in the communities worked to break each group of up to 25 girls into 3 smaller groups to allow girls to meet in their Safe Spaces whilst keeping a safe social distance from each other. When sessions started up with the adapted curricula, girls met once a week for 2 hours, focusing on each subject topic of the Learning Programme (Literacy, Numeracy, and Life Skills) for 40 minutes each. In addition, girls and volunteers were provided with face masks, and Safe Spaces were equipped with handwashing stations and cleaning supplies. Once it was safe to do so, sessions restarted 5 months later (September 2020) at the original schedule until Cohort 1 completed the Learning Programme in July 2021.

Considering girls' increased responsibilities after Covid-19, the Learning Programme for Cohort 2 was adapted to be shorter and more streamlined to a timeline of 30 weeks – with 3 sessions a week instead of 4. As Life Skills sessions stayed at the same frequency, Literacy, Numeracy, and Financial Literacy sessions were reduced. This was accomplished by incorporating numeracy skills into the Financial Literacy sessions and taking out Authentic Text from the first phase of the curriculum and only including it in the second phase, when learners are better able to use the skills they have already learned to engage with the content. Some topics were also reduced based on feedback reviewed from the EAGER team and girls based on what was most relevant and useful to the girls. These adaptations were made in ways that would not impact the overall learning outcomes.

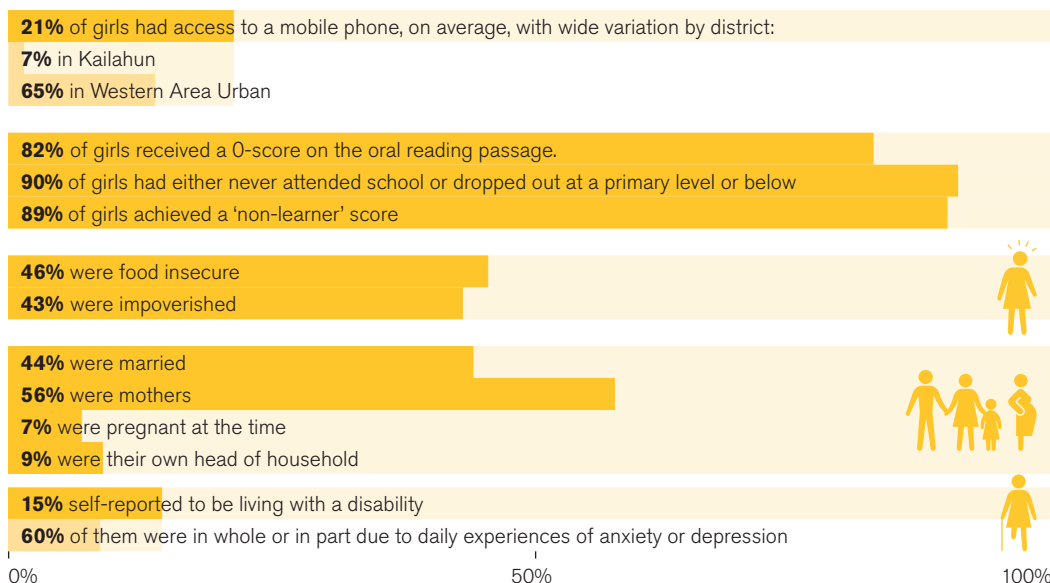
> Learners Profile

EAGER's goal was to support the most marginalised OOS adolescent girls ages 13-19 who had never been to school or dropped out very early, and had no or almost no foundation in literacy and numeracy. The curriculum package was designed for those girls who did not have the necessary literacy level to return to school and class at an appropriate age level. As this programme focuses on foundational skills, it would be very challenging for a girl in her late teens to attend a primary class at Grade 1.

The EAGER Baseline revealed that more than 90% of girls had either never attended school or dropped out at a primary level or below, and 89% achieved a 'non-learner' score.

OOS adolescent girls in Sierra Leone face specific barriers that pose challenges in transitioning to formal education, as the Baseline found that nearly half were food insecure and impoverished, and 9.2% were their own head of household. In terms of social barriers, 44.1% of girls were married or living with a partner, 57.5% had one or more children, and 7% were pregnant at Baseline.

Other barriers included that 14.6% of girls were living with one or more disability, and of those living with disabilities, 60% qualified in whole or in part due to their daily experiences of anxiety or depression. It was confirmed that many girls demonstrated gaps in social and emotional learning, hostile attribution bias, and moderate levels of emotion dysregulation. These findings confirmed the need to integrate a strong emphasis on girls' psychosocial wellbeing across all aspects of the project.



Resources

- [EAGER Baseline Evaluation Brief](#)
- [EAGER Cohorts Factsheet](#)



➤ Learning Approach

The learning approach for EAGER was designed taking into account the learners' profiles and ensuring that the programme was contextually appropriate and engaging to learners. Content is based on real world examples that learners can use in their day-to-day lives right away and is taught to be practical rather than to pass an exam.

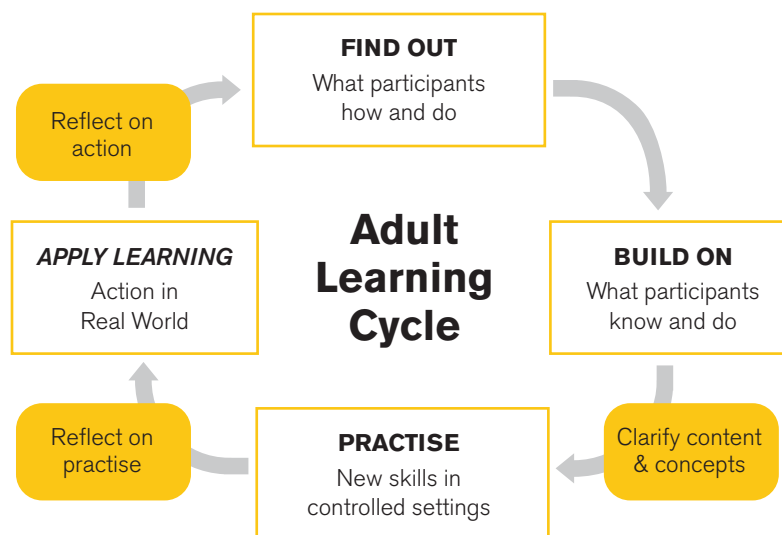
There are differences between teaching children in a formal school setting and teaching adolescent girls who have little experience of formal school. There is also a difference between preparing children for formal school system exams and equipping them with the practical skills they need in their everyday lives. EAGER sessions are delivered to groups of a maximum of 25 girls, ensuring a high teacher-to-student ratio compared to formal schools, where an average ratio of 84 students to a government-supported primary school teacher has been observed.²⁷ As such, the approach and teaching methods used in EAGER are more girl-centred and focused on activity-based learning and problem solving, with minimal teacher talking time.

Some important considerations were taken when developing EAGER's Learning Programme:

- 1. Base Knowledge:** Young learners enter primary school with little/no functional literacy and numeracy knowledge. The primary school curriculum and lessons are designed to first give them a foundation and then slowly develop their skills over time. OOS adolescents may have had little/no experience of learning literacy or numeracy in school, but they will have developed some skills and background knowledge over time through their everyday life experiences. Thus, the programme and methodology of teaching builds on this knowledge and relates the sessions to the girls' everyday lives and existing knowledge.
- 2. Motivation:** A young child attends school to learn new things, to socialise with her friends and to sit the NPSE and continue studying. An OOS adolescent girl may also want all of these things, but she already has responsibilities and needs. She is likely to join the programme if she can see how it will benefit her everyday life. Improving her economic opportunities, giving her access to tools to help her family and plan for her future, meeting other girls like her, and doing activities together to increase confidence and independence. For example, a girl might want to learn how to give change in the market so that she is not cheated.
- 3. Teaching Method:** Learning experiences need to be age appropriate; in maths, for a young child, teaching aids are used to introduce new concepts. OOS adolescent girls may need to learn the same skills and content as young learners, but in a different way. Adolescents have more critical thinking skills and their learning cycle is similar to adults. They need the opportunities to gain self-confidence by practising their new skills in a real-life context. For an adolescent girl, the concepts are more easily brought to life through dialogue, reflection, discussion, and peer work; adolescents are motivated by expressing their thoughts and engaging with peers. EAGER's functional approach to the curriculum follows Knowles' 4 principles of adult learning:

27 MBSSE 2019 Annual Schools Census Report

- » Learners need to be participants in the planning and evaluation of their instruction (e.g. self-assessment after each lesson).
- » Learning activities should be based on their own real-life experiences.
- » They are motivated to learn content that is relevant to them and can clearly see that it will have a positive impact on their daily lives.
- » The learning should be focused on solving problems faced in their daily lives, not learning information about a topic.



Source: Gragg, B. (2007). "Tools from the Field: Participant-centered techniques for effective training." Boston: John Snow, Inc and World Education.

> Core Principles

The following Core Principles for working with adolescent girls formed the basis for the Learning Programme and any interaction with the learners. These principles are not negotiable for EAGER staff and volunteers. These principles are the reason that EAGER exists and the foundation for all the work that the project carried out with and for girls.

As a project, we expect all staff and volunteers to know, understand, support, and follow these principles!

1. Girls are **resilient, powerful, and resourceful**; they are the experts in determining their future.
2. Girls **face greater risks** and dangers than boys of the same age.
3. **Investment in girls** increases the overall wellbeing of families and communities.
4. Core **life skills and assets** are critical to a girl's safe transition to adulthood.
5. Girls have the right to attend school regularly and attain the highest education level available; OOS girls have the **right to attend and learn** through non-formal education opportunities.
6. Girls **must know about their bodies, puberty, and sexual and reproductive health** so they can make smart decisions and stay healthy and safe.

7. Girls **must be protected from harm**, including all types of violence, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual exploitation.
8. Girls **must be believed** if they report violence, sexual abuse, or exploitation, and all measures must be taken to **ensure their safety and promote healing**.
9. Early marriage and early pregnancy increase risks to girls' physical, mental, and emotional health and **must be discouraged**.
10. The **community is responsible for girls' safety** and must work together to keep girls safe from violence, sexual abuse, and exploitation.

Learning Environment

➤ Along with the learning approach, the environment plays a key role in the EAGER Learning Programme. Groups are limited to 25 girls to best support learning and relationships. The physical spaces that sessions are conducted in are also carefully considered. Functional Literacy and Numeracy sessions typically take place in a Learning Space, and all Life Skills Sessions within an EAGER Safe Space.

A 'safe space' for adolescent girls is a female-only space where girls can feel physically and emotionally safe and comfortable to engage with a female adult, talk with other girls, learn new things without shame, ask questions without fear, and feel like they can relax and be themselves. Within this space, there is an absence of trauma, stress, violence, and abuse.²⁸

The creation of Safe Spaces for EAGER is an evidence-based global best practise because most public spaces in communities (including markets, gathering places, schools, religious centres, etc.) are dominated by men and/or boys, and girls often do not feel safe or fully at ease in these public spaces. These feelings of dis-ease are a response to the realities of harassment and incidences of violence that often occur in or nearby such public spaces.

Having a dedicated female-only space set aside for adolescent girls to come together is an equity approach that can greatly impact a girl's felt sense of value, whilst strengthening her friendship with other girls as a protective social asset. The physical safe space gives girls a tangible sense of place in a context where there is likely to be no other such protected area or safe haven for girls.

When delivering Life Skills sessions for adolescent girls, it is essential that the girls feel a sense of privacy and separation from the community whilst inside their EAGER Safe Space. They will be learning and discussing things that they may have never talked about before and which may be embarrassing and/or taboo, such as relationships, menstruation, and sexual and reproductive health. A physical female-only Safe Space, the presence of a kind female Mentor, and a contextualised curriculum are key elements that enable these conversations, questions, and learning in an inclusive and empowering environment.

28 www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/UNFPA%20UNFPA%20Women%20and%20Girls%20Safe%20Spaces%20Guidance%20%5B1%5D.pdf

Where it was feasible to have a separate Learning Space for the Literacy, Numeracy, and Financial Literacy sessions, these were most often a vacant classroom at the local school if space permitted its usage outside of regular school hours. Otherwise, EAGER Safe Spaces were also used as Learning Spaces, as long as the female Mentor was also present and male Facilitators asked permission from the girls to enter the space prior to each session.

➤ **Teaching and Learning Methods**

Research tells us that most people learn best by doing. Experiments on learning have taught us that we only remember about 20% of the information that we hear. We remember approximately 40% of the information that we see and hear. But we remember around 80% of the information that we see, hear, and interact with in a meaningful way.²⁹ Therefore, it is critical to make sure that when we teach, coach, or train others they have the opportunity to see, hear, and do!

The EAGER Learning Program therefore uses a variety of activities where learners may be working in groups, pairs, or individually as well as working together as a whole group. The various methods that are used in the programme include:

29 "Exhibits for Special Issue." *Educational Technology*, vol. 54, no. 6, Educational Technology Publications, Inc., 2014, pp. 39–49, www.jstor.org/stable/44430322.



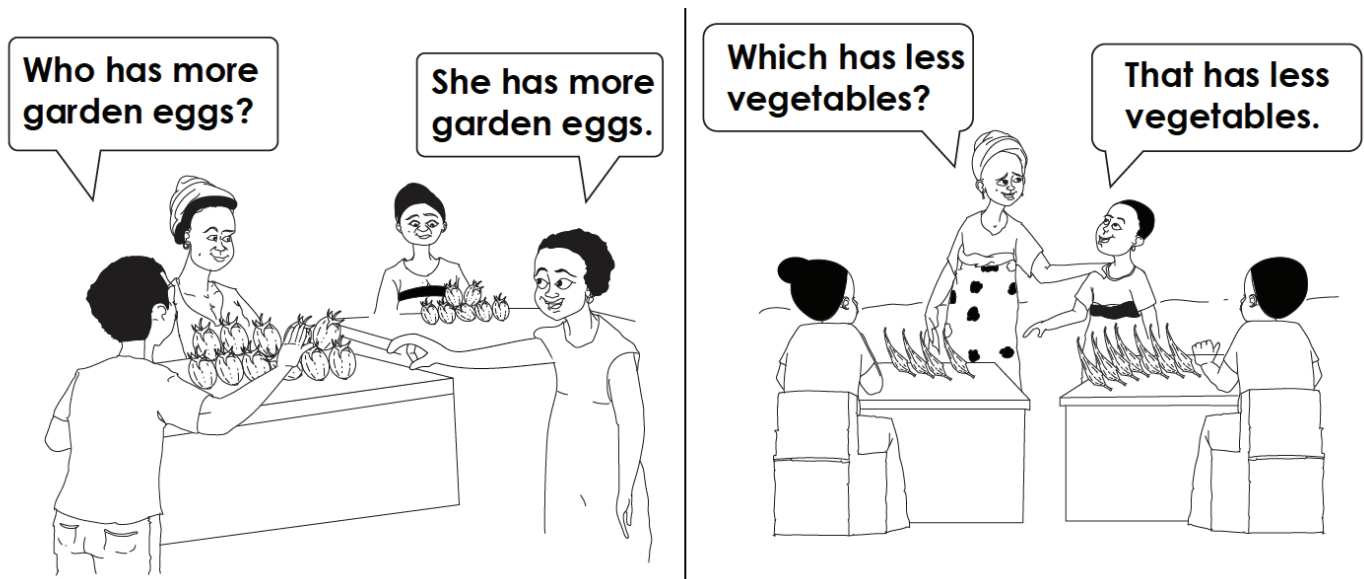
Discussions

Discussions are integrated in the entire Learning Programme. They serve as a chance for learners to share ideas, and for the Facilitators and Mentors to understand what learners already know about a topic. Discussions help learners understand how a topic is important to their everyday lives, making the activities in the session immediately practical and useful. All discussions are learner-centred where learners do most of the talking, encouraged by questions from the Facilitator and Mentor. Facilitators, even in the Literacy Sessions, allow learners to use their mother tongue as well as to make mistakes. During these activities, it is important that all girls feel heard and can share their thoughts and ideas.

Explanations

Generally following every discussion is an explanation where the Facilitator or Mentor presents new information to learners in a way that will be easily understood. Explanations use real life examples, and Mentors and Facilitators are encouraged to use the learners' mother tongue. Facilitators are asked to keep explanations simple and to the point so more time in the sessions can be dedicated to learners' discussions and practise of the new information or skill.

In every session there is space for discussions and explanations. This is outlined in the curriculum by prompting the Facilitator or Mentor to discuss a topic by asking a few key questions. For example, in a Life Skills session on Different Abilities, girls are asked, "What are different kinds of disabilities you are aware of?". This allows girls to share their own knowledge and experience, connecting the topic to what girls already know. Following the discussion, the Mentor or Facilitator explain any additional information that the girls may not have brought up. In this example, the Mentor explains and gives examples of various types of disabilities.



Group Work and Pair Work

Group work and pair work, or Think-Pair-Share, is an active learning strategy that is very useful in exploring new concepts and skills. Learners work together to discuss, practise, or solve problems as a team.³⁰

In group and pair work, learners develop their communication and social skills, build self-confidence, improve their problem-solving skills, and practise with peers. In addition, small group or pair work encourages learners who may be shy to participate in a large group setting to become active learners whilst allowing the Facilitator to observe learners' progress and enable more targeted support where needed.

Role Play

Role plays are incorporated throughout the Learning Programme. During role play, learners act or play the role of another person. In Literacy sessions, learners practise conversations and new vocabulary in English while also learning sentence structure and grammar. Numeracy and Financial Literacy use role plays to practise skills in real life situations such as counting a total cost of goods to purchase and calculating the correct change. Life Skills role plays give girls a chance to practise applying the social and emotional skills they are learning in real-life scenarios and to teach each other through their demonstrations.

30 Teaching for Effective Learning. Active Learning Strategies - Queens University. www.queensu.ca/teachingandlearning/modules/students/22_active_learning_strategies.html



Homework

At the end of every session, girls are given a short recommendation for homework. Understanding that most girls have very little free time outside the sessions, these requests are not mandatory and are simple actions that girls can do to continue to practise the skills they have learned during the sessions. This may mean practising some breathing activities when falling asleep or counting the number of houses on their walk home from the sessions. Although the homework activities are simple and short, these are a way to encourage girls to continue practising their skills regularly outside of the planned sessions.

Bintu's Stories

Stories are incorporated throughout the Learning Programme. Bintu, a fictional character, was developed to contextualise stories for adolescent girls in Sierra Leone and introduce topics to learners through real-life experiences. Bintu is a 16-year-old girl with a 6-month-old daughter named Sia. They live with Bintu's Auntie Hawa and her 2 younger cousins. Each week, learners hear at least 2 new stories about Bintu. Learners follow Bintu along with her family and friends through a variety of situations and experiences. Each story is introduced through an image depicting the situation in the story to help bring the story to life.

In Life Skills sessions, Bintu's story sets a framework for girls to discuss sensitive topics and how Bintu and her friends can make decisions, solve problems, learn new skills, and navigate difficult situations. In the Literacy sessions, Bintu's story relates to the week's topic and introduces vocabulary which learners are taught in the session and help develop listening comprehension skills. Bintu's stories are continued through the Numeracy and Financial Literacy sessions, where learners use new mathematical skills to help Bintu solve problems and learn financial literacy skills as Bintu starts a new business with her friend, Isha.

When people listen to stories, they create mental images that belong to them, connecting the content to something personally significant. Discussing the topic and reading or hearing Bintu's story can help learners to connect what they are learning to what they already know – their background knowledge and personal experiences.

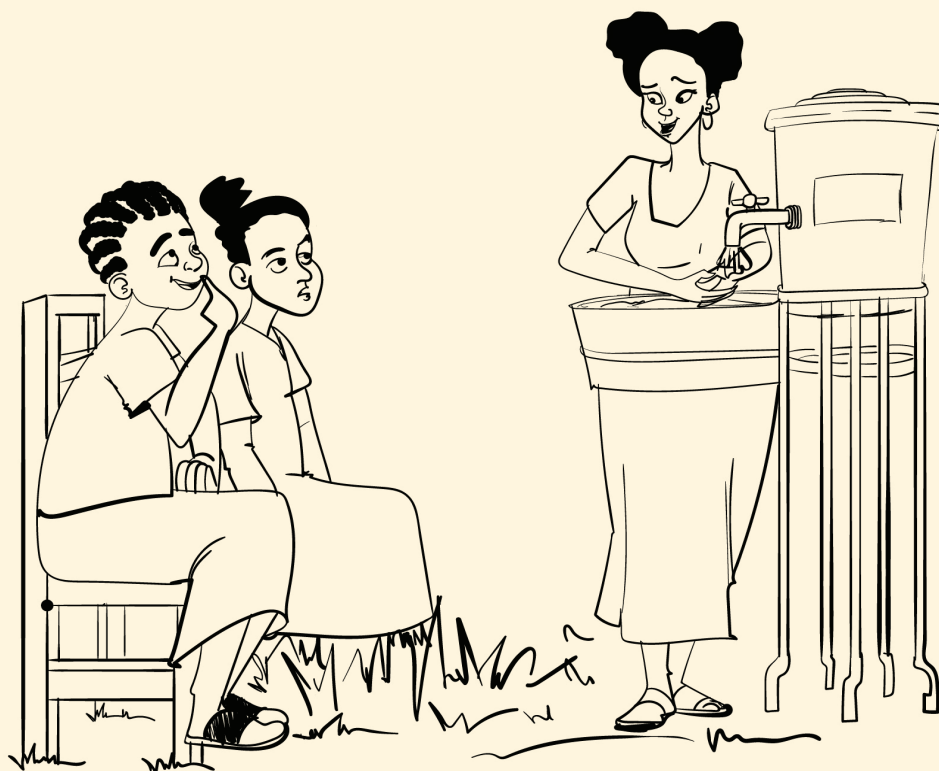
Bintu became a focus for the Learning Programme as girls easily related to her situation and could remember topics discussed through her examples. Bintu and her stories were so relatable that when girls from the first cohort in the project were graduating from the Learning Programme in July 2021, they were asking volunteers if they could meet Bintu, thinking she was a girl like them living in Sierra Leone.

Bintu's Story: A Visit from the Community Health Worker

Isatu, the community health worker, comes to meet girls in the village. Every month she comes to talk to them about how to care for themselves and their families.

Today, she talks about hand washing. She tells the girls that hand washing with soap is one of the best ways to stay healthy. It also helps people avoid getting diarrhoea. Hand washing is very important to keep babies and children healthy. Isatu asks, 'When do you wash your hands?' She tells them that there are 4 times when you need to wash your hands to not get sick. First, wash your hands after using the latrine. Second, wash your hands after cleaning your baby's stool. Third, wash your hands before eating. Fourth, wash your hands before feeding baby. Isatu shows them a hand washing station. She shows the girls how it works.

Then she shows them how to wash their hands with soap and water. She asks the girls to show their families how to wash their hands properly with soap and water to stay healthy.



A Visit from the Community Health Worker

> Literacy

Functional Literacy is the ability to “understand, evaluate, use and engage with written text to participate in society, to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.”³¹ The Literacy programme follows a 2-session-per-topic structure. Over 2 sessions (1 week), learners engage with the topic in a meaningful way in order to develop their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. The curriculum is divided into 2 phases as learners’ skills progress. Phase II has a slightly different structure as Authentic Text is introduced at a stage when learners can more comfortably engage with real-life text. An overview of what is taught in each session and specific objectives and themes for Literacy can be found in the Appendix.

Literacy Teaching Aids

Along with the teaching methods that cross between subjects of the EAGER Learning Programme, Literacy includes some specific teaching aids that Facilitators and learners use throughout the programme.

Literacy Learner Book

The Literacy Learner Book comprises a variety of teaching aids that are all gathered into a workbook designed to be used by the individual learner. Every girl in EAGER receives a Literacy Learner Book. This book includes various teaching components that correspond to the curriculum that learners are meant to be using individually, in pairs, and in groups to practise their new skills. In addition to Vocabulary, Conversation, Reading Charts, Authentic Text, Letter Formation Chart, and the Alphabet Chart, the Learner Book has writing practise pages. These pages are blank pages that learners can use to trace and practise their writing.

Bintu’s Story Pictures

Every week, or every 2 sessions, includes a new Bintu story. Before the Facilitator reads Bintu’s story, they show a corresponding image that illustrates what is happening in the story. Looking at the picture, discussing the topic, and listening to the title, learners make predictions about what the story is about. This can help learners connect new concepts or words with what they already know and understand. Using a visual image helps learners internalise new ideas and vocabulary. These pictures are printed and given to all Facilitators to be used in the sessions with the learners. Once the picture and story are discussed, where possible, they are displayed in the learning space so they can be referred to in future sessions.

Vocabulary Pictures

Every week, or every 2 sessions, learners are introduced to new vocabulary in English. The vocabulary appears in Bintu’s story as well as in the conversation practise. Learners practise 5 target vocabulary words using vocabulary pictures. These vocabulary pictures change each week and can be found in the Literacy Learner Book, as images are an important tool to help girls learn and remember new words.

³¹ Definition of adult literacy goals drawn from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).

Learners already have a rich oral vocabulary in their mother tongue, or home language. These are all of the words and expressions that they use to communicate on a daily basis. EAGER encourages learners to transfer their oral vocabulary knowledge in their mother tongue to English. The more words they know and understand in English, the easier it will be to read and write.

Conversation Pictures

Every week, or every 2 sessions, learners ask and answer questions in English. These conversations are related to the theme and use some of the vocabulary of the week. These conversations help learners develop oral language skills that they can use later on when reading and writing. This is an effective way to teach grammar communicatively. Through these conversations, they learn common patterns, or sentence structures. They get the opportunity to practise the language skills they are gaining by acting out these conversations.

Each week, learners see conversation pictures in the Learner Book. These pictures are a visual learning aid to help them understand the context of the conversation. Like using pictures for Bintu's story and vocabulary, learners can better understand when and how the conversation would take place. They can look at the pictures and predict what the conversation is about. The pictures also help to connect the conversations to their own personal experiences and daily lives.



Authentic Text

Starting in the second phase of the Learning Programme once learners have a base knowledge and can decode words, Authentic Text is introduced. Each week, or every 2 sessions, learners can engage with a sample of text they may encounter in real life such as a text message, sign board/ advertisement, or a receipt. Girls work together as a group to read the information in a piece of writing. All authentic text is in the Literacy Learner Book. By practising authentic text, learners understand the importance of functional literacy skills and how what they are learning relates to their lives. Learners may not know and do not have to know all the words in the authentic text; they will, however, learn strategies for using what they already know to help them determine the overall meaning.

Reading Charts

Reading charts are used after a letter sound or syllable is introduced. The reading charts can be found in the Literacy Learner Book and include a picture, words, and later in the curriculum, sentences. This is to help learners remember the sounds or syllables as well as an opportunity to practise writing the target words and sentences.

Letter Formation Chart

In the introduction weeks, learners are taught how to form 6 basic shapes. These shapes are the building blocks for writing letters. These have been printed for all Facilitators and can be found in the Literacy Learner Book.

Alphabet Chart

An alphabet chart is a visual aid that is given in poster size to all Facilitators and can be found in the Literacy Learner Book. The chart is a standard alphabet chart that shows the uppercase and lowercase letters in the English alphabet. It has guidance lines to help learners understand how to form the letters and pictures to help them recall the letter sounds. The pictures have been contextualised for Sierra Leone.



Girls' average literacy score increased from **19%** at Baseline to **45%** at Midline, or sixfold against target



Resources

- [EAGER Functional Literacy Curriculum – Facilitator Guide](#)
- [EAGER Functional Literacy and Numeracy ToT Training Manual](#)
- [EAGER Learner Book – Literacy](#)
- [EAGER Bintu Story Images](#)





➤ Numeracy and Financial Literacy

Functional Numeracy is defined as the ability to understand, use and communicate mathematical information and ideas. EAGER defines **Financial Literacy** as a set of skills used to manage money. The Numeracy and Financial Literacy Facilitator's Guide has been divided into 2 parts to align with the first and second phase of the Literacy curriculum. The first part focuses on basic numeracy skills and the second on financial literacy.

The first phase of sessions is designed to develop learners' competencies in number sense, operations (+ – × ÷), measurements, and data. Traditional mathematics courses usually focus on a single mathematical theme at a time and use formal mathematical language. EAGER has been designed to not just teach mathematical concepts but mathematics skills in a way that relates to learners' everyday lives. A single numeracy session or theme involves multiple mathematical competencies. Language used is not formal but familiar to learners from their daily experiences to build their skills in these competencies.

The second phase of sessions focuses on Financial Literacy. These sessions build on what girls have already learned throughout the EAGER Learning Programme. Although some basic business skills are covered in these sessions, it is not assumed that all learners who go through this programme want to start a business. The primary goal of the second phase is for learners to build the skills they need to make smart financial decisions and manage their own finances. By the end of the second phase, learners will have a financial goal (business or otherwise) and know how to complete the Financial Goals section in their Empowerment Plan template. More details can be found in Section 3 of this Strategy.

An overview of what is taught in Numeracy and Financial Literacy and specific objectives and themes can be found in the Appendix.



Numeracy Teaching Aids

As with Literacy, Numeracy and Financial Literacy have some specific teaching aids that have been created and given to Facilitators and learners.

Number Chart or 100 Chart

Each Facilitator received a poster-size Numbers Chart to be used as a visual aid in the learning space. The chart can also be found in the Numeracy Learner Book. The Number Chart is used by Facilitators and learners to identify numbers, do basic counting, as well as skip counting by 2s, 5s, and 10s.

Number Cards

Number cards are visual aids that are used during sessions by Facilitators and learners. They include the written word for the number, symbol for the number, and dots to show the number. The number cards are used in the curriculum to help learners identify numbers, compare numbers, and to put numbers in order.

Print-out of Leone Notes

Most learners use money in their everyday lives, and using money is a good way to understand how numeracy can relate to learners' daily lives. As Leones are the currency in Sierra Leone, printed pictures of Leone notes are used at different points during the curriculum to practise a variety of skills in group or pair work. A few skills practised with these Leone notes include reading and writing 4-digit numbers, comparing amounts of money, finding the total price of goods, and giving change.

Measuring Tape and Ruler

In sessions that include learning about distances, a measuring tape or ruler is used. However, these tools are not always readily available to learners outside the sessions. The objective of the session on lengths and distance is to know the approximate lengths of different distances or heights and have a common understanding of these, rather than focusing on specific measurements. Therefore, in addition to using measuring tapes or rulers, learners were taught a few general ways to associate different lengths or distances using what they are familiar with. These included:

- One metre is approximately the length from a person's chest to fingertips.
- A kilometre is 1,000 metres. It is the length of 10 football fields. Or 1,000 girls standing next to each other with one arm out.
- One inch is about the length of a finger from the tip to the knuckle.
- One foot is 12 inches, or about the length from your wrist to your elbow.

Numeracy Learner Book

In addition to the Literacy Learner Book, every girl in the EAGER Learning Programme receives a Numeracy Learner Book. The book includes numbers, number cards, number charts, visual pictures representing mathematical problems, and some practise pages where learners can practise writing numbers and complete basic mathematical equations on their own. The book also comprises a variety of images including maps, analog clocks, and other teaching aids that are used during the numeracy sessions.

The second half of the Numeracy Learner Book focuses on Financial Literacy with visual representations of income and expenses as well as profit, loss, and some simple budgets. The largest aspect of the Financial Literacy section is EAGER 'My Empowerment Plan'. More information on the plan can be found in Section 3 of this Strategy.



Girls' average numeracy score increased from **47%** at Baseline to **74%** at Midline, or fivefold against target



Girls' financial literacy confidence increased from **68%** at Baseline to **87%** at Endline



99.5% of girls reported that they use skills from their BLN sessions in their everyday lives.
- Girls and Mentors Survey, Project Monitoring, 2022



Resources

- [EAGER Numeracy and Financial Literacy Curriculum – Facilitator Guide](#)
- [EAGER Functional Literacy and Numeracy ToT Training Manual](#)
- [EAGER Learner Book – Numeracy](#)





➤ Life Skills

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines Life Skills as a set of psychosocial and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathise with others, and manage their lives in a healthy and productive way. These skills can empower girls to make positive changes in their lives, relationships, and communities.

The EAGER Life Skills sessions are designed to guide and encourage girls to value themselves, see their own strengths, and build their knowledge, confidence, and resilience. There is a strong emphasis on supporting girls to build their power from the inside out, their power to take action in their lives, and their power to work together with others to create positive change.

The curriculum scope and sequence follow 5 core themes: 1) Trust; 2) Social and Emotional Skills; 3) Health and Hygiene; 4) Safety; and 5) Vision. Each session builds on the previous ones, and more sensitive topics are introduced once girls have been meeting together for several months and have built a foundation of trust with their Mentor and peers.

Specific session topics and themes of the Life Skills sessions can be found in the Appendix and are articulated in the EAGER Protection Strategy (find link to this Strategy under Resources at the end of this chapter).

Teaching Aids

As with the rest of the Learning Programme, Life Skills use some specific teaching aids on top of those that cut across all sessions.

Life Skills Pictures

Each Life Skills session has an associated drawing that illustrates the Bintu story and helps Mentors start the discussion about the topic. These visuals are designed to support girls to connect more strongly to the stories and topics and enable them to engage in sensitive discussions without sharing personal experiences. Visuals can help to reinforce learning for all girls, including girls with hearing and intellectual disabilities, and can support greater memory retention of key skills as girls move through the programme.

Stress Management Practises

In the EAGER Baseline Evaluation, many girls reported experiencing daily anxiety or sadness. In a survey conducted by EAGER in June 2020, 80% of girls reported feeling increased levels of stress since the start of Covid-19. In response to these findings, the project incorporated Stress Management Practises into the Life Skills curriculum to equip girls with tools to manage stress and support their psychosocial wellbeing. These include 8 different practises that use breathing, body awareness, and imagination. They have been translated into Krio and turned into audio recordings to support Mentors.

Mentors lead a Stress Management Practise in every session starting from Session 17 where sensitive topics relating to sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence are introduced.



Girls' average life skills score increased from **66%** at Baseline to **76%** at Midline, or fivefold against target



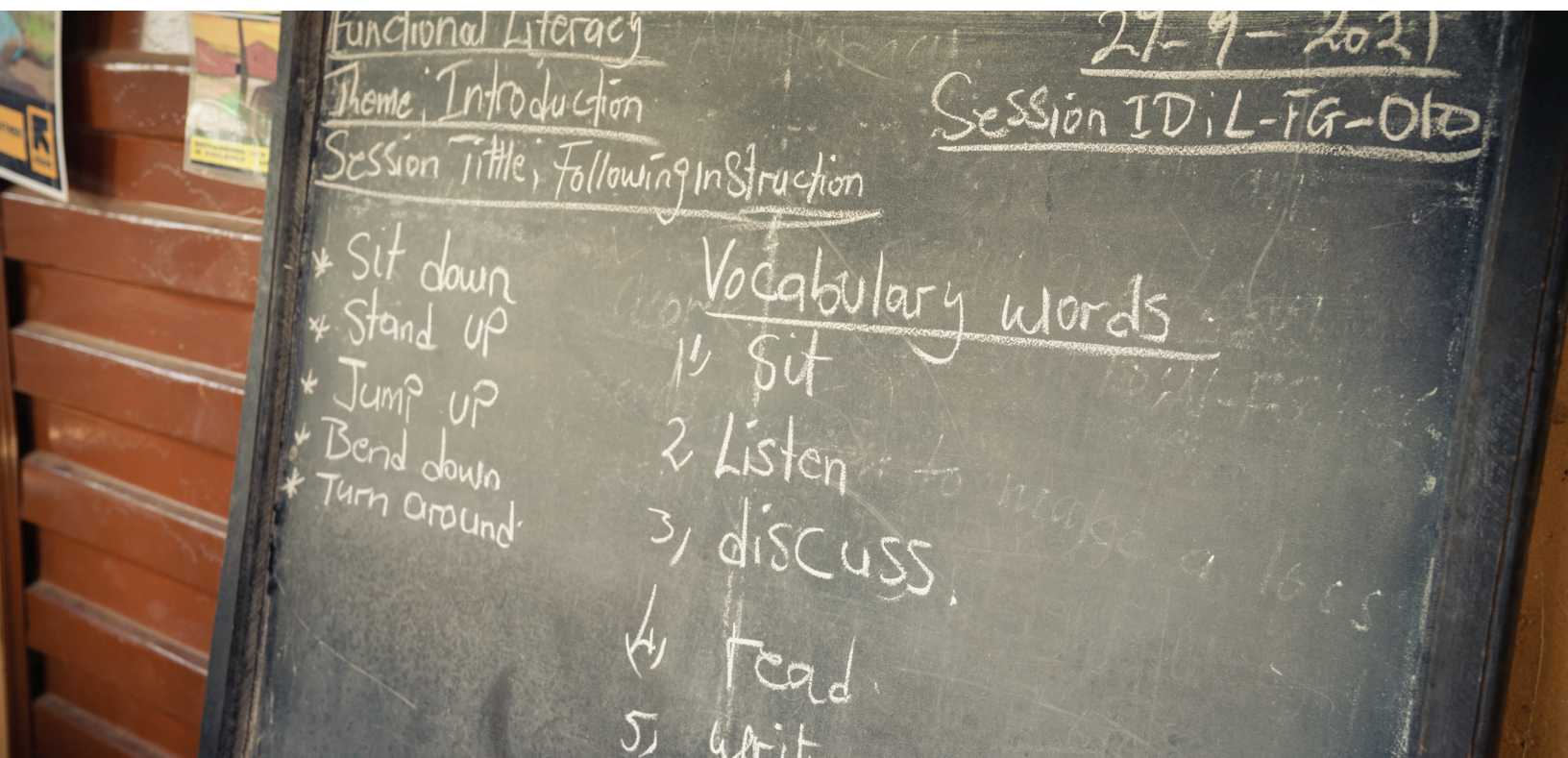
93% of girls reported discussing what they had learned in their Life Skills sessions with others.
- Girls and Mentors Survey, Project Monitoring, 2022



Resources

- [EAGER Life Skills Mentor Guide](#)
- [EAGER Life Skills ToT Training Manual](#)
- [EAGER Life Skills Images](#)
- [EAGER Stress Management Practises](#)
- [EAGER Protection Strategy](#)





➤ Check for Understanding

Facilitators and Mentors are trained to ask questions and check learners' understanding throughout the session to see if concepts need to be explained again or taught in a different way. At the end of all sessions, questions are asked to see if girls understood the main ideas or skills that were discussed or taught. This gives the Mentors and Facilitators a quick understanding of whether any topics may need to be explained further or a review in the next session may be needed. In Literacy and Numeracy, additional Check for Understanding sessions are incorporated in the curriculum. Approximately every 6 sessions, Facilitators deliver 2 sessions that review skills that are taught in the previous set of sessions. Learners revise and practise these skills while the Facilitator can identify how well learners understand the topics covered. Facilitators use a Learner Skills Tracker to record learners' progress for them to use as reference. This is not a test, and the checks are incorporated into regular activities during the sessions that Facilitators take note of and record. Facilitators use this tool to note any topics that need to be reviewed or learners that may need extra assistance before moving on to the next set of sessions.

➤ Learning Checks

In addition to regular Check for Understanding sessions, the Learning Programme has formal Learning Checks approximately every 6 weeks depending on the grouping of topics and skills learned. Life Skills incorporate Learning Checks following every 6 sessions, and Functional Literacy and Numeracy following each Check for Understanding week. Learning Checks are simple 5-10-minute touch points for EAGER Officers to get a general sense of how learners are doing in relation to the skills and knowledge girls have been taught. As the project targets OOS adolescents, the checks have been designed so they do not take the form of a formal test.

These checks should not put learners on the spot or induce any anxiety or stress. It is emphasised that girls are not being scored, nor do their responses impact their enrolment within the programme. Feedback from the checks informs Project Officers whether follow-up with the girls, Facilitators, or Mentors is needed, or if it may be necessary to review sessions or adapt the programme. The Functional Literacy and Numeracy Learning Checks comprise 5 questions where the Basic Literacy and Numeracy Officers ask the entire group of girls a question. They either take turns answering, like a game, or they write answers in their notebooks as Officers check their responses. Officers are recording the total number of correct responses for each question, and not correct responses for each learner, giving Officers an idea of how each group is doing in order to follow up on any potential concerns as necessary.

Life Skills Learning Checks consist of 6 discussion questions that Life Skills Officers ask the whole group and invite learners to share their answers. Officers check to make sure key messages are brought up by the learners and if a threshold is met, the question will be considered as answered correctly. Like Functional Literacy and Numeracy, these learning checks are scored as a group and not for individual learners. As the Officers then review any components of the answer that may have been missed by the girls, these learning checks also become an opportunity to remind girls about what they may have missed and reinforce their learning.



Resources

- [EAGER Functional Literacy and Numeracy Learning Checks](#)
- [EAGER Life Skills Learning Checks](#)



2. Quality and Inclusion – Continuous Professional Development

All Mentors and Facilitators are trained to facilitate specific aspects of the Learning Programme. Due to the remote nature of the regions where EAGER was implemented, the capacity of Mentors and Facilitators is not as high as it may be in more accessible and urban areas. Therefore, incorporating a holistic approach to professional development of the Mentors and Facilitators became a key aspect to the project.

All EAGER Facilitators and Mentors are trained on the curriculum which they are facilitating prior to implementation. A refresher training is provided midway through the Learning Programme. These larger trainings focus on the approach and content of the teaching and facilitation guides as well as facilitation skills and session facilitation practise.

Facilitators from a small geographic cluster gather twice a quarter to attend Peer-to-Peer Sessions where they discuss challenges and share learnings. They review and practise key topics and concepts with each other. Similarly, Mentors within a small geographic cluster gather once a month to attend Learning Clusters where they too share learnings and practise upcoming Life Skills Sessions.



In both Peer-to-Peer Sessions and Learning Clusters, EAGER volunteers come together so that they can:

- Develop new skills with a group of individuals who share similar teaching realities,
- Collectively explore and determine best strategies to support their learners' learning,
- Practise new techniques in front of peers to attain constructive and supportive feedback, and
- Support themselves by learning from their colleagues' experiences.

Although Mentors and Facilitators have distinct roles in the Learning Programme, they are working side by side to support the same group of girls. To further encourage this collaboration between volunteers, a Joint Learning Cluster Session takes place twice throughout the Learning Programme. In this joint session, Mentors and Facilitators come together from the same geographic cluster to share learnings and knowledge as well as review key topics that cut across the Learning Programme.

These 2 joint cluster sessions take place at strategic points:

1. At the beginning of the programme to build a shared understanding of disabilities and inclusive practises for working with girls; and
2. Midway through the programme to focus on the upcoming development of girls' Empowerment Plans and how they will work together to support girls in this process.

Although the Learning Programme is divided into Functional Literacy and Numeracy and Life Skills, skills and knowledge are crosscutting for the overall success of the girls. One group of girls is supported directly by a Mentor and Facilitator. Building relationships and support networks among EAGER volunteers helps ensure consistency throughout the Learning Programme and builds networks of support when EAGER Officers are not available.

In addition to group learning and sharing, volunteers receive individual support through regular session observation and coaching for both Financial Literacy and Numeracy, and Life Skills. EAGER Officers sit in on a regular session twice quarterly to observe volunteers' competence in core curriculum skills and facilitation, communication, and inclusion. Following the observation, the Mentor or Facilitator meets with the respective EAGER Officer for further coaching to discuss strengths and areas for improvement, and realistic action plans to address these.

Through the Training of Trainers, Peer-to-Peer Sessions, Learning Clusters, and the one-on-one coaching and formative feedback sessions, Mentors and Facilitators receive targeted support to build their own skills and confidence. This holistic approach ensures that girls are getting the best teaching and learning experience possible even in areas where capacity may be low (find out more in the EAGER Community-based Volunteer Model. See link under Resources at the end of this chapter).



93% of Mentors & Facilitators demonstrated inclusive teaching practises
- Project Monitoring, 2021



90% of Mentors & Facilitators passed the post-test
- Project Monitoring, 2022



85% of Mentors & Facilitators rated with Good Effort or Exemplary across all aspects of facilitation, indicating quality and inclusive practises
- Midline Evaluation, 2021



99% of girls reported that they felt comfortable speaking to Mentors
- Project Monitoring, 2021



94% of girls agreed "a lot" that their Facilitators made them feel welcome
- Midline Evaluation, 2021



99% of girls reported that Mentors & Facilitators encouraged all girls to actively participate in sessions
- Endline Evaluation, 2022



Resources

- [EAGER Literacy and Numeracy Session Observation and Coaching Tool](#)
- [EAGER Life Skills Session Observation and Coaching Tool](#)
- [EAGER Community Based Volunteer Model](#)



3. My Empowerment Plan

Following the Learning Programme, girls enter a Transition phase. EAGER conceptualised Transition in terms of a holistic model of 'Empowerment' in which girls themselves envision what they want this to be across 4 categories of learning, household, community, and financial empowerment. This integrated approach carries greater potential for transforming the gender narrative that prescribes certain roles for girls than a stand-alone financial intervention and encourages girls to think about how they can step into their own power in various aspects of their lives. Girls are looked at as groups, as well as individually. Girls often live with families and others depend on them, so they might not think of themselves individually. Local communities also identify more with groups than the individual. Transition is framed as a collective concept that reflects the local context.

Throughout the Learning Programme, girls gain a variety of skills that they will use to complete their own Empowerment Plan as part of the Transition phase. At the beginning of the second phase of the Numeracy and Financial Literacy programme (week 20), the concept of the Empowerment Plan is introduced to the girls. During the last few weeks of the Learning Programme, girls have the opportunity to work on and fill in their plan with the support of the Mentors and Facilitators.

Using the skills and knowledge they have learned, and with support from EAGER volunteers, girls identify goals with defined steps across these 4 categories (learning, household, community, and financial). This gives girls an additional tool they can use to continue practicing core concepts once the programme has ended. Goals and steps are considered short-term, or goals that can be achieved within a one-year time frame.



As part of their Empowerment Plan, every girl sets a Financial Goal and determines key steps she will take to achieve it. This goal-setting process includes the development of a budget that girls are required to complete in order to help them meet their Financial Goal. As mentioned in the Financial Literacy section above, not all girls will be able to start a business, but many will have aspirations that involve the use of some finances. Completing the budget helps girls use the financial literacy skills they have learned to plan how to use their finances. This section of the Empowerment Plan includes a market survey in addition to the budget. The market survey is completed only by girls who are planning an income generating activity, leveraging the skills they have learned in the programme should they want to use their finances to start or grow a business.

Upon completion of her Empowerment Plan, each girl, the volunteers, and where appropriate and wanted by the girl, a caregiver and/or her partner, sign off on the plans to commit to support the girls to reach their own goals. The Empowerment Plan is not just about the girl meeting the 4 goals she has set for herself but to give her a tool that she can continue to use to envision her own future and take small steps to reach her goals well beyond the timeframe of EAGER.



97.6% of girls reported that they believe they can achieve the goals they set in their Empowerment Plan within a year.
- Endline Evaluation, 2022



77.5% of girls reported that they were currently saving money in June 2022, compared to **45%** in February 2021.
- Endline Evaluation, 2022



Resources

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



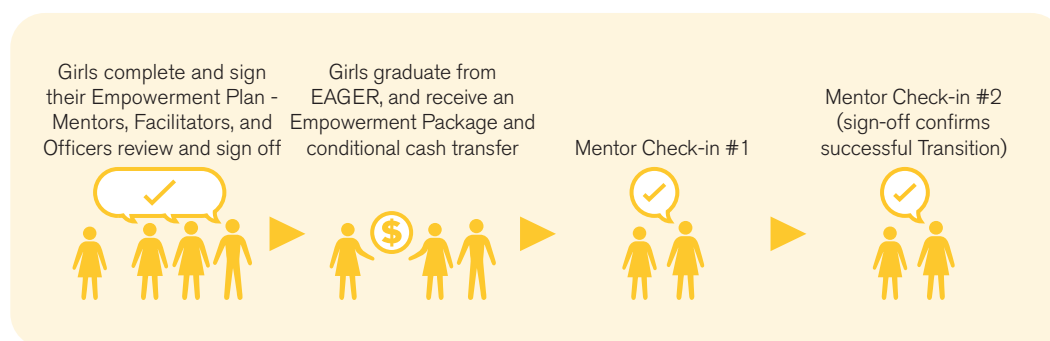
> Transition

After the Learning Programme ends and the Empowerment Plans are signed off, girls enter the Transition phase of EAGER. As the Transition phase starts, girls receive a small cash grant to use towards reaching their goals. They may use this money in any way they see fit based on the budget they outlined in their Empowerment Plan to reach their Financial Goal through the provision of cash at the end of their learning journey. Through the provision of a cash transfer at the end of their learning journey, EAGER gave the girls the opportunity to use the skills they learned in the Financial Literacy sessions and the other sessions in the Learning Programme to make smart decisions with their money and this way, reach the goals they set for themselves.



During the Transition period, girls are not regularly engaged in sessions. Mentors meet with the girls periodically to track their progress through these steps. EAGER does not assess a successful Transition on the basis of the effective achievement of the ultimate goals, but rather on how the girls have progressed through their defined steps. As the girls are encouraged to set goals that have potential for positive impact on their lives, these are unlikely to be reached within the 8-month Transition period that the project defined for the purpose of follow-up with the girls and project monitoring. Therefore, EAGER assesses a successful Transition based on a set number of steps which the girls achieved (target progress) towards their Empowerment Plan goals within the 8-month Transition timeline.

Find out more about the project's approach to Transition in the Transition Strategy (see link under Resources at the end of this chapter).



Resources

- [EAGER Transition Strategy](#)



Conclusion

The EAGER project aimed to engage some of the most marginalised and vulnerable adolescent girls in Sierra Leone and was designed to protect their rights, safety, dignity, and wellbeing. The learning approaches outlined above have been developed through a highly responsive process of learning and adaptations since the beginning stages of the project. The project made many direct adaptations in response to the Baseline findings as well as the first volunteer assessments of community-based Mentors and Facilitators, which highlighted that their capacity was lower than anticipated. This included rewriting the Life Skills curriculum, redesigning all training and coaching materials, and starting monthly Mentor Learning Clusters for Mentors and and bi-monthly Peer-to-Peer Sessions for Facilitators. However, this process of learning and adaptation did not stop there. It continued throughout the life of the project to ensure that it remained responsive to the girls' experiences and needs as they moved on with the programme.

This has been a core strength of the project, and has enabled teams to pivot and strengthen different areas to ensure that we as a project were doing everything within our power and resources to protect and empower girls. As specific learnings were gleaned through learning checks, field monitoring visits, trainings, regular dialogue with project teams all the way down to Mentors and Facilitators, and conversations with many girls in the Safe Spaces, the project used these feedback loops to design new materials and approaches in response.

Whilst this project is now coming to a close, the team is hopeful that the time and energy invested in building these girl-centred and highly-tailored resources – as well as the time invested by girls, volunteers, community members, and staff to provide inputs and feedback – will be maximised through their continued use. The project team has endeavoured to make these resources available and flexible for use as an integrated learning programme or as stand-alone components based on the programmatic context and need. There are also components that can be incorporated into existing programmes, and that can be further adapted and tailored as needed.

The EAGER project set out to create a learning experience for OOS adolescent girls that was welcoming, safe, affirming, and effective for building their skills, knowledge, confidence, and agency. Our hope is that these resources will continue to be used to empower more adolescent girls across Sierra Leone.

Appendix

> Literacy Sessions and Outcomes

The curriculum contains 11 themes. Each theme contains 4 sessions over the course of 2 weeks. Along with the themes there are 7 Review and Check for Understanding weeks where learners will review and practise the skills they have learned. The Literacy outcomes for each of these sections are in the table below along with the corresponding session numbers.

| Sessions | Theme | Literacy Outcomes |
|----------|--------------------------------------|---|
| PHASE 1 | | |
| 01-04 | Introduction 1 | Learners will use Bintu's story to be able to introduce themselves and answer questions about themselves (Feelings). They will learn pre-reading skills and concepts of print. They will be introduced to the alphabet, 6 shapes needed to form letters, and how to hold a pencil. By the end of this theme, learners should be able to read and write the letters of the alphabet. |
| 05-06 | Review and Check for Understanding 1 | Learners will review vocabulary and conversations from the last theme while practising the alphabet, letter formation shapes, and letters. |
| 07-10 | Introduction 2 | Learners will use Bintu's story to name different family members as well as follow simple classroom instructions and commands. Learners will learn the target letter sounds m, a, t, and s. |
| 11-12 | Review and Check for Understanding 2 | Learners will review vocabulary and conversations from the last theme and review target letter sounds. |
| 13-16 | Planning My Day | Learners will use Bintu's story to describe daily routines and identify days of the week. Learners will learn the target letter sounds p, l, n, and d. |
| 17-20 | Community Map | Learners will use Bintu's story to describe different people in the community as well as identify different places in the community. Learners will learn the target letter sounds r, e, k, and c. |
| 21-22 | Review and Check for Understanding 3 | Learners will review vocabulary and conversations from the last two themes while practising reading and writing known letter sounds. |
| 23-26 | Shopping at the Market | Learners will use Bintu's story to identify items for sale at the market, discuss needs and wants, and learn vocabulary for buying at the market. Learners will learn the target letter sounds h, f, o, and b. |
| 27-30 | Health in Sierra Leone | Learners will use Bintu's story to look at handwashing best practises and learn vocabulary for body parts. They will be able to ask and answer questions about how they feel. Learners will learn the target letter sounds g, l, j, and u. |
| 31-32 | Review and Check for Understanding 4 | Learners will review vocabulary and conversations from the last two themes while practising reading and writing words with known letter sounds. |
| 33-36 | Setting up a Garden | Learners will use Bintu's story to discuss different vegetables in the garden and the tools and materials needed to set up a garden. Learners will learn the target letter sounds v, w, q, x, y, and z. |
| 37-38 | Review and Check for Understanding 5 | Learners will review vocabulary and conversations from the last 2 themes while practicing all target letter sounds and reading and writing words with known letter sounds. |

| PHASE 2 | | |
|---------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 39-42 | Selling My Vegetables | Learners will use Bintu's story to look at how to get income from a garden. They will use a reading chart to practise reading syllables, words and sentences with the long /a/ sounds. They will practise reading 2 authentic texts: a market ticket and a record book. |
| 43-46 | Income-Generating Activities | Learners will use Bintu's story to look at the jobs different people do in their community and make a plan for an akara business. They will use the reading chart to practise reading syllables, words, and sentences with the long /o/ and long /i/ sounds. Then, they will practise reading 2 authentic texts: a sign for a hairdresser's shop and an akara recipe. |
| 47-48 | Review and Check for Understanding 6 | Learners will review vocabulary and conversations from the last 2 themes while practicing long vowel sounds and reading and writing words with long vowel sounds. |
| 49-52 | Becoming a Businesswoman | Learners will use Bintu's story to learn about making a budget and knowing their market. They will use the reading chart to practise reading syllables, words, and sentences with the long /e/ and long /u/ sounds. Then, they will practise reading 2 authentic texts: a budget and a text message. |
| 53-56 | Come to My Shop | Learners will use Bintu's story to help plan for a small shop or market table and talk about negotiating with customers. They will use the reading chart to practise reading syllables, words and sentences with the sh, ch, wh, and th sounds. Then, they will practise reading 2 authentic texts: a text message and a receipt. |
| 57-58 | Review and Check for Understanding 7 | Learners will review vocabulary and conversations from the last two themes while practicing target letter sounds and reading and writing words with long vowel sounds and the sh, ch, wh, and th sounds. |
| 59-60 | Review and Check for Understanding 8 | Learners will review vocabulary and conversations from the entire curriculum while practising reading and writing words with known sounds. |

➤ Numeracy and Financial Literacy Sessions and Outcomes

The curriculum contains 11 themes. Each theme contains 4 sessions over the course of 2 weeks. Along with the themes there are 7 Review and Check for Understanding weeks where learners will review and practise the skills they have learned. The Literacy outcomes for each of these sections are in the table below along with the corresponding session numbers.

| Sessions | Theme | Outcomes |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| PHASE 1 - Numeracy | | |
| 01-04 | Introduction 1 | Learners will be able to count and read numbers up to 100. They will be able to count by 2s, 5s, and 10s and compare 1- and 2-digit numbers. |
| 05-06 | Review and Check for Understanding 1 | Learners will review and practise reading and counting numbers up to 100 as well as counting by 2s, 5s, and 10s. |
| 07-10 | Introduction 2 | Learners will be able to identify the value of each Leone note. They will have a very basic understanding of how the 4 operations (+ - ´ ¸) work. |
| 11-12 | Review and Check for Understanding 2 | Learners will review the last theme and practise basic operations and identifying Leone notes. |

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| 13-16 | Planning My Day | Learners will be able to tell time on an analogue or digital clock. They should be able to discuss amounts of time, such as minutes, hours, and days. They should be able to plan how they spend time, and identify the days of the week. Learners will record data in a simple table. |
| 17-20 | Community Map | Learners learn the size of 1 metre, and use metres to measure large objects. They should use their understanding of length to draw accurate maps of locations they know, such as their classroom, house, or community. They should be able to interpret maps of Sierra Leone and should know the approximate size of one kilometre, and interpret a map scale. |
| 21-22 | Review and Check for Understanding 3 | Learners will review and practise skills from the last two themes. |
| 23-26 | Shopping at the Market | Learners should be able to identify and count Leone notes of different amounts. They should be able to compare amounts of money, including the prices of two goods. They should be able to calculate the total price of a set of goods by counting or by using a calculator. They should be able to give change to a customer, or check the change they receive. |
| 27-30 | Health in Sierra Leone | Learners should understand how to count the age of babies and children in days, weeks, months, and years. They should understand measurements that are used to determine if a child is healthy, including height and weight. |
| 31-32 | Review and Check for Understanding 4 | Learners will review and practise skills from the last two themes. |
| 33-36 | Setting up a Garden | Learners will use numeracy skills to plan a vegetable garden. They will draw a map of a garden, including patterns of plants with good spacing. They will estimate how much food their gardens will grow. Then, they will use the market prices for food to estimate how much income they can earn. |
| 37-38 | Review and Check for Understanding 5 | Learners will review and practise all the skills they have learned from the last two themes. |
| PHASE 2 - Financial Literacy | | |
| 01 | Financial Goals | Learners have a basic understanding of the Empowerment Plan template and start thinking about their own financial goals. |
| 02 | Money Management 1 | Learners understand wealth through individual assets, the difference between income and living costs, and the difference between needs and wants. |
| 03 | Savings | Learners understand the importance of savings, how savings can help them reach their goals, and how they can save for emergencies or unexpected events no matter how much money they have. |
| 04 | What is a Business | Learners know the three types of businesses: trade, production, and service. They see examples of women in Sierra Leone challenging gender norms by doing different types of business. |
| 05 | Money Management 2 | Learners use what they learned in Money Management 2 about income and expenses, and learn how to calculate profit. They are introduced to budgeting and record keeping. |
| 06 | What Makes a Good Business | Learners understand the characteristics of a good business including diversification, location, and customer service. They learn that time and effort are part of the full cost of a business. They know how to plan if they want to work with a partner. |
| 07 | Starting a Business-Market Survey | Learners are introduced to a Market Survey. They learn the difference between supply and demand and look at start-up costs and potential profit of a business. They have the skills to complete their own Market Survey for their business ideas. |

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| 08 | Starting a Business-Budget | Learners understand the difference between start-up costs and repeating costs. They look at budgets and how to plan before starting a business. |
| 09 | Loans | Learners understand the difference between loans, <i>osusu</i> , and borrowing money. They understand that loans have interest, and why planning is important if they want to take a loan. |
| 10 | Transition | Learners review their financial literacy skills. They complete their Financial Plans and work on their full Empowerment Plan. |
| 11 | Finalize Empowerment Plans | |

Life Skills Sessions and Objectives

| Sessions | Title | Objectives | Skills |
|----------|----------------------|---|--|
| 01 | Welcome to EAGER! | Girls learn about the EAGER Life Skills programme. Girls create their own Group Promise. | Good communication, teamwork, creativity |
| 02 | Our Safe Space | Girls reflect on emotions and body language. Girls discuss how to create a safe space for each other. | Good communication, emotional awareness, positive body language |
| 03 | People We Trust | Girls reflect on what it means to trust someone else. Girls recognise the qualities of people they can trust, and people they should not trust. | Teamwork, good communication, identification of safe people, critical thinking |
| 04 | Seeing Our Strengths | Girls understand how high or low self-esteem can affect us. Girls see and name their own strengths and positive qualities. | Self-reflection, good communication, confidence, giving encouragement |
| 05 | Listening Skills | Girls learn about active listening. Girls practise using active listening skills. | Focusing, active listening, good communication, teamwork |
| 06 | Being a Good Friend | Girls think critically about the qualities of a good friend. Girls reflect on how they can be a good friend to others. | Good communication, relationship-building, building trust, teamwork |
| 07 | Different Abilities | Girls develop greater empathy for people living with disabilities. Girls reflect on how they can value and support girls living with disabilities. | Empathy, kindness, being a good friend, observation, reflection |
| 08 | Expressing Emotions | Girls learn how to identify and express strong emotions. Girls practise listening to their body and focusing on their breath. | Building trust, managing emotions, body awareness, breath awareness |
| 09 | Managing Stress | Girls know how to recognise the signs of stress. Girls practise different ways to manage stress. | Stress management, emotional awareness, managing emotions, body awareness |

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| 10 | Assertive Communication | Girls see the difference between passive, aggressive, and assertive communication. Girls practise using assertive communication. | Good communication, asserting choices, managing emotions |
| 11 | Managing Disagreements | Girls learn how to use “I” statements. Girls learn and practise: stop, think, and act. | Managing disagreements, teamwork, managing emotions, mindful reactions |
| 12 | Negotiation Skills | Girls reflect on the value of a win-win situation. Girls practise communicating their choices. | Negotiation skills, assertive communication, resolving disagreements |
| 13 | Making Smart Decisions | Girls learn steps for making smart decisions. Girls practise using these steps to make decisions. | Decision-making, reflection, non-reactive behaviour, managing emotions, teamwork |
| 14 | Protecting Each Other | Girls understand how sickness can spread from person to person. Girls learn and can communicate the critical times for handwashing. | Good hygiene practises, safe food preparation, smart decision-making |
| 15 | Staying Healthy | Girls have a better understanding of malaria and fever. Girls see the value of sleeping under a bednet and know how to use it properly. | Smart decision-making, planning ahead, critical thinking, teamwork |
| 16 | Changing Bodies | Girls reflect on their changing bodies. Girls learn good menstrual hygiene practises. | Good hygiene, body awareness, confidence, solidarity, good communication |
| 17 | Sex and Pregnancy | Girls learn the facts about sex and pregnancy. Girls understand that they can protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy. | Body awareness, critical thinking, smart decision-making, teamwork |
| 18 | Sex and Consent | Girls understand that they have the right to say NO to sex. Girls practise smart decision-making skills and assertive communication. | Smart decision-making, critical thinking, setting boundaries, assertive communication |
| 19 | Safe Sex | Girls see the value of safe sex. Girls learn how to use a condom properly to prevent pregnancy and STIs. | Body awareness, safety planning, assertive communication, critical thinking |
| 20 | Modern Contraceptives | Girls learn about 3 methods of modern contraception. Girls understand they can make choices between contraceptives. | Critical thinking, smart decision-making, planning ahead, asserting choices |
| 21 | Safety Planning | Girls see the value of safety planning. Girls exchange ideas and think about their own safety plans. | Critical thinking, planning ahead, smart decision-making, safety awareness, solidarity |
| 22 | Violence Against Girls | Girls understand that sex without consent is never okay, and girls are never at fault. Girls understand the risks and what to do if this ever happens. | Recognising violence, seeking support, empathy, kindness, emotional awareness |

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| 23 | Early/Forced Marriage | Girls reflect on the realities and responsibilities of marriage. Girls understand they have a right to delay marriage until after the legal age of 18. | Assertive communication, assertive rights, recognising violence, seeking support |
| 24 | Responding to Violence | Girls are aware of different ways to respond to violence. Girls reflect on how they can support each other in difficult situations. | Critical thinking, safe responses, assertive communication, empathy, solidarity |
| 25 | Exploitation and Abuse | Girls are more aware of exploitation and abuse. Girls can identify warning signs to look out for. | Knowing who to trust, asserting rights, recognising violence, teamwork, solidarity |
| 26 | Trafficking | Girls understand the risks and warning signs of trafficking. Girls practise using their life skills to stay safe from trafficking. | Critical thinking, safety planning, assertive communication, knowing who to trust |
| 27 | Gender | Girls understand the difference between Gender and Sex. Girls understand that Gender rules are created by people, and can change. | Critical thinking, observation, reflection, creative thinking |
| 28 | Goals | Girls understand the difference between short-term and long-term goals. Girls understand how to set a goal and take steps toward it. | Setting goals, visioning, planning, creative thinking, critical thinking, problem-solving |
| 29 | Power With Others | Girls can identify negative peer pressure. Girls understand the value of positive peer power and working together. | Critical thinking, good communication, teamwork, solidarity, self-esteem, confidence |
| 30 | Using Our Power | Girls reflect on all they have learned in Life Skills, and on their power inside. Girls think about different Learning, Household, and Community goals. Girls think about collective action they can take for positive change. | Self-esteem, reflection, confidence, teamwork, solidarity, visioning |



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