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LEARNING BRIEF #7

Sister support: Lessons on peer mentoring from the Girls' Education Challenge

Girls'
Education
Challenge



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

The most marginalised girls are in danger of not accessing a quality education or dropping out of school early. For many, navigating their education journey can be incredibly challenging. Peer mentoring can be an effective mechanism to support girls on this journey by providing them access to positive role models, emotional support and encouragement, and individualised academic support.

More than 130 million girls aged six to 18 were out of school before COVID-19, and research estimates 20 million more girls are at risk of dropping out.¹ The most disadvantaged and marginalised girls face myriad challenges. In families with limited resources, parents may prioritise sending their sons to school over their daughters. Girls may feel pressured to contribute to household income, making it harder for them to attend school. Many have low confidence in their academic abilities or have internalised gender and cultural norms that expect girls to prioritise domestic duties or marry early instead of pursuing an education. This can lead to girls being discouraged from attending school or being pulled out of education early. Negative gender norms can also play out in schools with higher expectations for boys than girls, and girls may face a higher risk of gender-based violence on their way to school or at school, which creates safety concerns for parents, causing them to keep their daughters at home. These pressures become more pronounced for girls as they reach adolescence, but many girls lack the information, the life skills and the support to guide them and help them make informed decisions.

However, developing secure relationships with mentors can help girls deal with these challenges. Mentors can help girls navigate societal pressures and negative gender norms at a critical time. They can help girls access accurate information and build the life skills required to make important life decisions. Peer mentoring programmes can provide access to supportive relationships and opportunities for these girls to get together and find help and advice in an informal and non-judgemental way.



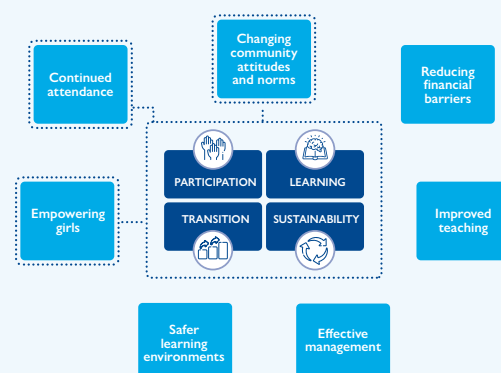
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This Learning Brief collates information on GEC project approaches to peer mentoring and lessons learned. It concludes with recommendations for policy and practice. It is intended to support governments, donors and implementing partners in designing and implementing effective peer mentoring approaches.

¹ Malala Fund 2021 – 2022 Annual Report

The Girls' Education Challenge Learning Brief series:

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



What is peer mentoring?

Peer mentoring is a process by which peers work together in small groups or one-to-one for mutual benefit, providing support in learning, counselling, emotional encouragement and life skills development. Because girls are of the same or similar age, they can develop important one-to-one relationships and create valuable social networks.

In the GEC, peer mentors are usually girls from the same communities, ideally from similar circumstances, who serve as role models for their mentees. Many have demonstrated resilience and ambition and, at times, defied all odds and charted alternative pathways to a better life. Peer mentoring programmes allow mentees to draw on mentors' experiences and life lessons in a structured and meaningful way to inform and enrich their lives. In the wider community, peer mentors are seen as competent, trusted advisors whose age, gender, or status is not a barrier to their role. This can allow them to play an important role in challenging long-held community beliefs.

The existing literature shows a spectrum of mentorship models. There are the more **traditional peer mentorship** models, which pair an older or experienced student mentor with a new or struggling student, usually on an academic skill. **Peer mediation** refers to student mediators who get involved in resolving a conflict. Finally, **peer counselling** involves pairing students with trained peer counsellors who provide emotional and social support to their peers. Sometimes mentors can take on a mix of these roles.

“Because girls are of the same or similar age, they can develop important one-to-one relationships and create important social networks.”



Peer mentorship on the Girls' Education Challenge

Across the GEC portfolio, peer counselling is the dominant peer mentorship model; girls counsel other girls primarily around real-life challenges, provide psycho-socio and emotional support and help expand girls' horizons and raise awareness on education and employment pathways available.² As there is not much evidence on how peer mentoring is delivered for children from marginalised backgrounds, the GEC projects offer an opportunity to fill this gap and gather and share lessons on effective implementation of peer mentoring.

This Learning Brief looks at evidence from eight GEC projects that implemented peer mentorship to improve girls' attendance, retention, self-esteem and wellbeing. These projects broadly implement the core activities illustrated in *Figure 1*, with variations across contexts. The core mentoring

activities are group and one-to-one sessions with girls, follow-up with individual girls, outreach and awareness raising with community members, parents and caregivers, and connecting girls to resources and support within their community and beyond. Projects also implemented many support activities to ensure effective peer mentoring, such as training mentors, developing materials, and training those supporting mentors and mentees such as teachers. Also illustrated in *Figure 1* are the benefits for mentees, which include improved learning, self-esteem and social skills. But there are also benefits for peer mentors, including improved leadership and communication skills, wider social networks and a sense of fulfilment.

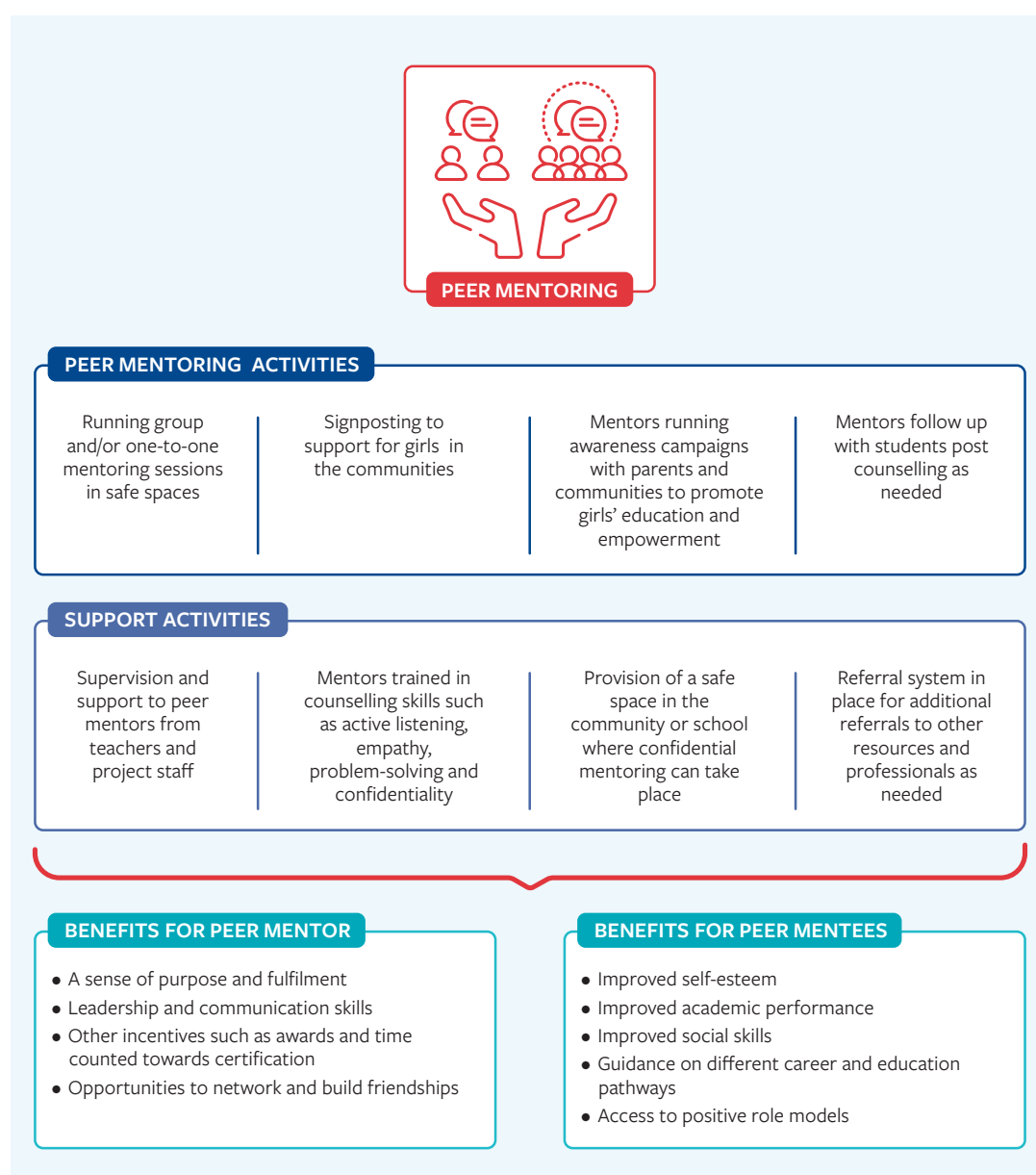


Figure 1: Peer mentoring activities and benefits

² In this brief, when referring to peer mentoring, we are usually referring to peer counselling unless specified otherwise.

Approaches to peer mentoring

The peer mentoring approaches that GEC projects took reflect the varied contexts in which they work.

How much structure is needed?

Some projects follow a more structured approach where an effort is made to standardise the mentoring support by giving clear instructions on the number of girls in each session, session duration, the curriculum to follow and resources to use. Roles and responsibilities are assigned to the different tiers of leadership at the school level, including head teachers, Guidance and Counselling teachers, and other stakeholders with oversight duties. Capacity building of mentors and others is further supplemented by providing resources such as handbooks, manuals and workbooks for the girls. Sessions are generally monitored to ensure they are run to a certain standard. On the other end of the spectrum, projects play a smaller role in defining the rules around running the peer mentoring session. They set broad design features, and the schools have far more leeway to run the clubs as it suits them.

Where does peer mentoring take place?

The peer mentorship intervention can be located within and run by the school. In many projects, peer mentoring depends on the school leadership for its running and successful implementation. In these projects, the role of school leadership is critical. GEC project experience shows that the buy-in and support from school is vital to ensure mentoring sessions run regularly and implementation is consistent. The mentors are from the school: either senior to the

mentees or from the same class. The mentoring session is integrated into the school schedule and runs within school premises. Other peer mentoring approaches involve a variation, where the peer mentorship is linked to a school but implemented by the project, with minimal reliance on the school to run and sustain it. The mentors are from outside the school – they may be alumni or previous project beneficiaries with a stronger tie with the project or implementing organisation than the school.

Are the peer mentoring sessions connected to a larger network?

At their most contained, peer mentoring sessions are in-school sessions, following a curriculum and administered by trained mentors. The girls benefit from the counselling from their peers in the safe mentoring space. Other stakeholders who can support the mentoring process can include teachers, head teachers, Guidance and Counselling teachers, trained professionals and project team members. Their role can be around support, supervision, grievance redressal or monitoring. A wider circle of support can include local leaders, parent groups or other schools. An even wider network circle can include law enforcement agencies, education leaders, and municipal, district and federal governments. The networks and circles of influence the peer mentorship circle is connected to and can draw from varies across projects. So does the nature of the relationship with these spheres of influence. These could be formalised relationships or loose, non-formalised relationships, which mentors can signpost to for support.



CASE STUDY: Integrating successful models into a larger network

The 'Big Sister' – 'Little Sister' mentoring model is at the heart of the following projects: [Engaging a New Generation of Adolescent Girls with Education \(ENGAGE\)](#) and [Sisters for Sisters' Education](#) (both implemented by VSO in Nepal), [Marginalised No More](#) (implemented by Street Child in Nepal) and [Aarambha](#) (implemented by People in Need, Nepal). In this innovative mentoring approach, 'Little Sisters' (younger girls) are supported and mentored by Big Sisters (often female community volunteers who are a few years older). The Little Sisters receive guidance in their academic work to boost their self-efficacy and deal with everyday challenges. Each Big Sister is responsible for five to seven Little Sisters. The Big Sisters receive training on peer mentoring, interpersonal skills, life skills and providing psychosocial and emotional support.

All projects are also active in the Girls Inclusive Education Network (GIEN), a network that aims to raise the voices of marginalised girls. This provides an even wider social network for mentors and mentees who are active in this network. Each project has formulated school-level, community-level and municipality-level networks. The structure of the networks varies according to the projects, but all of them hold the fundamental objective of supporting girls' education, advocating for the operationalisation of a Complaint Response Mechanism in schools, ensuring a gender-friendly environment for girls and mainstreaming gender policies in close coordination with the local authorities.

What does success look like?

Peer mentoring and a strong peer mentorship network can have a transformative impact for girls living in remote communities, sometimes disconnected from larger support networks. Project Endline Evaluations provide evidence that peer mentorship programmes have increased girls' self-efficacy and motivated them to stay in school, learn and develop life skills and seek pathways to financial independence. Quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that peer mentoring is effective in the following ways:

- Retaining girls in school and improving their attendance
- Supporting girls' learning
- Improving girls' self-confidence and self-esteem
- Enhancing girls' wellbeing (enjoyment, happiness, feeling connected and part of a community, and increased motivation)
- Enhancing girls' life choices and decision-making power

Figure 2 details some examples of the effectiveness of peer mentoring interventions.³

“Project Endline Evaluations provide evidence that peer mentorship programmes have increased girls' self-efficacy and motivated them to stay in school, learn and develop life skills and seek pathways to financial independence.”

CAMFED projects, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe Project 1 | Project 2

Marginalised girls reported having become more self-confident in the Endline Evaluation, crediting the Learner Guide programme which provided them with life skills that increased their confidence, enjoyment of school and engagement with learning. Qualitative research shows that marginalised girls know their rights and have the courage and confidence to speak out about the challenges they face. They were also better able to succeed in their next stage of transition after school because of peer mentoring.

Jielimishe (Educate Yourself) project, Kenya

From baseline to endline, there was an 89% improvement in attendance, and a 50% increase in confidence over two years. There was an increase from 22% to 94% in self-esteem, an improvement from 69% to 85% in class participation and an improvement from 35% to 90% in communication skills amongst learners. These improvements were linked with peer mentorship. Peer mentorship improved life and leadership skills amongst girls, with reports of increased confidence, greater self awareness and motivation to learn and succeed, positively influencing girls to continue learning.

World University Service of Canada (WUSC)'s Kenya Equity in Education Project (KEEP), Kenya

There was a positive trend from baseline to endline for most indicators related to life skills and self-efficacy among girls. The Peer Mentoring and Guidance and Counselling approaches are credited with contributing to these increases in life skills and to creating a more supportive school environment for girls. It should be noted however that life skill gains have tended to plateau since midline and remain very fragile. COVID-19-related pressures on girls have undermined their self-confidence and the support they receive at home and in school.

VSO's Sisters for Sisters' Education, Nepal

An outcome attributable to the work of the Big Sister-Little Sister mentoring approach was the high rate (94%) of girls who transitioned to the next stage of education or employment. There was also strong evidence that mentoring improved girls' ability to decide on key life decisions such as continuing school, when to get married, whether to work after completing studies, and the type of work to opt for. Parent-led marriages significantly decreased as parents' awareness regarding the negative impacts of child marriage increased.

Figure 2: Evidence from GEC Project Endline Evaluations



³ Most of the evidence on peer mentoring and its effectiveness is qualitative, with limited reporting of direct attribution of effective peer mentoring on education outcomes.

Factors for success

This section outlines the core elements that have contributed to the successful implementation of peer mentoring programming. Across the portfolio, eight key factors for success have been identified..

1. Mentoring that is relevant to girls' everyday needs and concerns

Projects need to understand the girls' everyday realities, their community and broader policy. Girls' needs differ across contexts and at individual levels. Girls from rural areas, girls with disabilities or young mothers can all have specific needs. Peer mentorship activities need to be designed to respond to the specific needs of each group of girls.

Effective mentoring programmes have managed to strike a balance between offering structure and guidance while also allowing for flexibility and tailoring content to mentors' and mentees' needs. A good mentoring programme will allow mentors to address the intersectional barriers that girls face. Girls are more likely to lose interest in mentoring and life skills if the sessions are not responding to their everyday needs and the barriers that they are facing.



CASE STUDY: Responding with practical solutions to the needs of girls

'Let Our Girls Succeed' (implemented by Education Development Trust in Kenya) supported girls from extremely remote communities. Their parents had never been to school, so academic support at home was limited. They also supported girls based in urban areas who lived not with immediate families but extended families. To ensure mentoring was responsive, modules were co-created with the girls. The modules for counselling were co-created with the girls themselves, identifying areas they required counselling. These girls needed practical, systematic training on speaking with their fathers, deliberating with authority figures, decision making and negotiating. These became the thematic areas for counselling.

These girls' challenges were extreme, from female genital mutilation to forced marriage and pregnancy, or being forced out of school. The peer mentors needed to train these girls, in a culturally sensitive and responsible way, on how to broach these conversations at home. The project sensitised the head teachers on the issues faced by the learners. The project also identified champions within the community, including leaders, pastors and parents' groups, to serve as powerful allies on sensitive issues and to challenge negative gender norms.



CASE STUDY: Exploring meaningful and viable livelihood options and choices

The learners in the Jielimishe project underwent life-skills training. Instead of training girls on generic skills and employment options, they were exposed to the employment options most relevant to their lives and communities. The project supported learners through experiential learning, exposing them to different employment pathways in their communities, to help them understand different opportunities in the job market.

2. Mentoring approaches that adapt to girls' needs over time

Successful projects assessed the ongoing needs of girls and continuously adapted their peer mentoring approaches to meet these. The needs of girls can change as they transition from primary to secondary education and then again as they graduate from higher secondary education. The 'Let Our Girls Succeed' project adapted their peer mentoring approach as girls transitioned from primary to secondary school. Recognising that girls faced increased pressures around forced marriage, early pregnancies and domestic responsibilities at the secondary level, the project increased the support to girls by linking them with guidance and counselling

teachers and integrating life skills into school timetables, using peer mentors as group facilitators.

Girls' needs also change based on external factors, as was all too evident when COVID-19 caused the closure of schools. Effective projects created opportunities for teams to come together, analyse girls' needs and changing contexts and adapt their interventions to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness. Successful projects adapted their peer mentoring approaches, such as the content or how the delivery mechanisms as needed. For example, during COVID-19, many projects focused more on mental health and social-emotional skills, pivoting to remote peer mentoring models.



CASE STUDY: Enabling safe transition to further education, vocational training, entrepreneurship, or employment

Marginalised girls face many social, cultural and financial barriers when they finish school, which can prevent them from capitalising on their education. In many contexts where GEC projects work, there are few opportunities in the formal job market, and the majority of employment opportunities are through self-employment. However, young women may lack the capital, connections, and assets to create employment through entrepreneurship. CAMFED implements GEC projects in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Through their post-school transition programme, young female mentors offer vital support to enable young women to capitalise on their education and live safe and fulfilling lives. The CAMFED Association (CAMA) trains members as transition guides or peer educators. Transition guides then support girls over a six to 12-month period as they approach the end of lower secondary school. They help them transition safely to higher secondary education, vocational training, tertiary education, entrepreneurship or employment. The guides deliver mentoring sessions in small groups, connecting young women to their peers and helping them to improve their health and wellbeing and make important life decisions. Recognising how the needs of the girls evolve, the transition guide programme focuses on practical learning. It provides mentorship, skills and resources to secondary school graduates to start businesses, seek employment and access further education. The programme includes:

- financial literacy training
- business planning and advice
- reproductive health and wellbeing information
- leadership training

This support comes at a critical time when young women remain vulnerable to exploitative labour and early marriage as they transition into a context often with few opportunities to establish a fulfilling, independent livelihood.



CASE STUDY: Pivoting to remote peer mentoring during COVID-19

As in most countries, COVID-19 school closures proved disruptive to learning and mentorship activities. The [Jielimishe project](#) in Kenya had been implementing peer mentorship activities pre-COVID-19. When schools closed, the project continued to conduct mentorship through virtual means such as Zoom, WhatsApp and Google Meet. The project created an online Mentorship Hub, which packaged their mentorship materials into a digital platform which housed mentoring resources and tools. The remote approach centred on creating an enabling environment for learning and connecting mentors to their mentees and peers. The mentors were free to use the resources best suited to their needs and the mentees' needs. The use of technology allowed the project to expand its mentor network, and mentors could connect with mentees and serve as business, career, and peer mentors to support the project's mentorship programmes.

3. Providing support to peer mentors to fulfil their role

Effective projects ensured that they had mechanisms in place to build peer mentors' capacity and that mentors had the support required to carry out their roles. They spent time training mentors through in-person training from project staff or other education or counselling professionals. Others ensured that mentors were networked to share their experiences and knowledge and support each other. It was also important that capacity-building support extended to those supporting the peer mentors, such as teachers and guidance counsellors. In the CAMA network, at the district level, one to two core trainers support and train up to 25 Learner Guides. The Learner Guides were trained, supported and supervised by their core trainers, with whom they had an almost daily communication channel. The newer learning guides shadowed the more experienced ones, and each school had, at a minimum, two Learner Guides, so they supported each other.

Many projects have worked closely with a key focal point in each school who is the main source of support for peer mentors – this is often the guidance and counselling teachers. If the position of guidance and counselling teacher did not exist in a school, projects were often instrumental in ensuring a teacher was assigned to this role. For example, while the policy to have a designated guidance and counselling teacher existed in Kenya, it was not implemented in schools. The Let Our Girls Succeed project ensured headteachers appointed a teacher to take on this role. They then ensured that these teachers received training and set up communities of practices for guidance and counselling focal points across schools. The Jielimishe project conducted regular training with these teachers, who were then the focal point for training peer mentors in schools. The curriculum for this training was developed by the project alongside these teachers. Many GEC projects also conducted training on the peer mentoring approach to wider circles of support, such as head teachers, members of PTAs and government staff.

“Effective projects spent time training mentors through in-person training from project staff or other education or counselling professionals.”



CASE STUDY: Institutionalising support for peer mentors in schools

In the [KEEP](#) project, the peer mentors were trained in basic counselling support, life skill sessions and one-to-one support. To ensure that peer mentors and mentees received ongoing support, KEEP strengthened guidance and counselling departments and established them if they did not exist. The project provided specialised support to these departments via a network of Education Counsellors (trained psychotherapists) and School Counsellors (trained in lay counselling). Through training on Lay Counselling and ongoing coaching, in-school guidance and counselling teachers were supported to enhance guidance and counselling services within the school and map referral pathways to help learners seek specialised support services where needed. They have also been guided on supporting the peer mentors and life skills sessions. Guidance and counselling teachers delivered initial sessions of the Life Skills Peer Clubs until the mentors were confident to run the sessions themselves.

4. Peer mentoring that is structured, informal and fun

Mentorship benefits from clear structure and guidance. For most projects, the mentors have a maximum of girls they can mentor, and peer mentorship sessions run regularly, either integrated into the school routine, run as after-school sessions or run outside the school (for example, in a community space). Many follow a curriculum and a structured timetable, and mentors are given resources such as guides and manuals to lead sessions. Many also have workbooks for the girls. These ensure some standardisation in the life skills curriculum and standardisation in the quality of support the girls receive. For example, in the KEEP project, peer mentoring sessions were run weekly during school time for one hour, covering a specific topic from the guidebook, with the opportunity for girls to ask questions and share with other members of the clubs.

It is also important that the pedagogical approach is informal, engaging and fun. In GEC mentorship sessions, there is a lot of focus on keeping the sessions light with activities such as dancing, singing and role-playing. This is essential to keep the space relatively informal and to draw a distinction

between a typical lesson in school and a peer mentoring session. The girls are more likely to voice issues they are facing at home and reach out for support and advice when the space feels safe and informal. On 'Let our Girls Succeed', the school Child-to-Child clubs ran one hourly session weekly. The girls assembled under a tree and followed a session plan with activities such as singing, dancing and reading poetry.

5. Mentoring that models alternative pathways

A peer mentor has a different role from a teacher or a typical mentor. Being of similar age and having a similar lived experience allows the peer mentor to 'model' the girls what alternative life paths can mean and look like. In the best peer mentorship models, there is a recognition that peer mentors are often the exception in the communities the girls come from, and they can model alternative pathways to other girls. In Nepal, for example, the Big Sisters generally have the same lived experience as many girls they mentor from the same community. This puts local (often marginalised) women at the forefront of community development.



CASE STUDY: Virtual Role Modelling during COVID-19

On [KEEP](#), role models were especially critical in inspiring girls to stay in school. During COVID-19, the project had challenges getting girls to attend sessions virtually, so they reached out to the alumni who had succeeded in secondary education and had been awarded the WUSC's Student Refugee Program. These girls were asked to conduct eight sessions through WhatsApp and Google Hangouts for girls in the Kakuma refugee camp. The Mentors created a safe space for girls to talk about their challenges and future, demonstrating what is possible for both girls and boys within the camps. The girls spoke freely and openly about their challenges, hopes and futures. It played a significant role in building the confidence and aspirations of students who previously lacked confidence or direction. It also played a critical role in raising the aspirations of many of the girls in the camps.

CASE STUDY: Following a structured curriculum to support mentor and mentee development

The CAMFED project's Learner Guides delivered a 45-minute to one-hour session each week and were committed to dedicating two and a half hours per week to mentoring. This included session planning, delivering the session, meeting with their core trainer and guidance and counselling teacher to discuss any issues and monitoring attendance through school registers. The Learner Guides follow a structured curriculum called the My Better World (MBW), to be delivered over 55 weeks. The MBW curriculum speaks directly to the experience of marginalised youth and has an accompanying interactive workbook which tells stories that rural children recognise from their own lives. It has helped students to build self-knowledge, discover their talents, build resilience, select role models, set goals and learn how to achieve them. They also provide vital health information, work to prevent HIV/AIDS and keep girls safe from exploitation. Learner Guides introduce students to new learning techniques and support them in forming study groups

CASE STUDY: Role models who girls can relate to, “just like me”

On the ‘[Let Our Girls Succeed](#)’ project, an HIV-positive girl was supported and given the medical assistance she needed. When another HIV-positive girl was identified, the counsellor asked the girl on the path to recovery to mentor and counsel this girl. The two girls had one-to-one sessions and open conversations. This was an organic outcome of the peer mentoring model, which recognised the importance of having a peer mentor who navigated a similar experience. The Learner Guides are excellent role models for the girls they mentor. The Guides are always from the same marginalised communities as the girls and are driven by a strong passion to give back to their community and to enable other girls to better their lives. Young women who have graduated from the same local school and lived in the same communities have an acute sense of the challenges faced by girls from these communities. They can speak to them meaningfully and earnestly, having lived through these experiences themselves.



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6. Strategies in place to sustain peer mentoring

Compared with other GEC interventions, peer mentoring is relatively less resource intensive. However, this does not guarantee that peer mentorship will be continued once a project closes out. To ensure sustainability and ownership in schools and communities, projects deployed different strategies to ensure uptake and commitment amongst stakeholders, from the mentees and mentors to school staff and community members. For example, an important aspect of the Big Sister/ Little Sister approach in Nepal was the outreach mentors did with the families of Little Sisters, holding dialogues, discussions and visits to shift behaviours of parents and caregivers. The buy-in of the schools and the community at large is critical for the sustainability of peer mentoring. Projects must work to ensure strategic stakeholders are part of the design and initial discussions during the project’s inception. The Sisters for Sisters’ Education project canvassed door-to-door

to build ownership within communities and conducted campaigns and street dramas.

It is also important that projects ensure the involvement of government partners. In several GEC projects, mentoring resources and even radio sessions have been approved for national use. Some projects demonstrated successes in carving out a policy space for peer mentoring and secured commitments and support (in the form of time and resources) from local and national governments. The Jielimishe project and government partners spearheaded the implementation of a mentorship policy for early and basic education that the Ministry adopted for use in all schools. At a local level, government partners have contributed venues, transport, and human resources to support peer mentoring. As illustrated in the Case Study below, providing incentives for peer mentors is also an important aspect of sustainability. Other projects offer fewer formal incentives, such as providing the mentors with smartphones, tablets and other resources to facilitate the sessions and professional development incentives.

CASE STUDY: Incentivising mentors to continue with peer mentoring

Building incentives for the mentors to continue with their roles is critical to the success of any peer mentoring model. CAMA has approached this particularly well, as Learner Guides benefit from access to low-risk, interest-free loans through the online lending platform Kiva, enabling them to start or grow local businesses on the basis that they are paying ‘social interest’ by assisting children at local schools. Through these businesses, Learner Guides are creating jobs for young people in their communities, supporting their families, advancing their education and supporting more children through school.

Learner Guides are highly respected by students, the school administration, family members and their communities. They are asked for advice, to monitor local elections and to stand for public office. New vocational qualifications (BTECs), earned through the programme, enable Learner Guides to fast-track into teaching, providing desperately needed teachers and role models in poor rural communities. This elevation in status and the professional development opportunities incentivises mentors to continue their activities.

7. Monitoring systems that allow mentee and peer mentor voices to be heard

Projects should closely monitor peer mentoring approaches to ensure they are aware of any challenges, changing contexts and changing needs of mentees, peer mentors and those supporting the approach. As part of the monitoring approach, platforms should be provided to raise the views and concerns of both mentees and peer mentors. In safe spaces, sensitive safeguarding issues may be raised, and the project should ensure mechanisms are in place to deal with this sensitively and confidentially. It is important that monitoring gathers the views of various stakeholders such as school leaders, guidance and counselling teachers, parents, PTA and SMC members, and other community members. In the [Leonard Cheshire](#) project, clubs operated as a mechanism through which the project team regularly received learner feedback. Safeguarding protocols were in place to ensure each issue was responded to and girls received the support needed. In Nepal, projects used a Big Sister monitoring form to monitor the mentors monthly. The form reported on progress made by the Big Sisters, issues faced, and the support provided to the Little Sisters.

CASE STUDY: Regular monitoring leads to more effective programming

On KEEP, in response to evidence gathered during monitoring, a revised peer mentorship model was implemented in the project's final year of implementation. KEEP project team members shared that a defining factor of success was regular school monitoring. The project counsellor visited the school and met with the Guidance and Counselling teacher and Head of Department and the head teacher. They were briefed on progress, issues faced and support needed. Sometimes, the counsellor would also observe a peer mentoring session to check how these were being run, whether the mentors were sufficiently supported and whether the girls were using the workbooks. Evidence showed that schools closer to the project office were more likely to be paid regular monitoring visits, and as a result, they were implementing the peer mentorship sessions more effectively.

8. Peer mentoring interventions that have a robust approach to safeguarding mental health

Peer mentors are working with mentees who may be experiencing extremely difficult problems. Safeguarding and mental health issues are likely to arise. Thus, there must be clear safeguarding mechanisms and protocols in place. Child protection is a central tenet of GEC's work, and it is important that projects work alongside government partners, engaging them in child protection training, policy reviews, case management and responses. Both mentors and Mentees benefit from up-to-date and comprehensive knowledge of reporting mechanisms, how to listen to and record a safeguarding report, how to have a survivor-centred approach, and who to report to and escalate to and when. Training for mentors to identify and escalate issues beyond their counselling remit is vital.

To this end, the peer mentoring model must be connected to broader networks or circles of support, with a clear mechanism to escalate issues. Mentors operate within a broader support network and must be linked to this network. This broader network of support also needs to be trained on safeguarding approaches. On the Jielimishe project, the girls were empowered with skills to detect, prevent and report abuse but other key stakeholders were also trained. More than 2,000 caregivers were trained in positive parenting and child safeguarding. The school administration was trained on child rights, positive disciplines and survivor-centred approaches in case management. And the community Area Advisory Council was supported to identify and handle children's cases and reinforce the child protection networks. CAMFED's Learner Guides were well connected to local authorities, and child abuse reporting systems, procedures and mechanisms were in place. They joined forces with CAMFED district officers, teachers, traditional leaders, social workers and the police to protect child rights and to find the underlying cause of abuse cases.

Value for money

Across the GEC portfolio, peer mentoring generally offers good value for money. It is generally not resource intensive as the mentors contribute their time voluntarily, but at the same time, it produces desirable outcomes such as providing vital learning support and encouragement to girls who need it. There are often higher costs at the beginning, such as the provision of materials and training costs, but once a space is secured for running the sessions and the mentors are in place, the running costs are low.

Below are two examples of the cost of running peer mentoring interventions. This cost is per beneficiary annually. These were estimated by isolating the direct and indirect budget lines that reflected peer mentoring activities, dividing by the direct beneficiaries covered by the activities and annualised.

On Jielimishe, the annual cost per beneficiary for the mentoring was £33. This represents good value for money, given the positive outcomes for girls (as illustrated in *Figure 2*), such as improved attendance, confidence, life and leadership skills and a higher motivation to continue their education. It has attracted some promising government-endorsed scale-up plans, with donor funding secured, which are good indicators that the approach will be sustained.

For the projects implemented by CAMFED, the cost per mentee per year was £23. Again, the projects had positive outcomes for girls, as the Endline Evaluation reported that mentoring made girls more self-confident and had higher attendance at school, were more engaged in learning and were better able to succeed in their next stages of transition. There are also good indications that the approach will be sustained. For example, in Tanzania, the government has plans to scale the Learner Guide mentoring approach to the entire Morogoro district in an initial phase and nationwide in a subsequent phase. CAMFED's good relationships with the Tanzanian education system and communities have enabled scale-up.

GEC peer mentoring approaches demonstrate good value for money because the approaches positively impact learning outcomes and life skills outcomes such as increased confidence and self-efficacy. These have important links to improving education outcomes but are also important in and of themselves. It is also important to note that peer mentoring is reaching some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised girls.

“GEC peer mentoring approaches demonstrate good value for money because the approaches positively impact learning outcomes and life skills outcomes such as increased confidence and self-efficacy.”



Recommendations for policy and programming

1. Ensure that peer mentoring responds to the needs of girls and their contexts. The situation of every girl and the barriers they face to their learning and wellbeing are different. Peer mentoring approaches and curricula must be designed to meet girls' specific needs. It is also important that the voices of girls are heard and are inform the design of the interventions.

2. Incentivise and provide structured support to mentors. Integral to the success of peer mentorships is the dedication and motivation of mentors. While mentors are not usually remunerated, there are effective ways to formalise peer mentorship through incentive structures. This helps improve and sustain the level of commitment and motivation of the mentors. This is particularly important when the work gets more demanding such as visiting homes and campaigning. Incentives can include the provision of smartphones and data bundles, access to loans and capacity building. A further step would be some formal recognition of mentors. This could be through formal award ceremonies or their time as mentors counting towards national education certifications.

3. Highlight the importance of safeguarding and mental health. Any peer mentoring intervention must have a robust approach to safeguarding. Mentors and those supporting mentors (such as teachers) must be trained in safeguarding and child protection. Mentors and mentees must be informed of child abuse response mechanisms and referral pathways. It is also important to attend to the mental health of mentors themselves, such as making sure that they do not feel overwhelmed by the stories they hear or the problems their mentees face. Community members also need to be sensitised on girls' safety and protection, and projects should embed their safeguarding protocols and mechanisms within existing local and district-level protection systems. It is important for continuity of care post-project closure and can also directly strengthen local and national protection systems.

4. Ensure robust monitoring and evaluation. To ensure the quality and relevance of approaches, peer mentorship needs to be monitored, allowing for adaptations to be based on the latest evidence gathered. For new interventions, close monitoring, coaching and support from the project are required by schools as they develop their approach. Thus, robust monitoring and evaluation systems and feedback loops are important. There is a need to establish practical ways for the mentors, mentees and school staff to share views on challenges and successes and to gain insights on what is working and how it can be strengthened and better supported.

5. Ensure a clear vision and plan for sustaining peer mentoring. This strategy can be at the community, school or government level, but also the level of the mentors. How can mentors be motivated and supported to continue mentoring girls once a project closes? It is also important to work alongside government, school and community partners, and build their capacity and commitment to continuing these programmes. Active engagement of local government, from inception and throughout implementation, is critical for sustainability and the replication of project learning. As one of their key sustainability activities, projects will broaden the network of peer mentoring to include larger networks of support beyond the school, community and, in some instances, at the country level and even across countries. The aim of expanding peer mentorship from schools to larger networks is sustainability and to raise the voices of marginalised girls, lobby local authorities, influence policies, promote girls' rights to education and protection, and raise awareness on climate change.

6. Generate more research and evidence on peer mentoring: There is a shortage of evidence and research on peer mentorship and how it can benefit girls in low-income and marginalised communities. This is an area of research that needs to be added to. Some areas of interest are:

- What peer mentoring approaches are the most effective, and what are the success factors? How can peer mentors be best incentivised?
- More evidence is needed on how peer mentorship affects girls' self-esteem and wellbeing and if it can shift negative attitudes and sociocultural norms that are detrimental to girls' education.
- How can mentorship work better to reach and support the most marginalised girls?

“Any peer mentoring intervention must have a robust approach to safeguarding.”

Girls'
Education
Challenge



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