

FEBRUARY 2023

## LEARNING BRIEF #2

# A space of their own: What we have learned about Girls' Clubs

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.



Across the globe, an estimated 89% of girls are now in school<sup>1</sup>, while more of the 129 million girls who are out of school are gaining access to community-based education.<sup>2</sup> However, we know that attention must be paid to the quality of girls' experiences *in* school rather than simply celebrating access alone.<sup>3</sup>

Compared to boys, girls are more likely to lack the physical space and leisure time to connect with friends. This is due to gender norms relating to regulations (e.g. behaviour and mobility) and an outsized responsibility for household chores.<sup>4</sup> Boys are therefore more able to develop their social skills and gain knowledge outside of the school curriculum by socialising with other, often older, boys in their communities, or while engaging in sports at the weekends. Girls are less likely to have such opportunities and as a result, find that they can learn only what they are taught in classrooms or 'pick up' at home.

Knowledge and skills relating to decision-making, communicating, negotiating, sexual and reproductive health (SRHR), and active participation in the classroom, are unlikely to be taught to them within the formal curriculum, even though such skills would allow them to better learn, advocate for themselves and understand their own bodies.

Formal curricula rarely include content that helps girls (or boys) to recognise the way that gender operates and its impact upon their daily lives. Without the opportunity to gain this recognition and safely contest it (including norms such as women being 'better' at domestic and caring work), children – especially girls – can grow up socialised to accept inequalities and replicate them as adults.

Young people are best placed to articulate their own experiences and instigate positive change by feeding into school action plans or influencing younger siblings, but they need confidence, self-esteem, language and adult support to do this.

As a result, many policy makers and practitioners have turned to schools, or



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community-based learning centres, to establish Girls' Clubs. Schools and learning spaces often reproduce the social norms of the community in which they are located. However, they also have the valuable advantage of bringing children together in a structured manner, often at very frequent intervals, into a place deemed legitimate by parents and community members. This legitimacy means that parents are more supportive and the risk of community backlash is limited. A 30-minute Girls' Club can easily be added to the end of a school day, and there are often teachers (many of them young women) who are highly motivated and legitimised by their role as teacher, ready to lead such clubs and provide girls with the support, skills and encouragement they need.

<sup>1</sup> World Bank (2022).

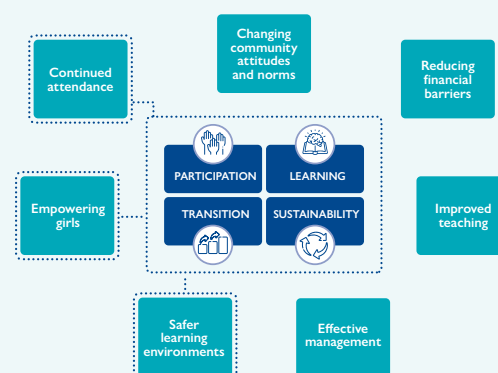
<sup>2</sup> Girls' Education Challenge (2022).

<sup>3</sup> Subrahmanian 2005; Cin and Walker 2016; Unterhalter 2016, 2017a, 2017b; Monkman 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Brown and Larson 2009, Skovdal and Ogotu 2012, Edwards 2020, Larsen et al 2021.

### 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 Girls' Clubs which contribute to achieving the highlighted outcomes:



## The benefits of Girls' Clubs

- Girls are supported as they move into adolescence and experience gender inequality that constrains their educational opportunities.
- Girls are engaged on the issues that matter to them.
- Girls have greater influence over what happens in a Girls' Club than in a regular classroom.
- Girls' practical needs are met through informal structures which provide childcare, increasing the likelihood that they will attend.
- Sessions take place at times and locations that are appropriate and accessible for girls.
- Ministries of Education generally allow Girls' Club leaders to use their own content and to train their facilitators.

It is important to note that the establishment of Girls' Clubs does not guarantee these benefits. The potential for Girls' Clubs to become places that reinforce harmful norms is high, as in any space in which adults can influence younger people. It is the nature of the implementation, content and delivery of the Girls' Clubs that is important.

This Brief collates information on GEC project approaches to Girls' Clubs and the lessons drawn from their implementation. It is intended to support governments, donors and implementing partners in their efforts to form and strengthen effective Girls' Clubs and includes wide-ranging recommendations for design, facilitation and monitoring of progress.

**“Compared to boys, girls are more likely to lack a physical space and the leisure time to connect with friends. Girls can grow up socialised to accept gender inequalities and replicate them as adults.”**

## The GEC project approach

GEC projects take the approach that Girls' Clubs' content should align with what girls deem important to them, their experiences and aspirations.<sup>5</sup> If girls want to discuss the dynamics of friendships and relationships, this is just as valid as a discussion on ways to report abuse. That said, it is recognised that girls may adapt their preferences to the gendered norms and expectations around them, so mentors and facilitators also help girls identify and question these constraints, and make choices that reflect their rights and ambitions. The content of most GEC Girls' Clubs aligns with the domains of girls' empowerment articulated by the Gender and Adolescence Global Evidence (GAGE) programme and the six capability areas critical to adolescent girls' development.<sup>6</sup>

Across the GEC, most projects work with some form of Girls' Clubs to promote girls' wellbeing and help them understand and cope with physical and emotional changes. Most Girls' Clubs are facilitated by a female mentor or peer leader who has received additional training – and most have a 'curriculum' structured around interactive discussion as opposed to teacher-centred delivery of content. Over 90% of clubs congregate in a girl-only space, typically a school or community space for out-of-school girls, with many schools offering Boys' Clubs in parallel.

In weekly 'safe spaces', girls catch up in subject areas, learn about their sexual and reproductive health rights, form friendships and share experiences. Content covered within GEC girls' clubs tends to respond to gaps in girls' knowledge or skills that are not met elsewhere at home or at school. While many clubs have a specific learning or skill focus (e.g. literacy, numeracy, ICT and finance), overwhelmingly the clubs also feature lessons and activities which

build confidence and self-esteem in girls, allowing girls to talk in a safe space with the opportunity to have conversations around their rights as children and girls.

For example, a project which identified at baseline that girls rarely ask questions in the classroom because they feel shy and are scared of getting things wrong, might choose to include content aimed at increasing their self-esteem and confidence. A project which identified high rates of absence during menstruation because of girls not knowing how to use available pads or materials, or feeling ashamed, might choose to have content related to this.

It was critical for GEC projects to have an approach that uses contextualised content but also recognise the value that outside international best practice brings. Although a 'one size fits all' approach is unlikely to succeed and contextualised content is more relatable, it is equally critical to have an approach which is grounded in child rights, inclusion and an understanding that individual girls have different needs and value different opportunities. Without this conceptual foundation, clubs and their facilitators may unintentionally reflect the inequalities of the world around them: reinforcing gendered systems, structures, and barriers instead of safely challenging these.

The evidence that Girls' Clubs support wellbeing and empowerment-related outcomes is fairly robust.<sup>7</sup> Overall, the girl-focused approach adopted by GEC projects drives the active development of girls' agency as a core element of delivery. Most projects then also work beyond the level of the girl herself through other efforts which explicitly tackle structural gender inequalities, to effect sustainable change.

<sup>5</sup> The approach taken on GEC is very much in line with the Capability Approach where a girls' capability to live a good life is defined in terms of the set of valuable 'beings and doings' to which she has access.

<sup>6</sup> Based on the GAGE Conceptual Framework: divided into six 'capability domains': education; health and nutrition; freedom from violence and bodily integrity; psychosocial well-being; voice and agency; and economic empowerment. See: <https://www.gage.odg.org/publication/gage-conceptual-framework/>

<sup>7</sup> See GAGE – Girls' Clubs, life skills programmes and girls' wellbeing outcomes – <https://www.gage.odg.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/GAGE-Girls-Club-Report-FINAL.pdf>



## What do Girls' Clubs achieve?

GEC project evaluations show that Girls' Clubs positively influence the following areas:

1. Self-confidence and self-efficacy
2. Levels of knowledge around key issues affecting their education
3. Aspirations and awareness of their rights
4. Attitudes towards gender equality
5. School retention and attendance
6. Transition into successive grades or paid employment

Any substantive effort to enhance girls' wellbeing, social networks and life skills, especially when designed and implemented well, can contribute to girls feeling safe and happy at school and form the foundation for girls' focus, attendance and motivation for learning. That said, being a member of a Girls' Club is not generally sufficient on its own to raise learning outcomes, although there is some evidence. Strong pedagogy, curricula and materials, amongst other factors, are also imperative for this. Additionally, projects that combined Girls' Clubs with engagement sessions with parents and community members also saw an impact on social and gender norms in communities.



Club members were **12.5 percentage points** more likely to remain in school, compared to their peers.

AGES project, Somalia

Girls' that participate in Girls' Empowerment Forums (GEFs) were associated with significantly higher gains in learning – a difference of **6.6 percentage points** over and above the comparison group in terms of aggregated learning scores.

SOMGEP-T, Somalia



**93%** of girls with disabilities who participated in Girls' Clubs experienced a successful transition, compared to 74% of girls with disabilities who were not in clubs.

The Expanding Inclusive Education Strategies for Girls with Disabilities, Leonard Cheshire, Kenya

**“I told my two brothers what I had learned at the club about gender equality and that household chores and roles should be shared. Now we have duties for house cleaning, doing dishes, washing and gardening, and also I’m now able to cut firewood, which was previously done by my brothers only.”**

Girl, Uganda



## Factors for success

In 2019, the GEC developed a Girls' Club Performance Framework to help projects strengthen and monitor their clubs in four core areas: participation, facilitation, content and monitoring. This section draws out the factors that influenced positive changes in these four areas.

### Ensuring girls' participation

- **Actively engaging community and caregivers in the start up and running of the Girls' Clubs achieved strong buy-in.** It is likely that this also helped shift attitudes towards girls' rights and freedom of movement more generally in those communities. Enlisting opinion-formers and community gatekeepers can help change perceptions of clubs as places for girls to gossip or as a threat to local cultures and traditions, into valuable places for learning new skills and knowledge.
- **Inviting parents, and mothers in particular, to participate in the clubs, reinforced the bond between mothers and daughters, and also the status of the club within the community.** This interaction also leads to further involvement in a girls' education, resulting in increased attendance and strengthened learning.
- **Understanding the make-up of club members has allowed them to be more inclusive and accessible.** Girls with disabilities and girls from highly marginalised backgrounds are participating in equal proportion with their peers. Many Girls' Clubs train mentors on inclusion and equity, carry out disability awareness activities and work to address stigma around disability. Building inclusive approaches into the facilitation and content results in greater confidence, agency and self-esteem for girls with disabilities. Adopting an intersectional lens around gender and disability goes beyond assumptions around the needs of girls with disabilities, and instead addresses the systemic and structural barriers they face
- **A pragmatic and flexible approach to the timing, duration and location of club sessions is important for supporting regular attendance and access, particularly for the most vulnerable girls.** Most schools and mentors run 30 to 45-minute club sessions once or twice a week, but after-school sessions sometimes posed attendance challenges. Education systems that have recently reformed their school timetables to formally include extra-curricular periods have experienced improved club attendance by scheduling sessions within this timeslot. Education for Life (Action Aid) Kenya, delivered their Girls' Club content component within the same three-hour session as English and Maths lessons, meaning that their girls, most of whom had small children, did not have to return for separate club sessions but had a clear, short time period in the afternoon which they could plan for and commit to.
- **Girls' clubs have high potential for replication and scale-up in other areas due to the enthusiasm that girls tend to hold for them, their low cost, and the presence of women in the community and learning institutions who want to be facilitators and mentors.** Many projects built upon this rich potential, with some projects seeing significant sustainability gains as more and more clubs organically sprouted up.



### CASE STUDY: Girls' Empowerment Forums

The SOMGEP-T project in Somalia found that 15% of the girls in Girls' Clubs had disabling levels of anxiety and depression. They tailored support to mentors to address barriers for girls with disabilities in their clubs, called Girls' Empowerment Forums. Girls' Empowerment Forums provide safe spaces for girls to experience non-traditional gender roles, practice leadership skills, discuss issues affecting them and provide peer-to-peer support and psychosocial support. Peer-to-peer support was seen as particularly important by girls with disabilities, as feelings of isolation and loneliness can further exacerbate anxiety and depression. Given the lack of professional counselling services in country, the project also integrated psychosocial support and counselling into Girls' Empowerment Forum activities, supporting mentors to develop basic skills to support girls displaying signs of anxiety and/or depression



### CASE STUDY: Organic institutionalisation

In EAGER's (International Rescue Committee) work with out-of-school girls in Sierra Leone, the final year of the project saw many clubs deciding to 'go it alone' as the project closed. Girls now run many of these clubs themselves and divide up leadership and facilitation responsibilities themselves. For SAGE (Plan International) in Zimbabwe, clubs have been handed over to community members.

### Developing effective facilitators

- **Ideal facilitators are locally trusted young people who themselves are capable of personal growth and embracing progressive attitudes.** When a programme seeks to shift gender norms and attitudes, it is important that life skills are taught by facilitators who can challenge old ways of thinking and model new ones, and operate within a relationship of mutual trust with girls. This dynamic moves away from the traditional teacher-student relationship and requires intensive input and encouragement from project staff. Dedicating time to build capacity with intensive facilitator trainings at different stages of a programme will maintain and increase engagement.
- **Emphasising the importance of a safe and supportive physical environment has positive effects on learning, increased self-confidence and stronger social networks.** Girls themselves can identify what it means to have a 'safe space': what this looks and feels like to them. At the outset, the EAGER project (International Rescue Committee) in Sierra Leone used the feedback from girls to make spaces safer (such as having ground rules for each club). They returned to this exercise at frequent intervals to check that spaces still felt safe to girls and to identify any further actions that could be taken.
- **The content relating to girls' rights can be viewed as challenging to adult (male) authority.** Working with girls to anticipate possible negative outcomes, seeking out adult allies, and using a locally sensitive approach can mitigate against a negative backlash from the school and community.

### Designing and delivering effective content

- **Involving girls in decisions about the design, planning, and/or implementation of content – especially about controlling one's life and claiming one's rights – results in strong engagement in the clubs and a wider commitment to changing the attitudes of the surrounding community.**

- **Piloting content, testing out modules and asking for girls' feedback produces the most relevant content.** Girls will always feel more comfortable discussing things that are relevant to them and their experiences. However, tensions can arise over the inclusion of some topics. For example, girls aged 15 to 17 who are pregnant or parenting can benefit from information on antenatal care. However, in a national context where the age of consent is 18, projects do not include such content despite the demand from girls themselves.
- **Delivering the sessions in the language with which girls are most familiar – which may not be the official language of instruction in school – boosts the number of girls who actively engage in the club, ensures conversation topics are understood and contributes to a feeling of 'safe space'.** Discussion of concepts such as gender, violence and sexuality require a level of fluency that girls often did not have and a switch to a more familiar language opened up new vocabulary and meaningful conversations. Some projects were pressurised to deliver content in the official language of instruction to adhere to school rules. This meant that girls the most marginalised girls, who would benefit the most from membership of a club, ended up self-excluding or dropping out when they could not understand content.
- **Mixed clubs, when deployed appropriately and as a complementary activity to girls-only discussions, provide an environment in which girls and boys can share and appreciate different perspectives on issues like menstruation, consent, contraception and expectations for love and sex.** The MGCubed's (Plan International) mixed clubs in Ghana led to girls and boys seeing each other as friends and equals, rather than pitted against each other within a hierarchy of gender or the frame of sexuality. However, they did note that the clubs were only successful when the project deployed close monitoring of the interactions between girls and boys, and considered issues such as voice and representation.



- **Content designed for boys can open up a space to discuss positive masculinities and gender.**

For example, Excelling Against the Odds' (ChildHope) Good Brothers Clubs in Ethiopia included discussions around what it means to be a boy, a brother, or a male partner – and to identify inequalities in the experiences of girls and boys and plan how to address them. This led to boys taking concrete actions, such as dividing up household chores equally with their sisters. It should be noted that, at its most extreme, the combination of effective boys' clubs with ineffective girls' clubs can exacerbate gender inequality as boys can become more confident, informed and connected than before the intervention, widening the gap between girls' and boys' wellbeing and social capital.

- **Girls learn better through participatory and inclusive approaches.** Methods include integrated games, role plays, games, puzzles, group discussions and radio or video content which keep the participants wholly involved in the sessions. This also helps girls with disabilities to access the materials.
- **Promoting involvement in civic or practical action can not only contribute to the political empowerment of girls but also can cement community support for girl-led action more generally.** Discovery Project's (Impact-Ed) clubs involved an element of Girls' Club members holding school authorities to account for agreed actions. IGATE (World Vision) supported Girls' Clubs to feed into community scorecard sessions. Many other clubs undertook actions such as community clean-ups or attended community discussions on issues affecting them.
- **Developing and practicing communication skills increases girls' confidence.** Girls who have peer support are better able to use their new-found confidence to speak out among peers, family or in the community. Girls from the IGATE (World Vision) clubs in Zimbabwe described how they felt more able to ask questions in a community setting and felt that their community thought they were important. Girls were also more likely to apply their confidence when faced with non-academic challenges, like unwanted

advances or reaching out for menstrual hygiene management support from parents, teachers or classmates.

- **Certain topics in the curriculum 'stick' with girls more than others.** These include menstrual management, recognition of their rights (and violations) and changes in attitudes about what girls and boys can do, in terms of professions and education. Topics where girls' knowledge or attitude changed little or not at all tend to be more deeply embedded gender norms (e.g. a belief that boys and men were equally responsible for domestic work, or norms around women and sexuality). This reflects the fact that contesting and unpacking such norms is a complex, long-term task which requires facilitators who themselves can – and want to – challenge these beliefs. When Girls' Clubs had access to a cadre of facilitators with this level of skill, deeply embedded gender norms were tackled successfully.

### Maintaining contact during COVID-19

During the pandemic, Girls' Clubs became more important than ever in keeping girls connected to each other and to their learning, as well as supporting them with anxiety, isolation and with home responsibilities and pressures. When in-person sessions were restricted, many clubs reached the girls through a blended learning approach and in some cases created remote peer support groups. Projects created WhatsApp groups or used radio programmes to cover life skills content. Some also continued to bring girls together in person, but in outside spaces with reduced numbers and social distancing. Girls and mentors reported that the increase in psychosocial support positively impacted their coping mechanisms. Membership of a Girls' Club also appeared to be correlated with returning to school after learning institutions re-opened.



#### CASE STUDY: Keeping it fresh

Clubs that trialled a participatory and highly adaptive curriculum remained as close as possible to girls' everyday realities. Marginalised no More (Street Child), Nepal decided to use loosely structured sessions, encouraging input from girls themselves. Social workers were also trained to engage with girls at regular intervals on learning content for the following two to three months, ensuring sessions delivered to girls were always relevant to current discussions and trends in the community.

## Monitoring girls' clubs effectively

- **Data on the membership and attendance of girls within clubs is often uneven, inconsistent and non-disaggregated.** Projects tend to support teachers and school management staff to monitor attendance in formal learning spaces, but the same attention is not generally paid to Girls' Clubs. This is sometimes because projects want Girls' Clubs to feel different to school; places where girls can come and go freely without punishment for absences. The downside of this approach is that it is difficult to gauge inclusivity, dosage and girls' exposure to content. Projects that collect membership data, and disaggregate it by sex, age, disability and other marginalisation characteristics (e.g. being a parent), are able to take actions when certain groups were not included. For example, SOMGEP-T, Somalia, disaggregated membership and leadership data by age, school, disability and parental situation (including whether girls were married or had children) and could therefore compare this to their wider cohort data and identify any exclusions or under-representations.
- **Monitoring the quality of clubs depends on the monitors' ability to recognise good facilitation and gender-responsive, and to hold meaningful, child-friendly discussions with girls in which they can make their views known.** Many projects build these skills within their own monitoring staff, through gender training or exposure to tools (such as the GEC's own Performance Framework). However, few projects build these skills amongst the government officers responsible for monitoring and inspecting schools. This was a missed opportunity. An exception was MGCubed (Plan International) in Ghana who worked with girls' education officers in each district to help them include club monitoring within their work with schools. Project staff carried out joint monitoring visits with these officers to show them what they need to look for and how to make recommendations.
- **Using a clear framework on empowerment, including defined concepts and indicators, is key to measuring results and understanding impact.** Where a clear understanding of girls' empowerment is defined within projects the risk of priorities becoming misaligned or approaches being implemented and monitored ineffectively reduces. Projects often want to contribute to improvements in agency and self-esteem or confidence, but these are not always measured in a way that captures the life-choices that girls have been able to make as a result of the clubs.
- **Monitoring of dosage is most effective when it aims to check that minimum levels of exposure and dosage are being met – but also uses the opportunity to verify that no harm is being caused (e.g. by requiring girls to attend frequently and risk backlash from family members who perceive that girls should be at home).**





## Value for money

GEC projects revealed some strong examples of how value for money is driven by girls' clubs. An analysis of project budgets indicated a range of annual cost per beneficiaries, ranging from £8 to £87 annually per beneficiary. These were estimated by isolating the direct and indirect budget lines that reflected club activities and dividing by the direct beneficiaries covered by the activities, and annualised.

**SOMGEP-T, Somalia's** clubs (called Girls' Empowerment Forums) had an annual cost per beneficiary of £8. The relatively low cost coupled with strong evidence of benefits in the form of learning gains, spill overs beyond the intended impacts, increased confidence and social capital, all point to strong cost effectiveness. The quality of the content, support to facilitators, roles played by girl leaders, and regular meetings were likely contributors to a successful model.

**Team Girl Malawi** (Link Education) girls' clubs, with their strong focus on life skills, also demonstrated good cost effectiveness. The annual cost per beneficiary was £33, resulting in attitude changes towards SRHRR and life skills for younger girls. Content was particularly strong, and the project demonstrated efficient practices by using trained facilitators, reaping the benefits of a previous training investment. The project's use of community health workers to deliver technical training was efficient, effective and sustainable, with wider benefits of exposing girls to local healthcare workers within their own community.

**SAGE's** (Plan International) girls' club activities in Zimbabwe were effective, with strong evidence of shifting gender norms and bringing improvements in self confidence among the girls following participation. There is also promising sustainability, as the materials may be used across other schools. SAGE is working with the ministry of education to make this happen. The annual cost per beneficiary for these activities was £87. This project was less cost effective than others.

**EAGER's** model was based on a pre-existing design by International Rescue Committee (Girl Shine), thus benefiting from sunk costs of design, and reducing current project costs, which was good cost efficiency. They adapted the design to the needs of the beneficiaries who had very low literacy and numeracy against a background of Ebola, high levels of SRGBV and Covid-19. These adaptations were the key to the success of the activities, as made evident by significant impacts in the life skills, transition and confidence of girls. The annual cost per beneficiary was £49, demonstrating good cost effectiveness.



## Recommendations for the design and implementation of girls' clubs

This section synthesises findings outlined in this Learning Brief and offers guidance on how practitioners can support the effective design and delivery of Girls' Clubs. The guidance provides practical tips and can also form the basis of a situational analysis.

### Advice for planning and design

- 1. Map out the availability of existing Girls' Clubs** before forming new clubs. In many cases, Girls' Clubs already exist within schools and require improved content, better facilitators, and more inclusive and transformative approaches.
- 2. Know the girls and their needs.** Before the objectives of a club are defined, decide and understand who clubs are aimed at. What are the experiences, needs, challenges and desires of the girls who will be attending them? What kinds of intersecting marginalisation do the girls in the targeted cohort face. Which girls are likely to need extra support?
- 3. Be clear on objectives from the start.** Set out exactly what the Girls' Clubs aims to achieve – and define the terms specifically. For example, if self-confidence is a desired outcome, conceptualise exactly what is meant by this with girls themselves. Is it the confidence to challenge girls or boys with whom they disagree, or to be able to stand up in class and answer a question? Workshop questions around the constraints that girls face to define the purpose of the club, the content needed and the standards which need to be met. Introduce a monitoring framework to regularly capture if and how these aims are being achieved (in the view of girls themselves).
- 4. Start slowly.** Take time to design each Girls' Club component, rather than rushing into implementation. Careful decisions about facilitation, content and monitoring need to be made, in a process that involves the girls themselves. Piloting a handful of clubs, and intensively monitoring them, is one way of ensuring that clubs are appropriate and likely to be effective before a wider roll-out.
- 5. Design sustainability** in from the beginning, thinking about who can facilitate Girls' Clubs after project involvement, which resources and content will be needed and how quality can be ensured.
- 6. Design inclusive clubs.** Girls' Clubs should provide inclusive environments where girls are encouraged to express themselves and deepen their understanding of and respect for others. Including girls with disabilities can bring about social benefits for all members of the club. Inclusive clubs do not set boundaries around particular 'needs'. Instead, they reduce barriers to learning, participation and social interactions, regardless of individual differences. Carry out disability awareness activities within clubs to address stigma around girls with disability. Recognise that some accommodations may be necessary for girls with varying types of disabilities to fully participate, including developmental disabilities, visual impairments and learning disabilities.
- 7. Secure buy-in from parents or caregivers from the outset.** This is particularly important for out-of-school girls or community-based clubs but is also good practice for clubs held within schools. Skilled community workers can help parents (and sometimes partners if appropriate) to understand the role that clubs play in girls' wellbeing and learning, and the right that they have to spend time with friends and discuss issues that matter to them. Aim for clubs to be seen as legitimate spaces.
- 8. Plan for resistance in advance.** Assume that there will be resistance if the club's content contests embedded ideas and norms (including by delivering SRHR content that some community members may disapprove of) and identify what this resistance will look like, who will lead and influence it and who can be used to combat it. Importantly, ensure there is no harmful impact on girls. By having these discussions and planning sessions, sensitive and forward-thinking solutions can be better developed.
- 9. Consider how Girls' Clubs can be adapted for out-of-school girls.** These girls are likely to have the most to gain in terms of friendships, social networks, and socio-emotional skills. Logistical constraints such as location, timing and childcare need to be considered and the girls' needs put first.
- 10. Hold the Girls' Clubs at a suitable time.** Think through issues such as household chores, caring work, avoiding journeys in the dark, and seasonality and weather events. Check regularly that these barriers do not stop any of the targeted groups of girls (including those with disabilities) from attending.
- 11. Avoid a fixed approach to mixed or segregated clubs.** It is important to acknowledge the benefits of both. Girl-only clubs are more likely to be perceived by girls as safe spaces in which issues felt to be sensitive can be aired and feelings shared. Mixed clubs, on the other hand, can be effective when projects are seeking to change the attitudes and behaviours of boys, and to help them understand how they can practise feminist allyship. Be wary of adding a few boys into a Girls' Club as a tokenistic way of deal with any backlash around a girl-only space, and be aware of the ways in which the presence of boys may compromise girls' confidence and voice within the club space.



**12. Plan for the prevention and response to intra-club bullying.** Build a feeling of solidarity into the club from the start, through good facilitation and appropriate content. Train facilitators and monitors to be alert to the signs of bullying and give them the skills to respond to it. Solidarity is also built through using small group sizes and the opportunity for girl-only discussions as it allows girls to ask questions and have more direct interaction.

**13. Plan for scenarios in which girls cannot meet in-person.** Draw on learnings from the COVID-19 school closures and develop communication methods such as radio, WhatsApp, or tablets uploaded with pre-existing content.

**14. Avoid creating differences between girls.** While girls' clubs often appeal as an intervention because of their close alignment with existing systems and their low cost, budget allocations can contribute to resolving issues around exclusion and absence. For example, after-school clubs often comprise a group of hungry girls and as a result the provision of snacks would further break down a barrier to attendance. However, such provision should be done as part of a wider feeding strategy for the whole school population to avoid the risk of girls joining the club only to receive food, or to avoid non-members becoming resentful. Available budget for Girls' Clubs can also be used to provide supplementary reading materials (in girls' favoured language rather than necessarily the language of instruction) such as magazines featuring inspirational stories.

**15. Complement Girls' Club activities on gender-based violence (GBV) with a rigorous SRGBV policy framework that has a survivor-centred approach.** Girls' clubs are often used as a space for increasing girls' understanding of GBV and of how to report it. Policy-makers need to ensure girls can report abuse and violence that occurs at home, at school or in the community. Those responsible for monitoring Girls' Club content must have the skills and support they need to check that girls' clubs are bullying-free spaces and that discriminatory messages are not being shared by mentors.

**16. Consider embedding a role for girls' clubs in project governance processes.** This could provide girls with the opportunity to build confidence in a real decision-making forum with real-life implications.

**17. Plan for visibility of outcomes.** Using recognition and encouragement of attendance and participation in girls' clubs taps into the dominant idea that school values certification and completion. This is also recognised by caregivers and communities.

**18. Remember that girls alone cannot shift or transform their situations.** Recognise the gendered power imbalances within existing hierarchies (i.e. families, community, education systems and policy environments). If the club aims to transform gender inequalities, complementary activities that work with those who maintain, police and uphold particular social norms (gatekeepers) are essential. Indeed, different gatekeepers and potential champions should be identified and engaged within each community. Implement awareness-raising interventions for communities to improve their knowledge on girls' education and girls' rights and create a conducive environment for girls to safely practice their newly gained skills and knowledge. Extend life skills training to family members of girls, if possible, to accelerate the impact of life skills knowledge and garner acceptance from the family members and the community. One practical example of this would be training the partners of girls on SRHR as well as the girls themselves.

#### Advice on content development and facilitator support

**1. There are many relevant resources.** Spend time to review existing guidance on life skills, socio-emotional learning and comprehensive sexuality education, rather than starting from scratch. Many tried and tested ways have sought to look at how skills can be developed, and often these activities can easily be contextualised and adapted.

**2. Acknowledge and address facilitator awkwardness around topics such as sex and relationships or disability.** Facilitators may have their own biases and values, and/or are often operating within oppressive regulatory environments where some subjects are considered taboo. Identify these constraints up front and find ways to address them that prioritise the needs of girls (e.g. to secure their right to comprehensive sexuality education) but keep facilitators safe and confident. Give them the skills and support networks to deal with challenges. Bring in outside experts if necessary.

**3. Ensure that there is clear recruitment guidance.** Guidance for institutions, including communities, should include content on vetting and safe recruitment, as well as the kinds of skills and competencies to look for (e.g., experience in working with young people, a sense of fun, compassion, and values consistent with equality and non-discrimination), and specific characteristics, such as being female. Additionally, institutions should be guided to put into place strategies for replacing mentors when they leave or are transferred in order to avoid clubs ending once a facilitator departs.

#### **4. Give facilitators the support they need.**

• Acknowledge the limitations of simple facilitator training and plan for a longer-term mentoring or coaching model. Help facilitators secure buy-in and support from headteachers, line-managers or community leaders (whoever they feel answerable to) and secure the time they need to be able to plan for and deliver sessions. Younger women in particular should not be burdened with high workloads when running clubs (exacerbating issues around gendered unpaid work). Instead, projects should help them to negotiate the time they need to dedicate to the club and, where appropriate, pay and performance issues. Similarly, male teachers – presumed to have more free time – should not be prioritised for volunteer role tasks on this basis, nor given more responsibility, no matter their seniority. Inattention to such issues will unconsciously pass on gender biases to club members.

**5. Evaluate the values, knowledge and skills of facilitators, and respond to gaps with a structured 'how-to' facilitators' guide.** This is often the most appropriate way to ensure that topics are covered comprehensively, and that content stays 'on-message'. If facilitators are more skilled, or resources exist to help them develop these skills, then a less structured curriculum in which girls and facilitator can self-direct sessions and decide on content, might be more appropriate.

#### **6. Make sure girls do not feel overwhelmed by discussions of social norms and girls' rights.**

When helping girls identify injustices around them, do it in a way that connects with their own lives and does not leave them feeling overwhelmed. For example, set out to identify a single social norm that impacts their lives (e.g. that girls and women should do the majority of caring work), and the different impacts it has on their lives (e.g. means they need to rush home after school to care for other family members instead of being with friends/ studying) and then plan for how this might change, with the support of adults and communities, over the course of a year.

#### **7. Recognise that practical factors will prevent regular attendance.**

Support facilitators to respond to this inevitability by, for example, designating peer mentors who can meet with members who missed sessions to retell stories and summarise the main lessons for the week.

### **Advice for monitoring and adaptation**

**1. Create systems for collecting data on club members that learning institutions can use after the project ends.** When girls self-select or teachers select particular girls, there is a risk that either those who would most benefit from membership are not selected or that girls feel stigmatised through being asked. Selection processes need to be managed carefully and data should be collected on who is included (and why), and who is excluded (and why they do not want to join or feel that they cannot join).

**2. Review the criteria for membership regularly.** Projects and schools need to check how membership works. Is any girl free to join? Do teachers select particular girls? What happens if more girls want to join than the club has space for? Are there too few girls with disabilities in the club and what is preventing them from joining? In answering these questions, girls, project staff and facilitators can work together to create a system that is not exclusionary, discriminatory and that will allow more clubs to organically grow. This can lead to wider and transformative conversations and approaches to inclusive education in general, so some technical support will likely be necessary.

**3. Prioritise girl-centred qualitative research for impact evaluation.** Ensure that the most marginalised groups are represented within sampling frameworks, as well as girls who are not in clubs (from whom there will be a lot to learn). Consider how teachers and local officials can be brought into the research team to build their research skills. In between evaluation points, more regular opportunities for getting feedback from girls need to be built in at frequent points.

**4. Ensure that lessons are systematically collected.** This will improve the ability to identify and address challenges and leverage successes, specifically on the effect that Girls' Clubs can have on desired outcomes. Furthermore, recognise that as it takes time to evidence change in social norms, evaluation points need to be planned in a timely manner to ensure change can be evidenced.



Girls'  
Education  
Challenge



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