

Final reflections

Achievements and lessons learned

Let our Girls Succeed
(Wasichana Wetu Wafaulu),
Education Development Trust

KENYA

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Girls'
Education
Challenge



Education
Development
Trust

“I have gone through a lot. I had given up in life. Now, I have new hope. The teachers allow me to come home to breastfeed the baby. My family is also supportive; they stay with my baby as I attend classes and sometimes bring her to me for breastfeeding. In a way, I feel that the baby has been a blessing to me for I now have a new resolve to pursue education. I am more focused and self-driven. I want to transform the economic status of my family through education.”

Girl



● Kenya

What did the Let our Girls Succeed project do?

Running between 2017 and 2023, the Let our Girls Succeed (Wasichana Wetu Wafaulu) project supported over 70,000 girls in marginalised communities in Kenya to achieve improved learning outcomes and transition through key stages of education or employment. The project operated in 521 primary schools, 90 secondary schools, and 23 technical and vocational education and training institutions.

The project worked across eight counties and two different contexts: the arid and semi-arid lands – Kilifi, Kwale, Marsabit, Samburu, Tana River, and Turkana counties – and the urban slums context in Mombasa and Nairobi counties. Led by Education Development Trust (EDT), the consortium partners included Concern Worldwide, Kesho, and the Ananda Marga Universal Relief Team. The project worked on ensuring girls gained the skills, qualifications, and confidence required to take control of their lives to better their life chances.

The Let our Girls Succeed project implemented the following activities:

- Provided engaging catch-up classes for girls who had dropped out of school.
- Worked with learners in primary and secondary schools on building interest on STEM subjects through practical experiments, clubs and increased capacity-building of teachers.
- Worked closely with community health volunteers (CHVs) for retaining girls in schools through identifying student dropouts and working closely with parents on sensitisation over girls' education.

- Offered girls' clubs in primary and secondary schools, which included peer mentoring and sexual and reproductive health training.
- Identified apprenticeship opportunities within the private sector.
- Provided teacher coaching and training with a focus on enhanced ICT competencies and gender-sensitive and inclusive approaches.
- Provided mentorship and capacity-building support to head teachers for overall school improvement.
- Promoted income generating activities by awarding grants to older girls and running community groups to support women.
- Provided needs-based financial support to assist with the payment of school costs or TVET fees.
- Worked closely with government bodies to improve the TVET centres.
- Worked closely with education officials from the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) to build capacities on overall supervisory oversight and monitoring classroom learning by focusing on gender-responsive pedagogies.



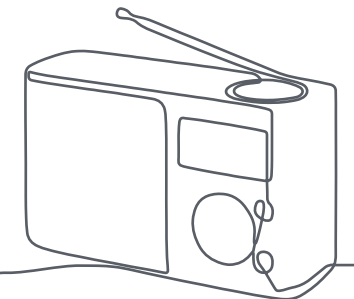
How did Let our Girls Succeed adapt during COVID-19?

In Kenya, in response to COVID-19, schools were closed for periods of up to nine months and travel was restricted. This hindered project implementation of most in-school activities. Project activities were adapted to reach girls during the school closures.

As the Kenyan Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) broadcast school lessons over the radio, one project adaptation included the provision and distribution of solar radios. Where girls were unable to get a signal, the project downloaded pre-recorded lessons onto flash disks and shared those with parents. The project also arranged for some teachers to be available online through WhatsApp to answer questions in real-time. To mitigate potential dropouts due to pregnancy, the project also supported reading camps. Girls listened to radio broadcasts in groups of five during the reading camps sharing one radio. This enabled them to support one another and continue their learning. The project also provided girls with learning materials. Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the vulnerability of communities due to loss of livelihoods, increased dropouts and affected learning outcomes.

The girls supported by the project experienced large learning losses as a result of school closures. This aligns with global trends, with studies finding substantial learning deficits globally arising early in the pandemic and persisting over time. Learning progress resumed once girls had returned to school, with an upward trajectory in line or exceeding with progress between baseline and midline. At endline, girls were still recovering from these losses. However, relative to the control group, the evidence showed that learning recovery in the intervention group was greater. According to the project endline evaluation, the project may have had a positive impact on learning for beneficiary girls, mitigating some of the worst negative effects brought about by the school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Project results for transition and sustainability were strong. It did not appear that the pandemic impeded girls supported by the project from transitioning to higher grades, enrolling in alternative learning pathways, or re-enrolling in school after dropping out. Transition rates throughout the project remained high, with an improvement from 93 percent at midline to 96 percent at endline. Likewise, the project had a positive impact on sustainability scores as measured along the three dimensions of community, school, and system. The endline evaluation found an increase between baseline, midline, and endline, with a sustainability score of 1.8 at baseline, 2.5 at midline, and 2.7 at endline out of 4.0 possible points. Keeping in mind the severe effects the pandemic had on government, school, and community capacity, the increase in sustainability score was positive, showing progress despite substantial challenges.





“After I became pregnant, I felt the whole world had abandoned me. Upon enrolment, I found the teachers supportive of my resolve. They were ready to listen whenever I was down. In addition, being a member of the school club helped me. The club members were like family to me. They made me feel part of them. I no longer felt like a stranger. I could now concentrate on my studies. On top of that, I got time to discover my talent: football. I love football very much.”

Girl

What did Let our Girls Succeed achieve?

Implemented and ensured continuity of a school-based coaching model for professional development of teachers. The Let our Girls Succeed project developed a teacher professional development approach through a unique community of practice model in project primary and secondary schools. Findings from the endline evaluation showed that 10,766 teachers were trained on improved teaching methodologies and that teaching quality was found to be very high at endline, with an overall score of 83.4 out of 100. Qualitative data suggested that many improvements in teaching quality may be due to the project interventions and trainings. Classroom observation data gathered by the project report that peer to peer teaching and internal observations were institutionalised in project schools and will be continued in the future.

Improved transition. Endline findings showed transition rates at 96% with a high number of girls showing willingness to continue to further education or move to alternative learning pathways such as technical and vocational education and training and apprenticeships. At endline girls showed a high commitment to continue their studies, with 99.1% of girls surveyed stating that they wished to continue studying beyond the current year. Transition rates increased to 96 percent at endline, from 94 percent at baseline and 93 percent at midline. Also, girls had high aspiration levels regarding education, with over 95 percent stating that they wished to continue in education until they met their goals.

Improved interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Increasing the quality of teaching in STEM subjects in secondary schools was a significant achievement of the project. Endline findings highlight that 82% of teachers adopted improved teaching approaches in technical subjects – such as chemistry, physics, mathematics – and made it more interesting for learners. Evidence showed that usage of ICT and practical

experiments by teachers in lesson delivery increased learning outcomes. Positive actions by learners in the form of developing and showcasing of models and experiments in science exhibitions and fairs further cemented the efforts of the project. Also, at endline girls had very positive attitudes about whether girls, as well as boys, should study STEM subjects. In focus group discussions, many girls mentioned that they were highly interested in STEM subjects and/or wished to pursue a career in STEM.

Delivered good value for money through adaptive and focused programming. The project focused on achieving good value for money in its education delivery by keeping its activities sustainable and driven by the needs of the girls. The approach adopted with regards to Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) ensured that supplementary support was given to girls with disabilities – such as braille books and equipment, training support to teachers and first-time access to marginalised learners. Working with communities through community health volunteers enabled girl retention and creation of an enabling safe operational environment. Investing in community structures since inception helped set sustainable foundations. Data observations showed that at the school and sub-county level key interventions, such as school coaching, peer teaching, safeguarding systems, were adopted and were likely to continue as pockets of positive change.

Incorporated project learnings in policy discussions. At the systems-level, the project actively worked in incorporating key learnings in the education reform process. Inputs provided in the National Education Sector Strategic Plan, Teacher Education Policy and Guidance & Counselling Policy will have a long-term impact on ensuring continuity of related project interventions.



Improved sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education. Evidence from the endline evaluation suggests that gender responsive approaches were utilised in classrooms, with girls being called on as equally as boys to respond to questions. It also indicates that the project supported girls in their understanding of SRH. Girls generally had good knowledge of sexually transmitted diseases and ways of prevention at endline, and over 96 percent of girls stated that they had the right to complain if touched inappropriately by a teacher, adult, or schoolmate. A slight increase in life skills was measured at endline. This was driven by increases in attitudes towards success in school and confidence in learning as well as attitudes towards continued pursuit of education, self-confidence, and ability to plan for the future. At endline girls overwhelmingly believed sexual education was important and expressed generally strong knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, including issues related to sexually transmitted diseases. Over 96 percent of girls were confident in their right to complain if touched inappropriately by a teacher, adult, or classmate. Girls were also highly confident in their ability to refuse unwanted sexual intercourse.

Worked on sustainability from the start. The Let our Girls Succeed project utilised and strengthened capacities of existing community structures to challenge cultural barrier to girls' education working closely with local chiefs and community health volunteers. At school level, coaches were existing teachers within the system who were trained to execute coaching duties and later released back to the system as catalysts for change. The project supported communities to identify and prepare local structures to take over activities and worked with stakeholders at community and school levels to develop exit roadmaps and clarify roles of each community structure after project closure.

Built capacity on quality assurance. Positive strides have been made in system improvement through building capacity of Ministry of Education staff on quality assurance. The project was able to train and mentor staff on the effective use of rubrics when observing teaching quality and providing them feedback. Monitoring observations gained over the project's implementation highlighted increased willingness of government officials to learn and monitor on teaching quality than tangible infrastructure.

// DUDU'S STORY

Dudu is a 17 year-old girl living in a remote village in Kenya. She is in Grade 8 at a primary school and is supported by the Let our Girls Succeed project. Dudu lives with her grandparents as her father died and her mother suffers from mental health issues. Dudu had a baby and initially dropped out of school, but she was able to return as her grandparents agreed to look after her child while she went to class. Dudu's experiences and understanding of the way in which her circumstances led her to an early pregnancy have helped her to become a mentor to her peers who are dealing with similar issues. After joining a catch-up learning centre through the Let our Girls Succeed project, Dudu was able to transition to Grade 8. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Dudu continued her studies through tutorials and learning materials provided by the project.



The Let our Girls Succeed project in numbers



Number of girls reached

70,540

Number of bursaries provided

5,307



Number of girls' clubs established

644



Number of teachers trained

6,067

Health clubs established: **90**

Government officials trained: **74**

Girls supported through cash transfers: **2,443**

Community forums established: **952**

To what extent did the project deliver value for money?

According to the assessment done by the GEC Fund Manager, the Let our Girls Succeed project offered strong value for money.

The project implemented effective evidence-based interventions that were highly relevant. The project also reached marginalised girls that had limited education opportunities and faced considerable socio-economic barriers in accessing education. The project had excellent learning outcomes with a special focus on STEM subjects, good levels of transition and positive communities' perceptions towards girls' education. The project was efficiently delivered and focused on sustainability from the start.

// GEORGINA'S STORY

Georgina works as a teacher coach with the Let our Girls Succeed project since 2014.



“The project has had immense impact on the teachers. It has provided a place where the teachers can grow professionally. Some of the teachers are fresh from campus with no experience, others are ongoing teacher trainees, once they are integrated into the project, we ensure they learn and understand what is expected of them. Our areas of focus have been on collaboration and communication, that the teachers are critically thinking. We also focus on building their creativity, by encouraging them to come up with teaching aids and

teaching tools which enable the children to understand their lessons better. The teachers also learn how to ensure that their lesson plans are learner centered. The fact that we have enabled the teachers to grow professionally has also seen to it that the learner's performance has improved. Girls have transitioned well from primary schools to secondary schools, and they have a better attitude towards in sciences.

My most memorable moments are every time I walk into a school and see the excitement on the faces of the girls. They know that I am in their corner, and I bring them hope for a better future. Some of the girls are refugees, others come from poor back grounds, others from single parented families where there is a lot of stress. But when they see how we are dedicated to ensuring that they excel in their education, their faces light up; that is one memory I stay with. During the COVID-19 period particularly we had to find new ways to support the teachers and the girls to continue with the online lessons. We ensured that we checked on the girls frequently through that period, we offered them psychosocial support through partner organisations and we also introduced child to child clubs. I believe that if we hadn't supported them through that period, most of them would have dropped out.”

What did Let our Girls Succeed learn?

Improving teaching quality. According to the endline results, a key contributor to strong teaching quality was teachers' use of methods to engage slower learners, motivate students, and use practical demonstrations. Furthermore, girls had strong perceptions of gender equity in the classroom. However, at endline teachers often stated that boys and girls were better at different subjects, suggesting that gender stereotypes might still affect girls' learning experiences. Also, several teaching quality metrics were lower in arid and semi-arid areas than urban slums. This may be due to higher teacher attrition in arid and semi-arid areas than urban slums, which reduced teachers' exposure to project interventions.

Addressing gender and social norms. The endline evaluation found mixed community views on cultural practices hindering girls' education. While around two-thirds of caregivers stated that early marriage and pregnancy were practices that should be done away with, only 27 percent of caregivers stated that female genital mutilation should be stopped. This indicates that some traditional norms tend to persist and need time to be addressed.

Improving transition. Economic barriers remain the biggest challenge to transition, as many families could not afford to pay for school fees. This highlights the importance that the project scholarships and cash transfers played in keeping girls in school and strengthening transition.

Targeting arid and semi-arid areas. The endline evaluation found that arid and semi-arid areas of Kenya lagged urban slums—particularly Nairobi—in terms of learning outcomes. Teacher attrition and turnover is high in those areas and cultural practices continued to be more conservative. It was difficult to unpack the exact reason for these findings. They may be influenced by environmental factors, such as persistent droughts, economic challenges, and cultural practices which

serve to marginalise girls and make it challenging for them to pursue their education. Regardless of the cause of these outcomes, however, it was clear that more work was needed in the arid and semi-arid to support girls' education.

Proving remedial classes at secondary level. Providing catch-up centres at the secondary level as these may help marginalised students better transition through education. A strong focus on remediation, along with strengthened teacher capacity on use of formative assessment to identify learners with low competencies for remedial support or accelerated learning programs, made our catch-up centres in primary schools very successful. Our monitoring shows that if well implemented, remediation has strong potential to bridge the learning gap.

Improving perceptions of and access to contraceptives. While girls generally showed high levels of SRH knowledge and confidence, willingness to use condoms and other forms of contraceptives were low at endline. Also, only around one-third of girls at endline stated that they would know where to get a contraceptive method. These findings suggested both stigmatization of contraceptives, as well as a lack of access. Expanding girls' ability to access contraceptives privately might help address both of these challenges, as girls may not feel shamed by their communities for pursuing safe sexual practices. Also, expanding contraceptive use may help reduce early pregnancies, which according to the endline evaluation is still described as a main reason for girls to drop out of school.



Providing catch-up classes at secondary level. Providing catch-up classes at the secondary level may help marginalised girls better transition through education. A strong focus on remediation, along with strengthened teacher capacity on use of formative assessment to identify learners with low competencies for remedial support or accelerated learning programs, made the project catch-up centres in primary schools successful. The project monitoring showed that if well implemented, remediation had strong potential to improve learning.

Working on ensuring sustainability from the outset. Sustainability must be planned and supported from the outset. Education projects must be designed to be owned locally and lay the groundwork for local sustainability. It is important to build capacities that can sustain promising approaches all the way through project implementation. While the project had strong sustainability at school and community level, more could have been done at system level earlier on in the project lifetime, such as having well identified policy areas that the project aimed to inform from the start, build strong evidence and knowledge around those policy areas, and ensure M&E capacity to measure progress.

Aligning to government priorities and plans. The Let our Girls Succeed project was designed to be aligned to government sector plans and priorities. This facilitated greater participation and uptake of project learnings at system level. It also used existing structures and actors, such as community health volunteers, to make interventions more sustainable.

Building trust and ownership at school, community and system level. A thorough process of project mobilization and stakeholder engagement from the outset to gain trust and build ownership and support at school, communities and system level is essential to project success and long-term sustainability. In addition, continuous engagement with relevant stakeholders at all levels is critical. While the project continuously engaged stakeholders, in the project implementation and incorporated feedback in implementation, a more resilient joined up approach with other in-country projects would have been effective for national level engagement.

Gathering feedback from girls, parents and community members.

Frequent feedback can produce more useful results and can allow for more timely action. This worked particularly well during COVID-19 pandemic, where the needs of girls were rapidly changing. The project sought beneficiary feedback through monthly and quarterly monitoring visits where project staff and stakeholders engaged with communities, county leaders, teachers and individual girls. The project experiences during emergencies – floods, droughts, COVID-19, safeguarding incidences – recognised the need to have in place mechanisms that accommodate high frequency feedback. The project also involved community volunteers and champions in the feedback processes and used technology such as WhatsApp and hotline numbers for emergency cases.

“The Let our Girls Succeed project has transformed myself and the way I teach. When I started teaching, there were so many things I did not know. But because of this programme I now understand the psychology of the children. The three-day training in numeracy and literacy has transformed me. I have gained a lot of skills and believe that the project will continue to empower us to get better.”

Teacher



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