

SHARING LESSONS

from the field

Girls'
Education
Challenge



QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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Educating adolescent girls

This quarter's newsletter has a special focus on the issue of educating adolescent girls. Almost every project in the GEC portfolio is dealing with this issue – working hard to give older girls access to education, keep them engaged and equip them with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence to transition into successful and independent women. The lessons emerging from this work on the barriers these girls face, the interventions that are being used to address these and the challenges and successes of implementation are summarised here and are drawn from projects' quarterly reports and analysis by country coordinators. This is not yet a comprehensive summary of lessons: projects are still delivering their activities and the midline reports will tell us much more about what is working – and what is not – for adolescent girls. However, it does cover a number of different aspects and interventions and is intended as a starting point for further discussion and reflection.



Adolescence is a crucial period of change for both girls and boys. But for girls, the disorientation of sudden physical changes, including the onset of menstruation, and 'adult' decision-making can be intensified by peer pressure, the risk of early marriage and pregnancy, and additional responsibilities at home. The onset of adolescence can occur during primary/lower secondary depending on the age at which the girls started school and the nature of their progression. Education is often a difficult choice in this context and the statistics on 'drop out' at this point in a girl's life are stark. In Afghanistan for example, nationwide, female enrolment drops from 48.3% in primary school to 23.2% by secondary school (National Risk and Vulnerabilities Assessment, 2011//12) – i.e. over half of girls are 'lost' at this transition. This is reflective of many countries where the GEC is working.

Across the GEC baseline surveys, we have seen that the main barriers to the successful education of adolescent girls include:

1. Poverty
2. Low self-esteem
3. Poor quality education and schools
4. Negative or ill-informed community attitudes
5. Risk or perceived risk of violence
6. Personal situation

As a result, a number of interventions are being implemented to address these. Again, these are described in more detail below but include:

1. Economic support for communities, parents and girls themselves
2. Activities designed to increase self-esteem so that girls are empowered and supported by their peers, parents, teachers and communities and improve their participation and performance in school
3. Additional and tailored tuition for foundational skills in literacy and numeracy, especially for those who need remedial support
4. Training and ensuring ongoing support for teachers to build appropriate skills and positive attitudes

A number of lessons, specific to these interventions are described in this newsletter, but there are some general lessons emerging from across the portfolio (it should be noted that lessons relating specifically to disabled adolescent girls will be addressed in a separate newsletter). You will also be able to read more about some of these issues in the GEC Evaluation Manager's upcoming thematic research report "Narrow Windows, Revolving Doors", soon to be published on the GEC page on the DFID website.

Barriers to education for adolescent girls

Poverty

Poverty is the most commonly cited barrier to girls' education. Inability to pay fees (or buy uniforms and materials) leads to irregular periods of absence from school which, as they add up, makes it more difficult for girls to stay in school. In this way, drop out generally occurs as a process, not as a single decision. Adolescent girls who have often started school late for economic reasons – e.g. parents have delayed sending them to school, perhaps waiting until they can go with siblings who are an appropriate age – are particularly affected. Specific challenges, in terms of learning and retention, are faced by an older girl in a lower school class.

Low self-esteem

There is a marked lack of self-confidence and self-esteem amongst marginalised girls who are the focus of the GEC. Adolescent girls often have little freedom to make decisions about their lives, even important decisions such as marriage and pregnancy, events which usually mean an end to their formal education and feelings of disempowerment. Local role models – such as other educated young women – are scarce and consequently girls often believe their options are extremely limited.

Poor quality education and schools

The general quality of education and teaching can be very low in areas of poverty. There is often inadequate provision of teachers and teaching materials. Teachers might not fully understand the topic they are teaching and their techniques can be over-reliant on copying and repetition. The curriculum is frequently unrelated to the realities of job opportunities and often uses materials which perpetuate gender stereotypes, which is particularly unhelpful for adolescent girls about to enter the world of work.

Schools often lack adequate classrooms and sanitation facilities. Toilets can be located in remote parts of the school, usually without locks and often without handwashing facilities. Adolescent girls are routinely absent from school during menstruation because of poor school sanitary facilities and lack of sanitary pads, leading them to fall behind and be more prone to drop out.

Community attitudes

Attitudes of parents, religious entities and other community members have a significant impact on whether or not girls get to school and are supported to stay there. Adolescence is the point at which decisions are made about what happens in a girl's life (often on her behalf). Families often prioritise boys over girls when it comes to education (for economic, cultural or social reasons).

Violence

Adolescent girls are often subject to violence – including corporal punishment in the classroom and sexual violence – at home, on their journey to school, and sometimes at school. Girls feel unsafe and their families fear sexual harassment, violence and insecurity – increasing the likelihood that girls drop out from education and are distracted from learning properly. Girls' mobility is often restricted as a consequence of the fear of violence.

Personal situation

For many adolescent girls, the experience of marginalisation is exacerbated by their own personal circumstances which may include illness, disability, caring responsibilities (for older, ill relatives or younger siblings) which often fall to older girls, or ethnic discrimination. These act as additional barriers which they must navigate in order to attend school and learn. Conflict and insecure contexts are a further threat to girls' education, taking girls away from their homes and away from their schools and putting them and their families in a situation where hard choices (economic, cultural or social) often favour boys over girls. The GEC is working in a myriad of ways with girls, parents, communities and governments to tackle these barriers.



GEC project interventions

Foundational skills in literacy and numeracy, especially for those who need remedial support

- Introducing varied curricula and new methods for teaching foundational skills
- Working with local education authorities to improve classrooms and teaching materials, making them more inclusive and girl-friendly
- Working amongst refugee and migrant populations to enable girls affected by conflict to continue their education
- Offering adolescent girls who cannot attend school opportunities to study through non-formal education

Teachers who have appropriate skills, positive attitudes and who have continued supported to improve

- Supporting schools to introduce new teaching methods and boost teachers' confidence through training
- Trialling and promoting non-violent forms of discipline
- Peer-to-peer mentoring for teachers

Increase self-esteem so that girls are empowered and supported by their peers, parents, teachers and communities and improve their participation in school

- Increasing parental and community awareness about the value of girls' education, strategies to provide resources for girls' education, and freeing girls from household and income-generating responsibilities
- Providing mentoring, 'big sister' schemes and access to role models
- Teaching sexual health and reproduction to adolescent girls at girls' clubs and through the use of media and drama
- Using the media to communicate messages about the importance of foundational skills for girls
- Employing careful, confidence building interactions to help girls to share their experiences of violence, and referring them to appropriate services

Economic support for communities, parents and girls themselves

- Providing financial and in-kind support to encourage parents to enrol out-of-school girls, and keep girls from dropping out
- Assisting low cost private schools to make improvements in school infrastructure
- Supporting parents to generate additional income, while talking to them about the importance of investing in girls' education
- Supporting particularly vulnerable girls with transport to and from school
- Assisting thousands of girls with individually tailored support to help them cope with disability

General lessons

In order to draw out lessons from GEC projects on this topic we focused on some key questions:

1. What barriers do adolescent girls (as opposed to girls more generally) face in accessing and staying in school?
2. What are the reasons girls start to drop out during adolescence? Why do some girls manage to stay on during adolescence – and what are the factors contributing to their decision?
3. What strategies are GEC projects using to address these issues with adolescent girls and other stakeholders?
4. What is the project perspective on the decisions and trade-offs of attending secondary school, as opposed to other options such as vocational training or employment?



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GEC projects are questioning assumptions about the solutions that will – or won't – work

As an example, in Afghanistan, the STAGES project found that rather than families not wanting their girls to go to school after Grade 6, which they had assumed, evidence in fact showed that many families – parents and daughters included – would prefer ongoing schooling, were schooling available, to the options of marriage or staying home for housework. This is regardless of perceived economic impact of schooling. Burde and Linden's 2013 randomised controlled trial of village-based schools in Afghanistan focused, essentially, on what people do, despite what they say. Very strong evidence revealed that even many of those who say they would keep their daughters home to do housework did actually send their daughters to school provided that the school was in the village.

They also began with an assumption that parents would not allow their post-puberty daughters to study under male teachers. However, it became clear that there was a consistent shortage of female teachers. Innovative/distance learning packages for teachers were developed, as well as significant efforts to gain community acceptance for male teachers. Of the 337 teachers hired by CARE to teach lower secondary CBE classes in Khost, Pakiya, and Kapisa provinces (particularly conservative provinces) 62% have been male. Many are young men in this case, approved to teach because of their own or their family's reputation in the community, as well as significant effort by CARE's community mobilisers to persuade parents of their value. In some cases, community shuras send a member to monitor the class, ensuring that propriety is respected. In cases other than CARE's, very old men or mullahs have been considered as "safe" for young adolescent women to study under.

A holistic approach with cooperation between all stakeholders is needed to ensure that a female student remains in school

Different but complementary roles are held by various players in order to ensure female students are retained in school. Examples of roles include the provision of care and psychological support by teacher mentors and role models, the monitoring of attendance and follow up on drop outs as well as the provision of food by parent support groups, the provision of material and general support by the project; and, the leadership and authority provided by school and district authorities.

The combination of barriers in every situation requires a combination of solutions

As girls get older their lives get more complex and so do the reasons why they drop out of school or fail to learn enough when in school. In general, there is no 'one fix' in any context. For example, one project highlighted that a long distance to school can make it difficult and dangerous for a girl to get there. And, for a young girl who is menstruating, a 1-2 hour walk – with only a rag as sanitary protection – is prohibitive. Both issues need to be addressed.

Extreme poverty can still hinder progress

Although the project provides educational needs and psychological support to the female students, there are cases whereby, due to extreme poverty at home, the students still make a choice to drop out of school and fend for their families' needs.

Self-esteem is emerging as a crucial element in ensuring adolescent girls remain in education and needs further investigation

Even with limited resources, there is a lot that girls can achieve with high self-esteem and self-confidence. Projects and programmes should have indicators in their log frames to track self-esteem and self-confidence so that we can better understand the correlation between self-esteem and achievement.

Involving teenage girls in discussions about their own education can address multiple barriers

Providing adolescent girls with a 'safe space' for discussion and feedback mechanisms can help to increase self-esteem and motivation, shape appropriate responses to menstruation management and other practical issues, and improve the quality of teaching – through discussion of the academic challenges.

Working with men and boys is very important in securing longer term cultural change

Community leaders, fathers, uncles and brothers play a crucial role in the decisions that are made about a girl as she reaches adolescence. Projects are working in a number of ways with different groups of males to increase the value attached to the education of girls and engage them as champions of gender equality.

In Ethiopia, ChildHope and Chadet have established 44 'good brothers' clubs, helping boys develop healthier behaviours towards girls within contexts of deep gender inequalities. Club members are helping other boys and men to become aware of the social injustices girls face. Clubs develop their own actions for change. Some good brothers are helping girls to put on community performances and facilitate community conversations about gender and girls' education. Other good brothers are demonstrating feelings of pride for protecting girls from further abuse by actively reporting it through letter-link boxes.

Intervention-specific lessons

Vocational skills

Graduating from formal schools does not guarantee gainful employment – numeracy and literacy can be blended with vocational skills to attract adolescent girls back into education and motivate them to continue and persevere.

Adolescent girls, especially those who have given birth, often prefer to be trained in marketable, technical skills instead of reintegration into the formal school

The Viva/CRANE project in Uganda is blending formal education with practical skills such as soap-making, beads work and book making which can turn into income generating activities.

STAGES in Afghanistan include para-professional (teaching and midwifery) training from the onset, meaning that girls completing the ninth grade are provided with an opportunity for an income and a positive, socially accepted role (even in extremely conservative areas, teaching and midwifery tend to be considered as acceptable professions for women).

Opportunity International's project in Uganda is delivering a financial education programme ('Aflatoun') to girls in schools which appears to be positively impacting on attendance and interest in school and education.

Gender-based violence and early marriage

Adolescent girls require continuous education about sexual violence and forced marriage and must have trusted channels for reporting when violence or the risk of early marriage occurs. This needs to be done alongside interventions with the perpetrators of violence.

Reporting does work

In Mozambique, Save the Children has found that in many communities there is a good relationship between women's groups, girls' clubs and school committees. They all take responsibility in identifying girls who have dropped out of school, share this information and work in harmony to re-integrate girls. Awareness activities are being undertaken and are performed in coordination between these groups. In one case for example, a girl of 15 in the 5th grade had dropped out due to forced marriage. With the intervention of the women's group and the directorate of school, the girl was rescued, the marriage was broken and the girl reintegrated into school.

Processes for dealing with increased number of GBV reports must be adequate

Some projects have found that their awareness raising on gender-based violence has resulted in a marked increase in reporting – which they were not prepared for. Mechanisms need to be put in place to make sure that reporting is dealt with swiftly and sensitively and by the appropriate authorities – this is a significant challenge in many of the countries in which the GEC is working.

Self-esteem

Organising competitions and leagues can help build the confidence and self-esteem of girls

In Uganda, the Viva/CRANE project conducts 'leagues' every quarter that are either based on music, speaking competitions, debates, quizzes or drama. The girls from their Creative Learning Centres compete against other boys and girls from the community.

Role models

Young women are influential role models in the retention of female students in school

Camfed's Learner Guide programme brings older girls into contact with younger girls who are at risk of dropping out of school. The guides are able to relate with and understand better the challenges facing the female students, who in turn view them as experienced but empathetic role models. At recent meetings, Learner

Guides have been extensively praised for the difference they are making in schools and for their own noticeable personal growth, maturity and credibility. They were also commended for returning previously 'unreachable' girls to school and never giving up until the most vulnerable students get the help they need.

Learner guides continue to exceed expectations about the time they have contributed to the role, demonstrating energy, enthusiasm and commitment to supporting students in their local schools.

Future, from Mudzi District in Zimbabwe is aged 21 and runs a business in her community. She was recovering from a life-threatening illness when she heard two girls had made plans to leave school and get married. Community members also told Future about the previous unsuccessful attempts to dissuade the girls, but that did not discourage her. She made a concerted effort to convince the girls not to drop out and after many discussions with Future they decided not to. They both remain in school now. Future says, "I have increased in confidence and [my ability to do] public speaking because of the work we do as Learner Guides. Camfed was there for me when no one could afford to take me to school. Camfed was there for me when I was sick. I will make something of myself and help other people in my community."

Older female role models are also being engaged in GEC projects and we will draw lessons on the benefits of their involvement in future analysis.





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Sanitary kits

A number of projects are reporting that the combination of sanitary wear provision and Menstrual Health Management (MHM) education appears to be an effective strategy for improving girls' attendance and class participation.

The provision of sanitary wear does not work in every context

One particular issue highlighted by Relief International in Somalia have found is that it is not possible to fully solve the problem of girls' monthly absence through the provision of sanitary kits due to the practice of FGM. 98% of girls in Somalia are subjected to the most extreme form of FGM, which involves, not only cutting but also sewing.

"Sanitary kits had an effect on the attendance of some girls who were not able to buy the sanitary kits before, because the sanitary kit will help them to sit in the class while having the

period so their absenteeism will be reduced. But young girls feel pain during the period so for sure most of girls will not attend the school their first or second day of the period."

Engaging communities

Engaging PTAs and community leaders is helpful in preventing early marriages

Red Een Kind's 'What's Up Girls?!' programme in South Sudan have an example of a case where the school mothers engaged the head teachers and PTA when a young girl was being forced

into marriage and the marriage was stopped. The team came to understand that not all men in the community supported early marriage and that having them in the 'advocacy team' yielded better results than having only women.

Engaging both parents is important in advocating for education

Red Een Kind's programme had a "What's Up Men?!" component but they changed this to "What's Up Parents?!". They realised that the women needed to be part of the strategy. Though men are the 'custodians' of the culture, the women do have a say in its practice. They found it was better to have both parents reflecting on their cultural practices so that they could all resolve together whatever changes were required.

"Relief International in Somalia have found that it is not possible to fully solve the problem of girls' monthly absence through the provision of sanitary kits."

Teachers

Investment and innovation is needed to address teacher development at secondary levels so that they are well equipped to respond to the educational needs of adolescent girls

Many projects are training teachers in gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP). Link Community Development, working in Ethiopia, are training teachers in gender-friendly teaching methodologies and indications after training are that teachers are eager to implement new knowledge and that they are much more aware – for example of their use of gender-friendly language. There is demand for more GRP for a wider cohort of teachers.

The Girls' Education Challenge has a zero tolerance policy on misconduct, including mistreatment of individuals and misappropriation of funds. If you would like more information on the whistle-blowing mechanism, or to report misconduct please email gecpmo@uk.pwc.com. The e-mail account is accessible only by a small number of individuals who have been trained on the requirement to keep the information confidential. We will follow up matters on an anonymous basis and are committed to investigate claims thoroughly and fairly.