

LESSONS from the field

Girls'
Education
Challenge



DECEMBER 2019

Alternatives to formal education for marginalised girls

For many of the 263 million children and adolescents who are out of school, formal education is currently not a feasible option. In some contexts, there are no formal schools available, particularly in rural communities. In other cases, children or youth may be over-age for their formal school grade, or other pathways may be more relevant, such as vocational training. In addition, a growing number of school-aged children in many low-income countries means a deficit of places in the formal education system.

As a result, alternatives to formal education are gaining traction, particularly for reaching marginalised children.

Alternative education is an umbrella term used to describe an array of interventions designed to help children and youth who cannot access, or are struggling to learn in, formal learning environments. Alternative education can be particularly useful for reaching those who have missed a chunk of schooling, or those in rural areas. These programmes generally align to the formal system, but are often delivered by non-certified teachers and may not be accredited by the relevant ministry. Examples of alternative provision are accelerated education programmes (AEP), catch-up programmes and community-based education (CBE).

This report first looks at the different types of alternative education programmes provided across the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC). It then takes a closer look at specific alternative education programmes across the GEC and pulls out key learning from five case studies before summarising lessons learned so far.

GEC girls will have had various experiences of education. Some will be able to re-enter formal school with the right support, if school places are available and girls are able to travel to school. However, other girls may



struggle to re-enter formal education; for example, girls who have never been to school or girls who have dropped out and may not want to attend primary school with younger children. In some cases girls are not permitted to return to school – if they become pregnant or are over age for example.

Others may not have time to go to school due to domestic burdens. This is why GEC projects offer a number of different alternative education programmes designed to best meet the learning needs and aspirations of their beneficiaries.

Types of alternative education provision across the GEC

The table below outlines the main types of alternative education provision found in the GEC and who they are suited to. It should be noted that there is some fluidity between these definitions.

TYPE OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION	ACCELERATED EDUCATION PROGRAMME (AEP):	CATCH-UP PROGRAMME:	ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION:	COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION (CBE):
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Run in an accelerated timeframe (compared to formal schools). Is equivalent to formal schooling. Often structured to enable learners to transition to mainstream education once completed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally shorter than an AEP Transitional education programme for children and youth who had been actively attending school prior to an educational disruption Provides learners with the opportunity to study the curriculum missed because of the disruption. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally focus more on the practical literacy and numeracy skills needed for learners' everyday lives. The focus is not reintegration into formal schools nor taking formal exams. Foundational numeracy and literacy is often combined with other components such as vocational or business skills with a focus on applied, practical skills and livelihoods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally fill a gap in government provision and follow the formal school curriculum. Usually taught by community (often non-certified) teachers. In some cases, the curriculum and timetables may be more flexible than in formal schools.
WHO IS IT SUITABLE FOR AND WHY?	Out-of-school learners aged 10-18 years who have missed one or more years of education. Also suitable for learners who have missed several years of schooling and may not be permitted to return to formal school due to age, or who do not want to learn with younger learners.	Out-of-school learners whose education has been disrupted and have missed a year or less of school.	Generally aimed at learners who are older and for whom it is not feasible (or who do not prioritise) to return to formal school.	Generally targeted at learners who do not have practical access to government schools.
EXAMPLES ACROSS THE GEC	<p>Examples in the GEC:</p> <p>GEC-Transition¹: REACH, DRC; STAGES, Afghanistan; SOMGEP, Somalia.</p> <p>Leave No Girl Behind²: Biruh Tesfa, Ethiopia; CHANGE, Ethiopia; Aarambha, Nepal; Closing the Gap, Pakistan; TEACH, Pakistan; AGES, Somalia.</p>	<p>Examples in the GEC:</p> <p>GEC-T: Live, Learn, Laugh, SCHIP Uganda; Sisters for sisters, Nepal; Let our Girls Succeed, Kenya; STAR-G, Mozambique</p>	<p>Examples in the GEC:</p> <p>GEC-T: ENGINE, Nigeria</p> <p>LNGB: EAGER, Sierra Leone</p>	<p>Examples in the GEC:</p> <p>GEC-T: STAGES, Afghanistan; CBE for marginalised girls, Afghanistan; IGATE, Zimbabwe; STAR-G, Mozambique</p>

Finding the correct support and pathway for marginalised girls

Projects have learned the importance of carefully matching girls to different types of project support, based on their learning levels, specific needs and, in particular, their age. They achieve this by carrying out a careful assessment of barriers to education and girls' learning levels before deciding on what intervention is the most suitable. Several GEC projects offer different programmes for different groups of girls. For example:

- STAGES (Afghanistan) provides CBE for primary school-aged girls who cannot access formal education. However, because of the high number of girls that are over-age for their grade, the project also provides an AEP.
- In the Star-G project, Mozambique (See Figure 1), there is a CBE programme for primary school-aged girls who have dropped out of primary school. However, a large number of project beneficiary girls who had finished primary school have no access to secondary school. Thus, the project facilitates girls attending the government secondary-level distance learning programme which is delivered at primary schools.
- Another programme that prepares girls for multiple pathways is the ENGINE project in Nigeria which is aimed at older out-of-school girls (aged 17-23 years). As well as focusing on entrepreneurial, business and life skills, it also builds girls' literacy and

Figure 1



¹ GEC-Transition (GEC-T) projects

² Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) projects

numeracy skills and provides them with support to return to formal education if that is their preferred option.

- The EAGER programme in Sierra Leone targets out-of-school girls (aged 13-17 years³) who do not have basic skills in literacy and numeracy. The needs assessment revealed that girls prioritise applied skills such as numeracy skills to manage transactions and business management. When adolescent girls who had little or no education in Sierra Leone were asked if they would prefer to return to formal school or go to an alternative programme, the majority chose the latter.



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‘One of the key drivers for this preference was because they are older now and for them to restart at the same point they left off makes them ashamed and uneasy. Many said they would not feel comfortable sitting and learning in the same classrooms as younger children’

Sierra Leone LNGB Needs Assessment

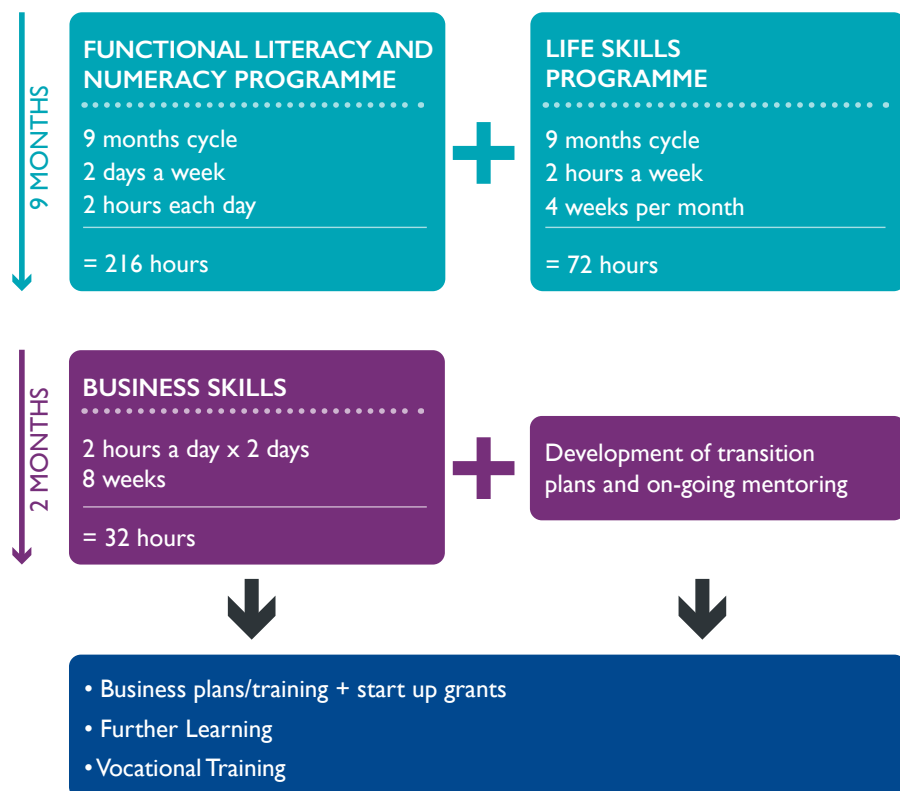
LESSON

Some GEC beneficiary girls, particularly those who are older and over-age for their grade in formal schools, are more interested in gaining practical and applied skills such as financial literacy and vocational skills, rather than returning to formal school as this will more directly benefit their employability and livelihoods.

In EAGER, as can be seen in Figure 2, once the girls have completed the 11-month learning component, girls work with mentors and facilitators to develop their individual transition plans and set goals. This could, for example, include guided development of a market-driven business plan, combined with a start-up grant to set up their own business.

Because projects like ENGINE and EAGER are providing girls with market-relevant skills and are supporting them to gain employment or start their own businesses, a labour market assessment is essential to ensure skills learnt are relevant and meaningful.

Figure 2: EAGER pathway for girls (Aged 13-17 yrs)



Accelerated education programmes (AEPs)

AEPs are gaining more attention as a viable option for children and youth who are over-age for their grade in formal schools, have never been to school, or dropped out early. There is evidence (from across the GEC and other programmes) that AEPs are increasing access to education for populations who would likely not have had such opportunity otherwise, and emerging evidence that AEP learners are outperforming learners in formal schools in some contexts.⁴ In Afghanistan for example, the attendance rate at AEPs (girl-only) is 95% compared to attendance rates of 68% in government schools (STAGES midline report).

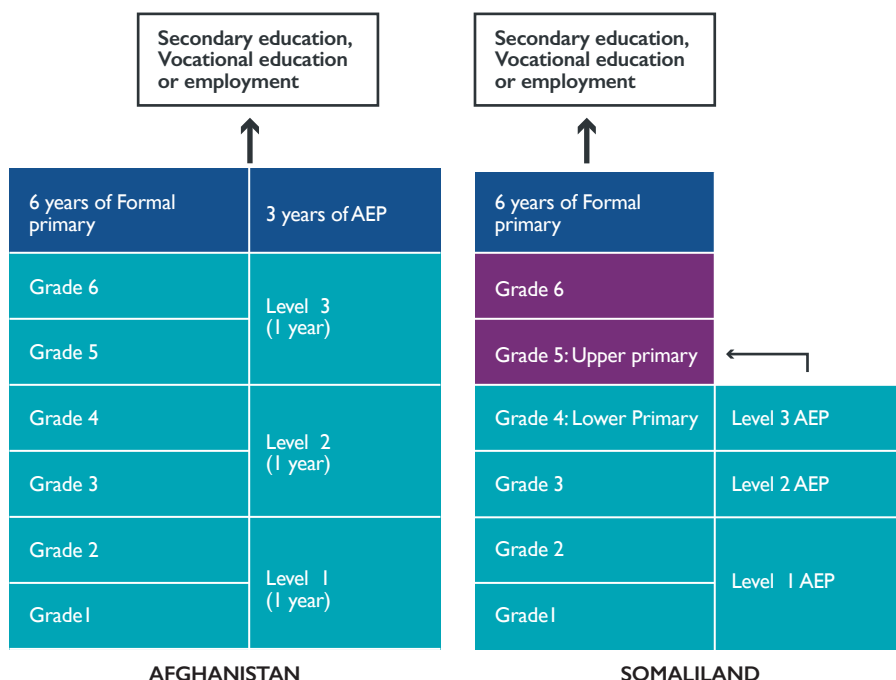
LESSON

AEPs are most suitable for girls aged 10 to 18 years. Girls younger than 10 are not well suited to accelerated education because they are unable to cope developmentally with the accelerated and concentrated rate of learning. (See: <https://inee.org/resources/accelerated-education-guide-principles>)

³ Note that younger girls are not tracked onto an employment pathway until they are a suitable age

⁴ USAID (2016) Accelerated Education in Crisis and Conflict: Building Evidence and Learning; Shah, R. (2015) Norwegian Refugee Council's Accelerated Education Responses: a meta-evaluation; IRC (2019) Meeting the academic and Social-Emotional needs of Nigeria's out-of-school children: what works and what doesn't for an accelerated learning programme; GEC-T (2018) REALISE Baseline report; GEC-T (2019) STAGES midline report. However, it should be noted that formal schools may not always be the best comparison group, as children's circumstances and profiles often differ – also AEPs often have a smaller teacher to student ratio.

Figure 3



In many GEC countries – such as Ethiopia, Afghanistan, DRC and Somaliland – AEPs are already embedded in the government system with existing policy frameworks and curriculum. AEP curricula are condensed, often removing non-core subjects while focusing on literacy and numeracy. Many condense two years of learning into one. For example, in Afghanistan three years of AEP is equivalent to six years of primary education; on completion, learners take the primary-school leaving exam and have the option of transitioning to secondary school. In the Somaliland model, learners transition to upper primary after the AEP programme (See Figure 3).

Across the GEC, AEPs typically fill a critical gap in the provision of educational services to the most marginalised girls who may be out-of-school due to conflict, lack of infrastructure, poverty, early pregnancy or early marriage. For the most marginalised, AEP provides the best ‘second chance’, particularly because when over-age girls do enrol in mainstream schools, they are a lot more likely to drop out.⁵ However, as with all alternative education programmes, AEPs have to be managed carefully to ensure they are not setting up a parallel system and girls are not being pulled from government schools – as in many cases they may be a more attractive option for parents.

Spotlight on projects

The following case studies highlight what is being learned in the GEC about the design and delivery of alternative education programmes for girls.

CASE STUDY I: STAGES, Afghanistan – Community-based education



Evidence from STAGES has shown that one of the main barriers for girls’ attendance at school has been long distances and safety concerns. STAGES has established CBE classes in rural communities close to home, where it is more culturally accepted.

Interventions

- Girls who are over-age for their grade are enrolled in AEPs.
- Primary-aged girls are enrolled in CBEs.
- Lower Secondary CBE classes are set up to enable girls beyond Grade 6 to continue learning.
- The project trains and hires female teachers from the community who are more likely to be aware of the challenges girls face and their realities.

Evidence from the project reveals that CBEs have higher attendance rates than girls in government schools. The project works within the government policy framework which has a high level of specificity with regards timetabling and curriculum and clear pathways into the formal system.

“My two sisters married at the age of 17 and 18. Whenever I approached my father to study and get an education, I was refused. My father believed that girls should not go to school and should stay home and do the housework... After many meetings with Shura members my father allowed me to study... Our community and district doesn’t have any doctors for women which causes a lot of problems, and my dream is to become an obstetrician to help women.”
(Sivita, 16, ALP student, Faryab Province)

LESSONS

- Engagement of community members is a key factor contributing to higher attendance: ‘School Management Committees (SMCs) were highlighted as being the most active source of support to prevent or reduce absenteeism in CBE communities. SMC members intervened with attendance issues by following up with families directly when a girl misses classes.’ (STAGES midline report, 2019)
- Girls attending CBE report feeling safer than girls attending government schools. CBE teachers are more likely to consistently praise girls and less likely to use harmful discipline methods. The midline report (2019) has found that girls who feel safe are likely to have higher literacy scores.
- A lack of female teachers in communities negatively impacts the enrolment and attendance of girls as parents prefer adolescent girls to be educated by female teachers. STAGES tries to break this cycle by supporting young women from the communities to attend a two-year accelerated teacher training course.

⁵ Sabates, R; Westbrook, J; Akyeampong, K; Hunt, F; (2010) School Drop out: Patterns, Causes, Changes and Policies. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO): Paris, France

CASE STUDY 2: Somali Girls Education Promotion Programme (SOMGEP), Somalia – inclusive learning

When assessing the needs of marginalised girls, the SOMGEP project found that many older girls (aged 12 to 19 years) were out of school and had limited education opportunities. This was due to a combination of factors such as long distances to school, financial constraints, early marriage or pregnancy, migration, and negative cultural norms which de-prioritise a girls' education. To meet the needs of these girls, the project introduced the alternative learning programme (ALP). The SOMGEP Alternative Learning Programme has been designed to increase chances of out-of-school girls' transition back to formal school, vocational training and /or (self) employment.

Interventions

- The ALP focuses on both accelerated literacy and numeracy, as well as business and life skills and prepares girls for either a return to formal school, or for (self-) employment.
- Courses are delivered primarily in rural areas where education opportunities are limited.
- ALPs are offered as a two-year condensed course with the literacy and numeracy competencies equivalent to formal upper primary and takes into account learning gaps inherited from the primary level.
- The ALP is facilitated by a local teacher trained by the project, and is composed of four core modules; English language, numeracy, business skills (such as financial literacy, market analysis) and life skills (such as decision-making, problem-solving, leadership and self-confidence).

The project evaluations have found that girls from pastoralists households are particularly at risk of being out of school. These households were hardest hit by the drought, and economic vulnerability means that girls are less likely to attend school regularly. Because the project considers seasonal migration, has flexibility in its scheduling, and has a curriculum tailored to over-age girls, girls from these households consider ALP a better option than formal education (SOMGEP midline, 2019). ALP classes are conducted in Somali to circumvent the challenges in these rural environments where neither teacher nor students have the necessary fluency in English.

LESSONS

- To ensure inclusivity, programmes should conduct teaching in the home language of the girl if they do not have sufficient knowledge of the formal school language of instruction.
- Timetables and scheduling should consider girls' availability and other commitments – as well as seasonal migration.

CASE STUDY 3: Star-G, Mozambique – distance education

The Star-G project has a distance education component which makes formal, secondary school education available to girls in rural communities. While this is not an alternative approach to formal education, it is included as an example of an alternative mode of delivery of secondary school education – to reach marginalised learners.

Interventions

- The project is supporting the Ministry of Education to expand the provision of distance secondary education, by locating the activities at primary schools, meaning girls can continue their education without having to travel long distances.
- This component uses the government distance education curriculum which aligns to the secondary formal school curriculum. Materials are designed in a way that are self-guided.
- The girls are supported by government teachers who run tutorials for the girls in which they can clarify doubts or questions girls may encounter during their self-learning process. Teachers focus on areas in where girls need specific support.
- The project encourages study groups and peer-to-peer support to ensure girls are interacting with, and learning from, their peers.

LESSON

- Distance education is a viable alternative mode of delivery which can address long and dangerous journeys to school for girls in rural areas where a lack of secondary school provision is an issue.

CASE STUDY 4: Live, Learn, Laugh, SCHIP (Strong, Creative, Holistic, Inclusive, Protective), Uganda – a holistic approach

The Live, Learn, Laugh, SCHIP project has set up Creative Learning Centres (CLCs) which provide a 6-month (on average) catch-up programme for out-of-school girls (aged 10-18 years) whose schooling has been disrupted and who need intensive support to catch up with their peers before returning to mainstream school. The goal is to equip girls with the skills, knowledge and confidence to reintegrate back into mainstream schools. The project takes a holistic approach by working with girls, their families and the community. For many of the girls, considering the possibility of returning to school can be daunting as their confidence levels are often low, particularly in their academic abilities. Thus, there is a strong focus on re-building girls' confidence and self-esteem. The main barrier cited for girls' continued education is financial. Whilst the girl is at the CLC, their parents are encouraged to join a Village Savings and Loans Association, or contribute to an income generation activity, to enable them begin to save for the girl's school fees. Free and safe childcare enables girls with young children to attend. Another barrier to girls' learning is abuse in schools and in their communities – thus the importance of working closely with mentors who have been trained in protection and safeguarding.

Interventions

- Viva's local partner CRANE (a network of children's organisations) run the centres in schools, special needs centres, and community spaces.
- Each centre enrolls an average of 25 girls.
- Having two teachers and two family mentors assigned to each group of girls means that the support provided can be individualised.
- CLCs are open from 8am to 4pm, five days a week and also run fun activities during holidays, to re-enforce learning through play and creative engagement.
- Teachers work with the girls to address their specific academic gaps and mentors work with the girls and their families to overcome challenges that led them to drop out in the first place (such as early pregnancy, safety, cost and negative cultural norms).

⁶ Distance education in this example is used as a mode for delivering formal education so does not fit neatly under the umbrella of Alternative Education umbrella. It is included here to illustrate alternative methods of provision.

- Mentors and CLC teachers help negotiate with schools for the re-entry of girls at an appropriate grade, particularly for the many girls who were previously expelled due to pregnancy.
- Once they transition from the CLC to formal schools, a Learning Support Teacher (LST) – who is stationed at a resource classroom in the school – continues to support girl's learning and ensure she is thriving in the school setting.
- Some of the girls who have reintegrated, return to the CLCs during the holidays if they need additional educational or pastoral support.
- Family learning days increase interaction of families with the school and their daughter's learning whilst an IT bus and mobile library come to offer extra-curricular learning.

LESSONS

Integral to project success has been:

- Taking a holistic approach that aims to mitigate the causes of drop out beyond learning gaps
- An individualised approach that engages girls in completing their learning plans and focuses on key learning gaps.

CASE STUDY 5: EAGER, Sierra Leone - Pedagogical approaches

Some projects such as EAGER are ensuring that the pedagogical approach is suitable for their beneficiary girls, and matches their age. Below are some of the features of EAGER's pedagogical approach in their alternative education programme for girls aged 13-17:

- One of the guiding principles is that the curriculum content and facilitator training should reflect the mindset that youth are joining the group with some pre-existing knowledge, important background knowledge and life experiences – and not as empty vessels. The facilitator should draw on learners' experiences to make sessions meaningful, contextually relevant and engaging girls.
- Facilitators are trained in the use of active learning techniques to engage girls in the learning process such as group work, peer-to-peer learning, dialogue and questioning with a focus on developing higher order thinking skills.
- The project takes a real-world approach using girls' lived experiences

as a starting point for engaging older girls. Content is problem based allowing girls to build skills by working through real-life problems they would encounter in their context. For example, Figure 4 illustrates the numeracy competencies targeted that are relevant to everyday life. In this case, she is learning skills that she can apply when setting up and caring for her garden.

- An additional guiding principle is that the content and facilitator training should embody a growth mindset approach – the understanding that everyone has learning capability and this can be developed through practice, hard work and perseverance.

Figure 4

Real World approach using her lived experience

THEME: Setting up a garden

LESSON	COMPETENCY
What should I grow?	Number sense
The size of my garden	Measurement & Data Geometry
When should I plant?	Measurement & Data
Spacing my plants	Measurement & Data Geometry
How many plants do I need?	Number sense Operations
The timeline of my garden	Measurement & Data

Aligning with government systems and priorities

In all five case studies, projects are working alongside government partners. Ensuring that projects are aligned with the wider education system and government priorities, is essential not only to ensure relevancy and buy-in from government partners at all levels, but also to ensure interventions can be sustained beyond the projects' life cycle. It is easier for projects to work in contexts where alternative education programmes are already integrated into the wider system and recognised by government. As is the case with CBE in Afghanistan, and distance education in Mozambique, these are government programmes which the projects are helping roll out due to limited government capacity. In such cases there is a focus on handing over responsibility and ownership to governments where feasible, or linking to existing government initiatives which will continue after project funding ends.

Other programmes such as SOMGEP are piloting new approaches and are not yet accredited. In cases such as this, it is critical to work with relevant government partners from the outset, aligning with government priorities, mapping curriculum frameworks against the formal curriculum where relevant, and ensuring examination and accreditation to facilitate entry from alternative into formal education systems, training or employment if needed.



Alternative education – summary of lessons learned

While the five case studies accounts illustrate some of the positive case studies and findings, projects are still learning what does and does not work well. The following is a summary of some of the key lessons:

- A careful assessment of barriers to girls' learning – and profiling of their needs, age, education background and learning levels – are essential before deciding on what intervention is the most suitable. A labour market assessment is important for programmes focusing on vocational skills.
- Many older and over-age girls prioritise alternative education pathways over returning to formal school. When girls prioritise skills related to gaining employment or starting a business, projects should also prioritise these skills.
- When designing alternative programmes – catch-up and AEPs in particular – it is important to firstly consider the pace and content in relation to the profile and learning level of the girls. Does the curriculum and timetable allow for girls to gain the skills and knowledge needed to succeed (or transition into formal school) once they finish?
- It is important to recognise that barriers to girls' learning are often not just academic, but can also be related, for example, to safety, self-confidence, child-care, cultural norms or cost. Taking a holistic approach to addressing the barriers to girls' learning, as illustrated in the Live, Learn, Laugh, SCHIP case study, has led to more successful outcomes for girls.
- To ensure inclusivity, timetables and locations can be tailored to meet the needs of specific groups of girls. For example, in SOMGEP Somalia, timetables allowed flexibility for pastoralists. SOMGEP also runs programmes in girls' home language to ensure girls can access learning, while building up their knowledge and skills in English.
- Hiring and training female teachers from the communities can help ensure girls' attendance. In addition, teachers from the local community are generally motivated and known by (and accountable to) the community, and are more likely to be in tune with girls' learning needs and challenges.
- Alternative education projects can provide an opportunity to train teachers and community educators in alternative pedagogical approaches that better meet the needs of marginalised girls – particularly older girls. Teaching and learning approaches that are more activity and problem based, and centred on girls' lived experiences can form the basis of teacher professional development programmes.
- Community engagement is key to ensuring the success and sustainability of programmes. In Afghanistan for example, school shuras and School Management Committees have been involved in identifying girls and in ensuring girls are attending regularly, as well as holding community teachers accountable.
- Finally, alternative education programmes should align with wider government education systems and priorities. Government partners should be engaged as early in projects as possible. Transition pathways from alternative education to formal or vocational – as well as examination and accreditation processes - should be clear, and decided with government partners from the outset.

Conclusion

It is clear that alternative education programmes are helping to fill the gap in education provision and support girls whose education has been disrupted or who have fallen behind. However, alternative education programmes have to be managed carefully; government partners and community members should be involved from the outset, and it is important that programmes are responding to un-met needs and are not setting up parallel systems. It is also important to ensure from the outset that the most suitable intervention is selected to mitigate barriers to girls' learning and meet their specific needs. It is also clear that accelerated education and catch-up programmes are viable options for over-age adolescent girls wanting to return to formal schools. It is vital to assess the nature of these barriers to girls' barriers to learning before setting up an AEP, and to work closely with government partners to ensure there are viable pathways back to formal schools. The GEC provides a unique and exciting opportunity to continue learning about, and improving, approaches to alternative and accelerated education. This learning can help ensure that the most marginalised girls are accessing relevant, safe and good quality education opportunities that meets their specific needs and provides them with alternative choices.

USEFUL LINKS AND RESOURCES

Accelerated Education: Principles for Effective Practice:

<https://inee.org/resources/accelerated-education-10-principles-effective-practice>

Accelerated Education: Guidance for Effective Practice:

<https://inee.org/resources/accelerated-education-guide-principles>

Alternative Education Definitions:

<https://inee.org/resources/accelerated-education-definitions>

Accelerated Education Decision Tree:

<https://inee.org/resources/accelerated-education-decision-tree>

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