

What drives value for money in Girls' Education Challenge projects that support girls with disabilities?

This Spotlight Brief is part of a series of papers which looks at the value for money of Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) projects, most of which work with girls with disabilities. This paper focuses on five projects that specifically address girls with disabilities. Evaluations of these projects are starting to highlight some valuable findings. The five projects vary in design. Two of them work within the formal education system and are entirely focussed on girls with disabilities. The other three focus on non-formal education. Baseline assessments found that 13 to 30% of girls reached by these three projects have visible and invisible disabilities, including psychosocial impairments. Indeed, the rates of psychosocial impairments were much higher than expected. This paper is primarily aimed at donors, governments and policy makers who are aiming to scale cost-effective inclusive education interventions and policy approaches, and who want to understand what value for money can mean in the context of supporting girls with disabilities.



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Assessing the value for money of interventions that support girls with disabilities can help determine which approaches are the most effective. Although interventions focused on individual girls might cost more, they can still deliver good value – especially when they are combined with investment in interventions that promote inclusive education at school level (and beyond), making education accessible and relevant for many more students.

The GEC follows the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's Disability Inclusive Development strategy (2018-2023). This takes a twin-track approach:

- specific solutions and individualised support for girls with disabilities (particularly those who may have higher support need)
- mainstreaming disability inclusion across all aspects of programming.

The objective of this twin-track approach is to support girls with all types of impairments, including intellectual, psychosocial or learning disabilities, so that they can participate in mainstream education by removing barriers and facilitating meaningful access.

Which approaches deliver value for money for girls with disabilities?

- **Twin-track approach:** Projects that combine low-intensity inclusive interventions at school or wider levels with more intensive targeted higher-cost interventions deliver the best value for money (see Annex 1 for definitions of the different types of intervention). It is important to carefully balance these two approaches.
- **Accurate data:** Without accurate data it is not possible to identify girls with disabilities within communities and understand the nature of their impairments. Acquiring this data can help to break the cycle of 'invisibility' that many girls with disabilities face. Projects that invest in strong monitoring, evaluation and learning systems are better able to support disabled girls and understand their needs. This helps them deliver efficiently, and they are also better at adapting to changes and challenges.
- **Organisational capacity:** Projects that invest adequate resources in project management capacity and have management teams with relevant expertise are able to deliver better outcomes and consequently better value for money.
- **Complex needs justify higher costs:** The primary objective for girls with complex needs is access and participation in school. Enabling them to do this can require relatively higher costs, but this additional spend is entirely justifiable.
- **Addressing stigma:** Projects that address social stigma around disability through awareness-raising offer good value for money. This is especially true where interventions address the intersection of disability with other barriers. Targeted awareness activities need not be more costly than standardised activities.
- **Teacher professional development (TPD):** Some TPD activities are particularly cost-effective. These include approaches that encourage continuous reflection on disability-inclusive education. This is even more effective when underpinned by robust data monitoring and regular feedback on data and results. However, higher costs do not necessarily mean better quality of training or better results.
- **Sustainability:** Sustainability is critical for value for money. This is most often achieved when projects are aligned with existing government policies, and advocating for and operationalising inclusive education practices. Working with education leaders is also extremely important to encourage a move away from segregated systems for children with disabilities as there are counter to rights-based principles and do not offer good value for money.

Why does value for money matter for girls with disabilities?

Value for money is an important way to think about any education project. It prompts a focus on the best ways to use limited resources. That said, value for money is not simply about reducing costs. It is about identifying ways to deliver bigger or better results with a given level of resources. A key focus is effectiveness: is an intervention delivering results? If the effectiveness of an activity is reduced because of cost savings, value for money is also reduced. Similarly, while an intervention may be inexpensive, if it does not achieve results, it does not offer value for money. For children with disabilities, there is a common misconception that assisting them is costly, with limited educational gain.

This paper seeks to identify which interventions offer greater value for money. We hope this will help other donors, policy makers and implementers make more informed decisions about new projects and programmes that support children with disabilities.

The GEC has a Value for Money Framework that is applied systematically to draw on evidence from evaluation findings. This is supplemented with interviews with project staff. *You can read more about the GEC Value for Money framework and review methodology, see Annex 2.* The Value for Money Framework uses four of the OECD DAC criteria:

1. **Relevance** – has the project invested in the right activities and modalities to respond to the needs and barriers of the girls identified? Has it allocated the right level of resources to them?
2. **(Cost)-effectiveness** – has the project produced the results it was designed to deliver? Has it produced these results at an optimal cost?
3. **Efficiency** – Was the project delivered well? What was the quality of its operations and processes? Was it delivered in a timely manner?
4. **Sustainability** – have the results for girls and others reached by the project continued over time?

How we went about the value for money review

The findings in this paper are based on the endline and midline evaluations¹ of five projects. These evaluations looked at what each project has delivered, using a range of different approaches (a mixed-methods approach). They drew evidence from project data, quantitative surveys with students and caregivers, and key informant interviews with students, teachers, headteachers, district inspectors and project staff. In addition to the project evaluations, this paper has also identified other sources of evidence on value for money, including analysis of activity-based budgets and inputs from a range of GEC staff experts.

Below, we set out the key findings of the review, structured by the four criteria in the GEC Framework.

¹ The projects are ongoing, not all have yet reached the point where they will undergo an end line evaluation.

Findings on relevance

In this section, we consider whether projects have invested in the right interventions and approaches to respond to the needs of disabled and marginalised girls. The review has highlighted that the 'twin-track' approach of targeting the needs of individual girls with disabilities while addressing wider issues of inclusion is appropriate and delivers results. The review has also identified that community-based approaches deliver value for money and highlight the importance of alignment with government strategies.

Relevance for the girls

All girls supported by GEC projects face significant barriers to education. These barriers include poverty, harmful cultural norms and practices, domestic duties, vulnerability to sexual violence and menstruation. In addition, most schools involved in GEC projects do not meet the needs of girls in terms of safety, hygiene, gender-responsive practices and do not have enough female teachers or other role models. This leads to gender gaps in learning. These barriers, combined with the additional barriers often experienced by girls with disabilities, can further exacerbate their exclusion.

We have found that projects which have a conscious understanding of intersectionality are more likely to deliver results. This means that they engage with stakeholders, including girls with and without disabilities, to identify and address barriers whilst developing activities that also address the specific needs of girls with disabilities, often working with organisations of persons with disabilities.²

This approach meets the needs of girls with disabilities well, and the projects that adopted this approach found it easier to deliver sequentially planned activities and to do this efficiently. In addition, there were specific economies of scope – where two units or interventions were delivered together there was a combined lower cost overall than delivering them separately. Because activities were undertaken in parallel, and because those also share the wider barriers to girls' education with disabilities, the overall cost of delivery was reduced. One example of this is providing transport to school, which is a key issue for disabled girls but is shared by other girls. Similarly, safety concerns or menstrual hygiene issues are encountered by many girls, even though they can create particular barriers for girls with disabilities. This is discussed further in the section on effectiveness.

Relevance to context

During the COVID-19 pandemic, marginalised girls were particularly at risk of disengaging from learning. These risks were even more intense for children with disabilities. The five projects conducted a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Analysis to understand the girls' needs. Then, they pivoted quickly to maintain safe contact with them, keep them participating in learning and reducing their isolation. All the projects' COVID-19 responses mirrored the twin-track approach, which was effective.

Community-based inclusive systems were particularly successful and effective in addressing education barriers and tackling social norms. During the lockdowns, one project successfully introduced community-based, small-group learning, facilitated by local teachers. This included children with and without disabilities. In particular, female community-based educators were key to monitoring girls' wellbeing and mitigating their risk of dropping out of school. Community-based inclusive approaches have proved to be extremely powerful. It has created mixed peer groups, decreased girls' isolation with disabilities and supported psychosocial wellbeing.³ Disaggregated data allowed the project to identify and prioritise girls who needed additional support which could be provided through home visits. The project is continuing this approach for girls, even after schools have reopened, and are advocating schools and the Ministry of Education to explore a similar approach to mitigate drop-out.

Training teachers and mentors to provide distance learning support in a targeted and inclusive way was also cost-effective. This was supplemented by training in psychosocial support and developing accessible learning materials and close tracking of engagement in learning. This approach ensured that girls with disabilities continued learning and that educators engaged in professional development on inclusive pedagogy. The result was high levels of girls re-enrolling when school or learning centres reopened.

Relevance to enabling environment

All five of the projects were aligned with their domestic policies and frameworks for disabilities and international⁴ government frameworks. There are existing government education strategies that respond to barriers experienced by girls with disabilities in accessing education in all cases. It is critical to align with these to ensure that projects are and remain relevant within the country. One area, however, where alignment to government policy did not deliver value for money was in relation to analysing data about disability. The GEC requires projects to use the Washington Group questions⁵ to collect disability disaggregated data at each evaluation point. Two projects, which were explicitly focused on disability, also used their government's disability definitions for targeting and implementation. However, this may have led to inconsistencies due to different methods of classification and potentially resulted in more invisible disabilities, such as psychosocial impairment, being overlooked. This compromises ongoing monitoring, project design, efficiency and effectiveness. Survey designs need to address both points.

² Empirical evidence indicates that working with Organisations of People with Disabilities is cost effective – <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-020-8192-0>

³ See – *Adapting interventions to strengthen teaching quality during the COVID-19 pandemic: Experience of the GEC in Afghanistan, Ghana and Sierra Leone*. ECDO – GEC (girlseducationchallenge.org)

⁴ *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)* 1981; *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)* 1989; *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)* 2006; and the *Sustainable Development Goals* (2015).

⁵ The Washington Group Short Set of Questions are used for the GEC-Transition projects (2 projects reviewed here) and the Child Functioning Set of Questions for the Leave No Girl Behind Projects (3 reviewed here).

Efficiency

The key findings in relation to operational processes and systems highlight how critical good monitoring, evaluation and learning systems are if value for money is to be achieved. Unit costs across the projects varied a lot, in some cases reflecting inefficiencies, poor design and poor performance. Accurate baselines are necessary to prevent invisible disabilities from being overlooked. As might be expected, good overall management resulted in the right combinations of activities, contributing to outcomes and keeping costs down.

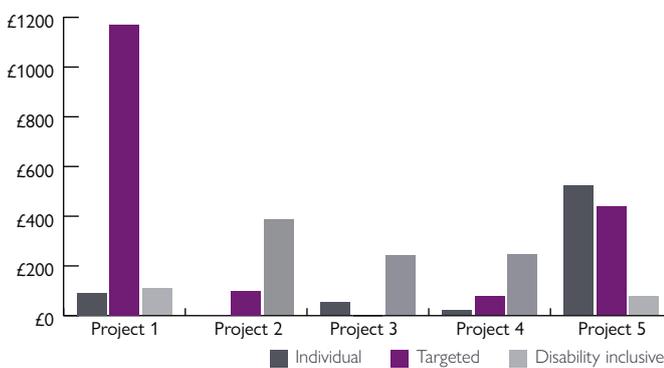
Cost variances

Our analyses have allowed us to compare the costs of interventions and outcomes for different projects. This provides a real insight into value for money, particularly when projects with similar interventions are compared. Some projects prove to be much more cost-effective than others, even when interventions are similar.

We estimated annual cost per beneficiary figures⁶ for different interventions and outcomes across the five projects. We calculated annual cost per beneficiary by undertaking an activity-based costing exercise and then allocating fixed costs and those costs that are directly attributable to these activities. It is clear from Figure 1 and Figure 3 below that these annualised costs per intervention and costs per outcome varied substantially between projects. Two main factors can explain these variations:

- Poor performance
- Genuine differences in context and project type

Figure 1: Annual cost per beneficiary for the three twin-track intervention types across all five projects.



Inclusive activities cover all girls in the sample. Targeted interventions cover smaller specific groups of girls and individual interventions are targeted on a single girl. For some of these girls, then, these costs are layered incrementally, depending on the activity. Girls who received individual and targeted activities and are within the wider beneficiary groups for the inclusive activities have a cumulative unit cost of the sum of the interventions.

Figure 2: Annual Cost per beneficiary figures for each of the five projects each for teacher training, systems strengthening and awareness-raising activities

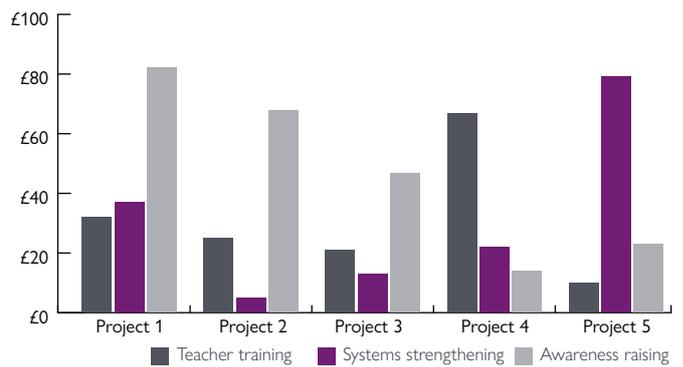
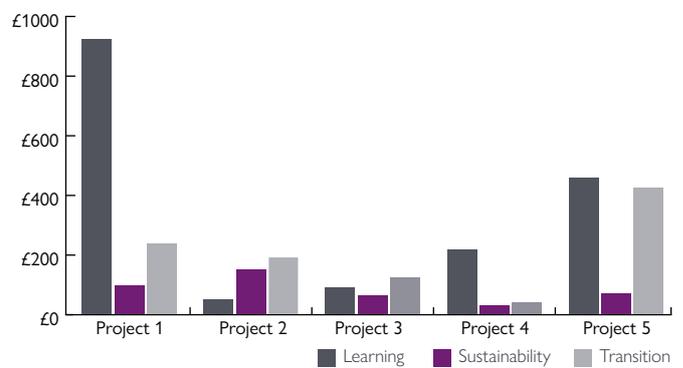


Figure 3: Annual Cost per beneficiary figures per outcome for each of the five projects



In general, projects where costs are higher because of poor performance are those where we have evidence that there is substandard management and weaknesses in monitoring and learning. As a result, interventions are not of high quality, programming is not appropriately targeted and there is a failure to capitalise on economies of scale and scope.

Project 1 is an example of a project with high costs for interventions and outcomes, which reflect weaknesses in management identified through monitoring activities and evaluations. Project 1 has many similarities to Project 5, and it is useful to compare the two projects. Both operate through formal education systems and are focused on girls with disabilities. As shown in Figure 3, Project 5 has much more cost-effective learning outcomes. At half the cost of Project 1, it is much more cost-effective, and this finding is verified in the evaluations.

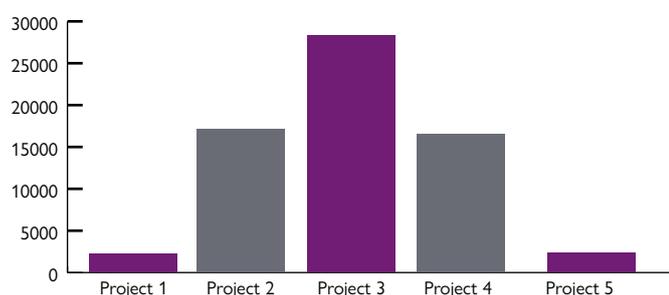
Projects 2 and 4 have relatively low individualised support costs. This can be explained by the fact that they are working through government systems, for example, through local health clinics. As a result, they benefit from fixed government costs (economies of scope). Both of these projects operate in countries that already have relatively strong social protection systems. (Figure 2)

Project 3 offers good value for money, as can be seen in Figure 3. It is cost-effective for all of its outcomes and this is confirmed by evaluations showing excellent learning results (this is discussed further in the cost-effectiveness section below).

There are other explanations for the high variance in project costs. For the most part, these are due to the differing nature of projects (for example, whether they deliver through formal

school systems or adopt community-based approaches), their local contexts, how intense their programming is, and the different types of beneficiaries targeted. For example, Projects 2, 3 and 4 focus on supporting girls supported through the [Leave No Girl Behind](#) programme. This targets the most marginalised adolescent girls who are out of school. In such cases, we can sometimes justify relatively higher costs, given their complex needs and difficulties in accessing education. The scale of the projects also varies. This impacts costs – larger-scale projects are likely to benefit from economies of scale.⁷ As shown in Figure 4, Projects 1 and 5 are not likely to benefit from economies of scale because they target only a small number of beneficiaries. On the other hand, Project 5 covers a large number of indirect beneficiaries through its approach of developing school-based inclusion teams (see next section).

Figure 4: Total number of direct target beneficiaries per project



Target numbers for the entire project duration

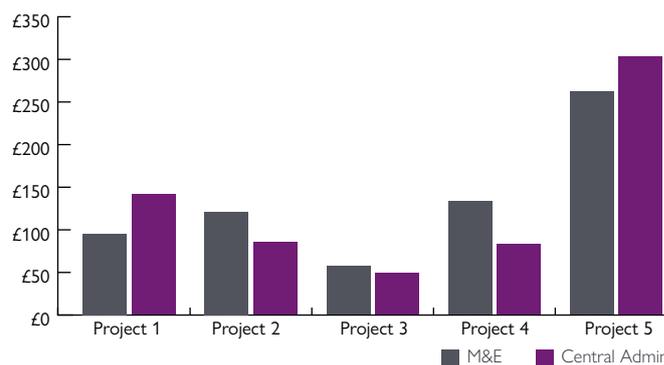
Monitoring and learning

A key finding from this review was that projects that allocated adequate resources to management and monitoring and learning activities were more efficient and effective. This was particularly true where projects used data to inform and adapt as it unfolded. The implementation efficiency of the five projects varied considerably, and the differences were particularly striking in relation to monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

M&E is especially important when working with highly marginalised groups. Targeting the right beneficiaries is particularly complex, especially when a twin-track approach is used, as this involves multiple layers of interventions with varying levels of support for girls with different needs. Some girls were covered only by the inclusive interventions, a smaller subset covered by more targeted interventions, and an even smaller subset covered by individually tailored interventions. To measure results, projects need a well-designed data collection system that can glean more nuanced data, especially categorising girls according to their disability status. This can help identify the interventions that are appropriate to them as individuals.

Good M&E does not necessarily cost more. The review singled out Project 3 as one that invested well in M&E resources, used the data to inform design and undertook very good evaluations. As a result, the M&E spend for this project was significantly lower than the other projects, as seen in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Annual cost per beneficiary in M&E and central administration functions per project



The review also found that it is essential to invest resources in identifying a baseline. This enables the needs of girls to be assessed at the outset and activities to be appropriately targeted. Projects that did this well were the most effective. Strong baselines included detailed assessments of the education situation of the girls, review of their impairments, identification of their needs and the barriers to their learning, and then establishing monitoring processes to better track learning and transition outcomes. Specifically, undertaking a full baseline assessment prevented further costs and inefficiencies that other projects incurred when they had to 'retrofit' new data requirements onto the baseline at a later date. The successful projects continued to assess the girls' needs to successfully and efficiently implement targeted interventions with attention to each girl's specific context.

Central management functions

There is a clear correlation between projects that are successful in achieving outcomes and those that are generally well managed. The less successful projects lacked management expertise and did not have the capacity to bring together know-how on disability, gender, social norms, pedagogy, behaviour change activities and learning. Project 1 fell significantly short, having only spent £141 per beneficiary per year on central administration. In general, it is important to allocate the right amount of finance and resources and the right quality of resources in the management of the project to achieve good value for money.

Findings on cost-effectiveness

Cost-effectiveness is arguably the most important of the value for money criteria. It focuses on the results achieved by projects and at what cost. It is essential to be clear what we mean by 'results' in relation to educating girls with disabilities. For many of them, access to and participation in education is a significant result. We identified that the twin-track approach, which combines individualised and targeted approaches with wider work on increasing inclusion for girls, is the most effective in delivering results. We also identified that moving from special needs schools towards including all students in general classrooms and schools can be cost-effective when done in a locally relevant approach.⁸ We also assessed the value for money of individualised interventions and concluded that assistive devices provide particularly good value, particularly when leveraging government resources.

⁷ A situation in which unit costs reduce as the number of beneficiaries increase, as fixed costs are spread over more beneficiaries.

⁸ Sibanda, Patrick. (2018). The dynamics of the cost and funding of inclusive education in developing countries. *Scientific Journal of Pure and Applied Sciences*. 8(1) 6-822. 10.14196/sjpas.v7i9.2555. and Banks, L. M., & Polack, S. (2015). *The economic costs of exclusion and gains of inclusion of people with disabilities: Evidence from low and middle income countries*. London, CBM.

Enabling access and participation

For girls with disabilities, access, participation and attendance outcomes are critical. In general, in education projects, effectiveness has been traditionally measured by the amount of learning achieved and whether beneficiaries transition to further education or employment. However, the intersection of disability, gender and poverty for most girls included in GEC projects makes access even more challenging. Across the GEC, projects are supporting access (getting girls with disabilities into school), participation (keeping girls with disabilities in school) and quality (enabling girls with disabilities to learn at their potential). All of the projects reviewed delivered good results in relation to access and participation. Four of them also succeeded in engaging girls with disabilities in effective learning. Without these GEC projects, these girls would likely have remained at home, facing acute risks given socio-cultural norms on gender-based violence, early pregnancy, marriage, and child labour. For this reason, forming peer groups networks and developing agency and independence are particularly vital.

The twin-track approach was effective in delivering results. Interventions that directly resulted in access were often relatively high-cost activities targeted at individuals or small groups, such as bursaries, transport provision and payment of school fees. Our research indicates that whilst some of these activities were cost-effective, others were less so. It is therefore important to ensure a balance between these interventions. Individual interventions that led to girls with disabilities accessing schools also included assessments, provision of assistive devices and medicalised interventions. However, when these individualised interventions run in parallel with wider interventions, which include girls with disabilities, but are not only targeted at them, the results are even more striking. For example, some projects linked girls to government assessments and rehabilitation systems or social protection schemes. This can provide value for money as, for example, in Project 2 which had no individual costs (Figure 1) as these were borne by government systems and structures.

Disability-inclusive interventions include physical school improvements, a focus on safety and wellbeing, safeguarding, teaching and learning quality improvement, and engaging with the broader school community on awareness-raising. This review provides evidence that these activities have enabled most girls with disabilities to enter school, participate and engage in learning. Indeed, three projects (Projects 2, 3 and 4 in Figure 3) mainly focused on disability-inclusive interventions across their programme. In addition, findings indicate that their cost per outcome was relatively low and cost-effective.

Value for money can be achieved by focusing on mainstream teachers and facilitators. Teaching girls with disabilities does not always require expensive additional disability training and developing a new set of specific skills. Educating girls with disabilities can first be done by improving teaching and learning for all children. Disability-inclusive pedagogy, if delivered correctly, can be cost-effective because educators can teach students with diverse needs and learning styles, including those with disabilities without high support needs.

All five projects trained teachers in disability-inclusive pedagogy. Two of the projects using this approach had particularly good learning results for girls with disabilities. One of these projects (Project 3) had an annual cost per beneficiary of £241 for

inclusive activities (including teacher training), based on 20,800 girls. Project 2 had higher costs, with an annual cost per beneficiary of £386 for inclusive activities based on a target of 11,470 girls. However, the target groups of both projects were quite different, as were the activities. Girls in Project 2 were some of the most marginalised adolescent girls in the country with high rates of those with psychosocial disabilities, who were pregnant or young mothers, girls who married early, and those who have been affected by gender-based violence. Many of these girls demonstrated significant gaps in social and emotional learning. Women-led spaces using young local female mentors were set up to reach those girls with and without disabilities (16% of the cohort had disabilities) to teach the life and business skills sessions, provide psychosocial support and ultimately support transition. The mentors and their teachers required intensive support and training, which added to the cost base.

Project 3, on the other hand, was working with girls who were less marginalised. As a result, it needed fewer adaptations to address girls with disabilities. In particular, there was a government-run Complementary Basic Education system in parts of the country, which was appropriate for some of the target groups.

Teacher training – reflection and adaptation

Better quality training is not necessarily related to costs – it is related to the design and delivery of the training. Therefore, it is important to follow best practice and design training that helps teachers develop through self-reflection, peer support, lesson observations, feedback and coaching. Inclusive pedagogy is also more effective if combined with training in other core areas such as gender-responsive and systems-strengthening work. Moreover, engaging school management and leaders is key in developing an inclusive school.

Projects with successful learning outcomes for girls with disabilities built more reflective practices in their teacher training. Rather than taking a standardised approach to teaching learners with specific challenges, this approach asked facilitators to be problem solvers in the learning environment, make adaptations to pedagogy and timing of lessons, and modify learning spaces to account for multiple barriers faced by their students.

Project 5 was particularly effective in its continuous school-based teacher professional development. Teachers changed their teaching practices by trying out new inclusive methodologies and adapting them to meet better the needs of their learners with and without disabilities. By locating inclusive teacher professional development at the school level, support was more sharply tailored to meet needs, enabled professional discussions, and encouraged school leadership and local government officials to observe, understand and champion new approaches. That project found that improvements in a supportive learning environment led to improvements in both literacy and numeracy. In addition, its approach to teacher professional development was cost-effective, at an annual cost per beneficiary of £89 (teacher training and system strengthening costs combined).

In contrast, Project 1 did not adopt this approach. Instead, it tended to implement one-off teacher training. These were found to be cost-ineffective. Without follow-up training or support, teachers were likely to forget the training and implement inclusive education practices over time. Although

its annual cost per beneficiary for teacher training was only £32 (or £69 when combined with systems strengthening), this was not a cost-effective use of resources. The GEC has recommended that this project focus on a whole-school approach to inclusive education by training school management and leaders in inclusive teaching practices, encouraging peer mentoring within teachers, and offering more joined-up support with parents.

Social norms, stigma and discrimination

For girls with disabilities, social stigma creates barriers. Interventions are necessary to address them, especially when they intersect with other barriers. The interventions that have had a positive effect are the ones that have adopted a twin-track approach, undertaking a combination of awareness-raising activities relating to the desirability of inclusion, with one-on-one engagement with and support to families of disabled girls by people from the community. In Project 5, the evaluations identified that girls with disabilities who felt respected by family members or their community had much higher literacy scores at the end of the project than girls with disabilities who do not feel respected by their community (63.7% compared to 50.92%). Additionally, the extent to which girls with disabilities felt included in community events was a statistically significant predictor of whether a girl experienced a successful transition into further education or employment.

Project 2 did not address the intersection of disability and gender well, which was reflected in the results. This project had an annual cost per beneficiary figure on awareness-raising of £82. However, these activities could have been much more cost-effective if they had integrated awareness-raising around wider gender issues with disability. This was specifically on social norms around gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health (SRH), with these topics needing both a disability and gender lens. This would not have cost significantly more, but the results would have been better and thus provided greater cost-effectiveness. We can see this by comparing this project to Projects 3 and 4, which addressed intersectionality around gender and disability much more effectively, including in their work on gender-based violence and SRH. Adopting an intersectional lens means that these projects moved beyond assumptions around the needs of girls with disabilities, and instead addressed the barriers as systemic and structural, rather than the identities of disability and gender themselves.

This twin-track and intersectional approach was reflected in Projects 3, 4 and 5, with positive results on community awareness and removing stigma for girls with disabilities. However, Project 2 did not measure stigma against girls with disabilities and they scaled back their awareness-raising activities as a result of this. This was not good value for money. Their recent evaluation found a general perception in the community that education does not lead to valuable opportunities for girls. This social norm is a significant factor in hindering both girls' learning and transition outcomes. Investment in awareness-raising on this topic could have improved results cost-effectively.

The value for money review has identified that during COVID-19 school closures, many girls with disabilities preferred to participate in community-based hubs or home-based learning and felt that they were better supported there. An evaluation in Project 4 found improvements in girls with disabilities' self-esteem and life skills after participating in learning in a community-based hub. In general, regular school attendance may not be possible for some girls with complex or multiple disabilities, and other approaches to inclusion need to be considered, with more personalised interventions, as shown here.

Project 5 created a male mentoring scheme where men mentored other men to promote greater involvement by fathers in the education and protection of girls with disabilities. However, it emerged that a large proportion of girls with disabilities live in female-headed households, which suggests that the male mentorship programme may not be universally relevant to all girls with disabilities. A stronger focus on female mentors might improve results, with marginal impact on costs, thus significantly improving cost-effectiveness.

Individualised interventions

We have highlighted the value of twin-track approaches. This means that individualised interventions for girls with disabilities are equally important in achieving results in the right contexts in a balanced way. All projects leveraged existing government services, including health, safeguarding and social protection services, to keep costs down. In fact, with four projects, the project interventions enabled girls and their parents to access government financial assistance and benefits that they were entitled to but had been unable to access before.

We have found that assistive devices are particularly effective and can improve the learning outcomes of girls with disabilities, thus justifying the relatively higher costs. There are wider initiatives designed to lower costs and make assisted devices more available and adapted to their context, such as ATscale.⁹ Girls who need assistive devices are more likely to have complex needs or experience multiple intersecting inequalities. Many of these girls would otherwise be excluded entirely from education programming.

In Project 1, the evaluation indicated that girls with assistive devices transitioned more successfully than girls who lacked assistive devices (90% as opposed to 84%). In Project 5, research indicated that receiving an assistive device supports girls to better engage in class and learn in school. Finally, in Project 4, the evaluation found that assistive devices have greatly improved the participation levels of learners with a disability, as noted by feedback from Community Educators.

In many countries, education services for students with disabilities take the form of segregating them, either in separate classrooms or in special schools, with no opportunities for engaging with peers who do not have disabilities. This segregation often means a separate curriculum, which may not prepare them for transition into education or employment. Academic research and evaluations of GEC projects show that including all students in general education classrooms and schools can be more cost-effective¹⁰, especially when it means that all children receive appropriate educational programmes and curricula relevant to individual needs whether they have disabilities or not.

⁹ ATscale, the **Global Partnership for Assistive Technology** was launched in 2018 with the ambitious goal of catalysing action to reach 500 million people with life-changing assistive technology by 2030. Strategy Overview — [ATscale. \(atscale2030.org\)](https://atscale.atscale2030.org/)

¹⁰ Sibanda, Patrick. (2018). The dynamics of the cost and funding of inclusive education in developing countries. *Scientific Journal of Pure and Applied Sciences*. 816-822. 10.14196/sjpas.v7i9.2555. and Banks, L. M., & Polack, S. (2015). *The economic costs of exclusion and gains of inclusion of people with disabilities: Evidence from low- and middle-income countries*. London, CBM.

Findings on sustainability

Sustainability is key to value for money. However, no intervention can truly deliver strong value for money if its effects do not last beyond the project's life. The review has identified the importance of a structured and systematic approach to sustainability working with governments and other people with disabilities. Ad hoc approaches do not deliver good value. Specifically, there needs to be more intentional and carefully designed programming for sustainability, with a balance of the twin-track approach, if the needs of girls with disabilities are to be addressed in the longer term.

It is too early to assess the sustainability of most of the projects. However, Project 5 is nearing completion and is now mainly focused on sustainability activities. Emerging evaluation findings show that the project has significantly impacted the enabling environment for children with disabilities at the community, school and system levels. The project has been working with the Ministry of Education to institutionalise child-to-child clubs in government schools and school-based inclusion teams, which will continue after project closure. The project is also working with county governments on developing referral systems and child-friendly policies focused on disability and supporting the government to introduce a sector policy on education and training for learners and trainees with disabilities. This project has spent £79 per person annually on system-strengthening activities, which is deemed cost-effective, given the results it is delivering.

Three projects have historically taken a more ad hoc approach to sustainability – most often, these are projects which have longer to run. However, the most recent evaluations of these projects have not identified positive sustainability results. Two of these projects have already recognised this shortcoming and have revised their sustainability approaches to be more strategic. Project 1, has limited capacity or ability to influence or engage at different levels in the education system on sustainability activities.

This project has spent a considerable amount on sustainability activities (on average £96 per person annually). This cannot be seen as cost-effective due to its lack of impact.

The evaluations to date have identified some key drivers of success in relation to sustainability; a favourable political environment; the ability of the project to lever relationships and influence opportunities; participation of girls and other stakeholders with disabilities in design and implementation of the sustainability approach; organisational capacity to facilitate processes and coordination other non-state actors with similar interests; raising awareness in public (for public consultations); and sensitisation about laws passed at the national level which need to be enforced at county or district levels.

Conclusions

Looking at GEC projects for girls with disability through a value for money lens has led to some important findings. Although it costs more to address the needs of individual girls with disabilities to help them access and participate in education, these individualised interventions are best balanced with some system-wide approaches that address wider barriers to girls' education. If a project is well designed with a twin-track approach, it is more likely to be effective and deliver value for money. Informed, reflective and purposeful approaches to targeting girls, gender and disability, disability-inclusive pedagogy, learning and sustainability contribute to good value for money. Management systems are important in delivering value for money. In particular, it is critical to have a robust monitoring system and to be able to use emerging monitoring data to adapt the project as it develops. As the GEC continues, and as further evaluations and more details about costs of activities are identified, we anticipate additional valuable learning and insights that can help other projects address the needs of girls with disabilities effectively, while delivering value for money.



Annex 1: Definitions of intervention types

- **Disability-inclusive activities:** Inclusive education is a transformational process of constant change and improvement within schools and the wider education ecosystem to make education welcoming and participatory achievement-oriented. Inclusive education identifies and removes barriers that exclude learners within each unique situation/context.¹¹ Inclusive education likewise calls for addressing the needs of all children, irrespective of the range of abilities or disabilities. Inclusive education impacts on those with or without disabilities and can have indirect beneficiaries.
- **Targeted activities:** These specifically target girls with disabilities or specific groups of girls with disabilities only, not ONLY wider beneficiaries. So, this may include specific learning or transition accommodations for girls with disabilities or cash transfers for all girls with disabilities. In addition, this covers some project activities. These activities are needed to ensure that girls with disabilities can access and actively participate in education. Most girls with disabilities would be unlikely to attend school/learning centres without these targeted activities.
- **Individualised activities:** These activities support individual girls. This is likely to include activities like assessments, one-off support activities, very targeted and individualised interventions (i.e., individualised education plans). These are likely to support girls with complex needs (such as deafblindness) or who experience multiple intersecting inequalities (for example, girls with disabilities who are young mothers living in a rural area) who otherwise would be excluded entirely from education programming.

Cost indicators

Table 1: Value for money cost-effectiveness and cost per activity indicators

Name of indicator	Definition of indicator	What can it tell you
Cost-effectiveness	% of expenditure spent on each outcome generated, with a narrative on outcomes	Here we can see the "cost effectiveness" of the outcomes, so relative comparisons to understand which outcomes cost the most. We are essentially matching up the narrative on outcomes with expenditure spent to draw judgements on cost-effectiveness in semi qualitative/quantitative way.
Cost per activity	Annual cost per beneficiary per activity defined – inclusive, targeted for girls with disabilities/subgroups of girls with disabilities and individuals	Here we determine how much was spent on the key activities. To ensure comparability across activities within projects (and to a degree across projects), this indicator is standardised by defining an annual cost per beneficiary per activity. Note that systems strengthening work is taken out of the budget for these indicators as those activities are not designed to impact girls directly in the short to medium term.

¹¹ EENET (n.d.) What Is Inclusive Education? UNESCO (2016). Reaching Out to All Learners – A Resource Pack for Supporting Inclusion.

Annex 2: GEC VfM review methodology

The aim of the GEC VfM framework is to offer a quick pragmatic methodology to review the VfM of a GEC project by using existing evaluation findings. The framework uses the OECD DAC criteria (relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability) and evaluation findings, and reframes them through a VfM “lens” drawing out the key features of the findings that point to strong efficient value generation for the right people against optimal costs and resource allocation.

Effectiveness

The GEC approach to VfM analysis relies on the extraction of effectiveness data from the evaluation reports (midline and endline). This should include all the different types of outcomes assessed (learning, transition and sustainability) and the intermediate outcomes, such as wellbeing and life skills, self-esteem, and social norms and behaviour changes. It should also include data on how effective interventions have been for different targeted subgroups. All types of data used to demonstrate effectiveness are relevant for VfM purposes (quantitative or qualitative data, including the beneficiaries’ voices on what they found most valuable). Effectiveness can either be assessed for a GEC project as a whole, or for separate components. Some projects’ midlines or endlines may be able to disentangle the impact and causality of certain interventions on outcomes over and above others. This likely will only be feasible for evaluations with a comparison group.

Cost-effectiveness

With activity-based budgeting, specific interventions can be assessed on cost-effectiveness. Costs can be presented in cost per girl format, with narrative attached to it, explaining what the overall cost per girl achieved in terms of outcomes observed. The number of girls reached by interventions can differ, thus giving rise to very wide-ranging figures. These variances should be discussed within the VfM analysis. Benchmarking to similar projects within the same context would be useful. If there are strong, statistically significant findings, with a control group of girls displaying the counterfactual ‘without project’ learning achieved in a year of schooling, the analysis can be taken further to estimate the Cost-Effectiveness Ratio (CER): additional years of schooling per \$100 spent.

Relevance

The GEC approach to VfM and relevance is to use evaluation report findings around relevance to understand whether resources were allocated to meet the needs and objectives identified upfront, and whether optimal resources were allocated across activities. If such needs changed over time, the VfM review should consider whether resources were reallocated to reflect this to maintain relevance of the programme. An equity angle to relevance would determine whether or not the right beneficiaries were targeted by the project according to needs, and if enough or optimal resources were allocated to various targeted groups. The analysis should consider whether, in retrospect, the budget would have been carved differently across activities to reflect relevance better, and whether there was a correct allocation of funds for technical functions, monitoring and evaluation, and management etc.

Sustainability

Sustainability within the GEC is measured by:

1. A long-term continuation of outcomes for the direct beneficiaries themselves (including targeted schools and communities) and
2. Replication and/or scale-up or adoption of project activities without the need for FCDO funding.

A project may have sound input costs (Economy), have a demonstrated ability to translate its activities into quality outputs (Efficiency), and achieve its targets with regard to learning and attendance (Effectiveness), but may not have a strong sustainability case. Sustainability is not always covered in the conventional measures of VfM. But it is another factor to justify expenditure. The evidence of evaluation findings on contributions to sustainability should be integrated into a VfM narrative. Evidence of replication or scale up beyond project funding would point to very strong VfM. Sustainability intent may have been present from the start in the form of specific design features or plans. But over time, as contexts have changed, contributions to sustainability may not have materialised. This may require projects to undertake additional activities targeting sustainability that increase their costs but do not necessarily improve their efficiency or effectiveness in the short term. These should be considered in a VfM assessment. Another angle to considering costs and sustainability is defining the minimum spend for activities required to achieve sustainable outcomes. For example, determining the cost of a minimum amount of project exposure/ duration or intensity necessary to achieve sustained outcomes based on findings.

Efficiency

Taking a narrative approach, assessing efficiency involves understanding how smoothly processes and interventions have been delivered (speed, quality, cost). There are four aspects to efficiency:

1. Whether the project as a whole was delivered on time and on budget
2. Assessment of the speed, quality and cost of the operating models for each intervention and the project as a whole
3. Assessing the efficiency of processes and management of the project as a whole
4. Assessing the efficiency of targeting girls (inclusion or exclusion errors).

Limitations of the GEC VfM approach

The VfM analysis is dependent on the evaluation findings, so its efficacy depends on the efficacy of the evaluation findings. It is also dependent on the ability of projects to producing expenditure data in relevant formats (activity-based budgeting). VfM assessments such as these are not often appropriate for making comparisons with other projects, due to differing contexts, cost structures and activities.

Girls'
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