

Leave No Girl Behind

Updating our commitments to the most marginalised girls

THE 2018 COMMITMENT

"We will commit to a new 'Leave No Girl Behind' funding window to the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) programme. The GEC transforms girls' life chances (over 1.4 million so far) and this new funding window will award 15 projects¹ and support 10,000 girls with disabilities.

"The 'Leave No Girl Behind' funding will:

- Provide access to better quality education, transition to further education and employment opportunities and livelihood transition funds, for example, in Malawi and Nepal.*
- Ensure all 'Leave No Girl Behind' projects use the Washington Group questions. Implementation will start before the end of the year."*

Introduction

As part of the second phase of the Girls' Education Challenge, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office committed 'Leave No Girl Behind' funding with the aim of reaching up to 190,000 highly marginalised girls and supporting essential interventions to provide literacy, numeracy and skills relevant for life and work.

Leave No Girl Behind projects tackle harmful social and gender norms that contribute to girls being out of school in 10 countries across Africa and South Asia. They address complex circumstantial barriers that have led to these high

levels or marginalisation which include girls with disabilities, orphaned girls, child brides, young mothers, refugees, victims of gender-based violence and modern-day slavery, and girls living in extreme poverty.

Girls receive support in several areas, including non-formal education focused on functional literacy and numeracy; skills and livelihoods; empowerment, agency, and rights; sexual and reproductive health and rights; community-based awareness-raising and advocacy; and systems-level capacity building and advocacy.

This document provides an update on the commitments we made in 2018. Where are the *Leave No Girl Behind* projects working? What are they doing? What progress and achievements have been made?

It also takes a closer look at one cohort of these girls: those with disabilities. Disability has emerged as one of the most critical areas of marginalisation. Most projects discovered at an early stage that support was needed for more girls with disabilities than they had anticipated. At the Global Disability Summit 2022, donors, governments and NGOs will be focusing on disability inclusion, particularly in education. This document offers some of the lessons that have already been learned by project staff and communities, often working in challenging contexts. We hope it provides some valuable insights for policy and decision makers who want to build on the GEC's work to help girls with disabilities grow in confidence and learn.

SUPPORTING GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH THE GIRLS' EDUCATION CHALLENGE

Progress in our work with girls with disabilities:

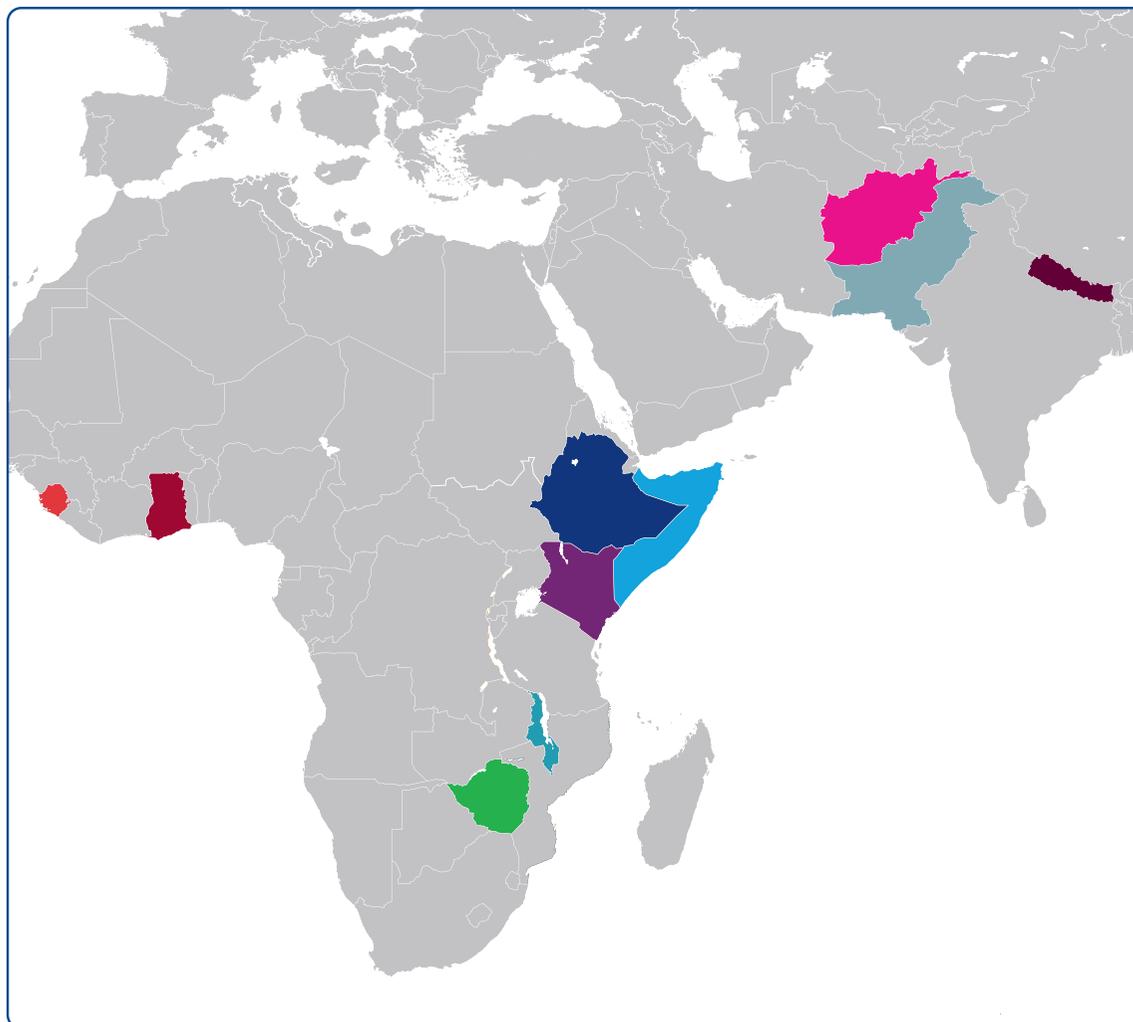
- Funding awarded to **14** *Leave No Girl Behind* projects, who are currently supporting **126,372** highly marginalised girls in 10 countries
- Of these girls, **31,550** are girls with disabilities that are now accessing learning, this is over **three** times the original commitment
- All projects systematically use Washington Group Questions to determine disability prevalence, monitoring and evaluation, and results reporting

At the start of *Leave No Girl Behind*:

- **18%** of girls have at least one disability.
- Most projects reported a much higher prevalence of girls with disabilities than expected – some up to **36%**.
- The most prevalent disabilities identified amongst the girls were psychosocial, including anxiety and depression (affective impairments).

¹ 14 projects were awarded grants

Where are the 'Leave No Girl Behind' projects working?



Sierra Leone

Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient (EAGER)

International Rescue Committee

Beneficiaries: 32,500

Ghana

Strategic Approaches to Girls' Education (STAGE)

World Education Inc

Beneficiaries: 17,000

Zimbabwe

Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE)

PLAN International

Beneficiaries: 16,500

Malawi

TEAM Girl Malawi

Link Education

Beneficiaries: 5,000

Ethiopia

Biruh Tesfa for All (Bright Future)

Population Council

Beneficiaries: 10,500

CHANGE

People in Need

Beneficiaries: 31,000

Kenya

Education for Life

ActionAid International

Beneficiaries: 5,000

Somalia

Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia (AGES)

Beneficiaries: 42,000

Pakistan

Teach and Educate Adolescent Girls with Community Help (TEACH)

International Rescue Committee

Beneficiaries: 35,000

Closing the Gap

ACTED

Beneficiaries: 5,500

Afghanistan

Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Education Success

Stages

Beneficiaries: 5,660

Nepal

Marginalised No More (MnM)

Street Child

Beneficiaries: 7,500

Aarhamba

People in Need

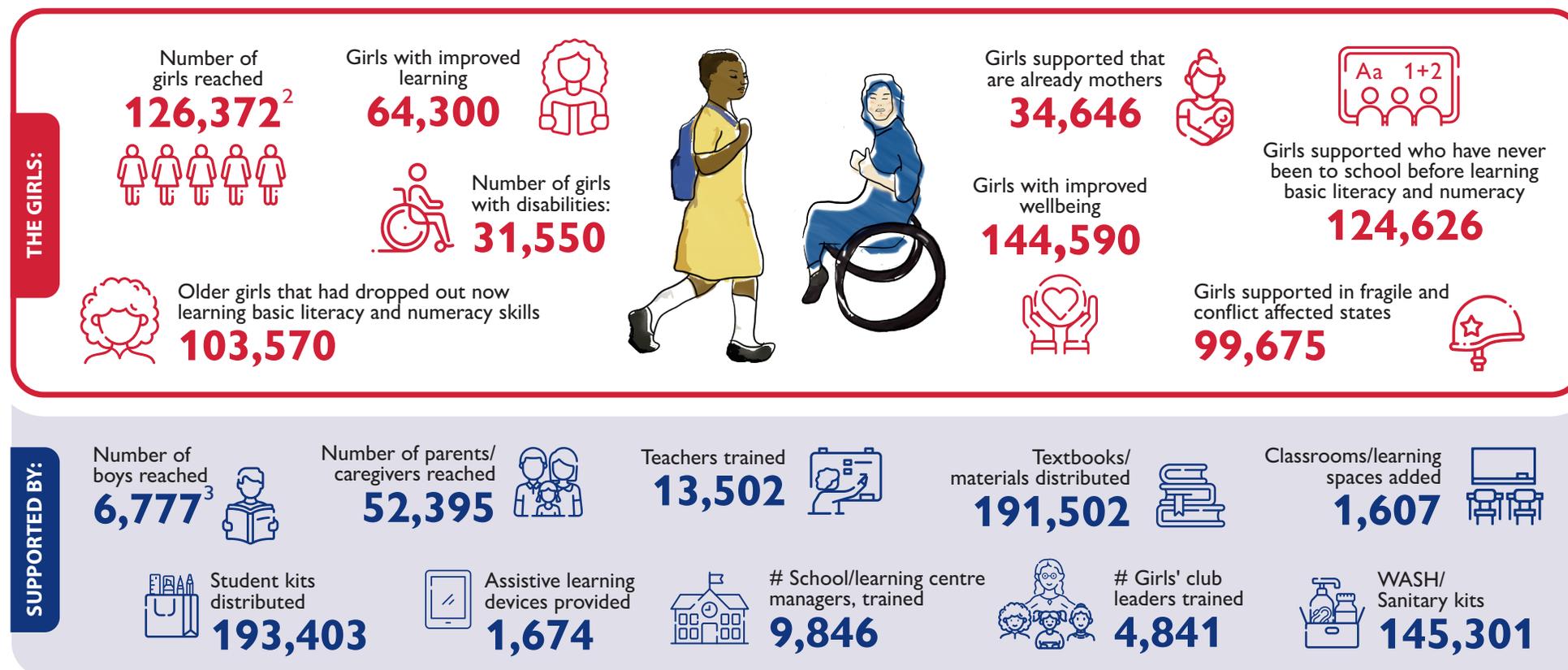
Beneficiaries: 8,500

Empowering a New Generation of Adolescent Girls with Education (ENGAGE)

VSO

Beneficiaries: 2,340

What have the 'Leave No Girl Behind' projects achieved to date?



At the start of *Leave No Girl Behind*:

- **53%** of girls have never been to school.
- **66%** of girls have domestic chore burdens.
- **28%** of girls are married.
- **29%** of girls are pregnant or are mothers.
- **46%** of girls come from poor households (i.e. unable to meet basic needs without relying on charity).
- **63%** of girls could not answer any literacy and numeracy questions correctly at the start of the project.

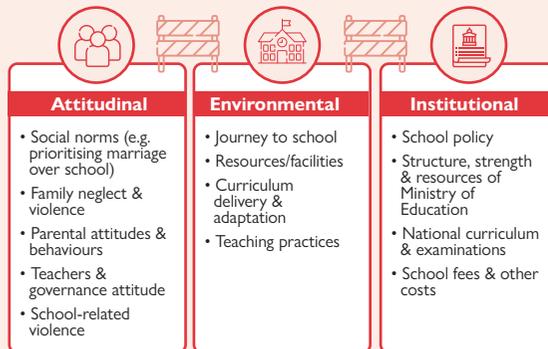
² All figures are derived from annual reporting and evaluation data.

³ This is underreported as 3 projects are not included.

SUPPORTING GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

As we can see, about one fifth of the girls supported by *Leave No Girl Behind* projects have at least one disability. The Girls' Education Challenge has defined disability using the rights-based approach applicable to all projects from the start. This encouraged programmes to focus problem analysis on limitations created by environmental, attitudinal and institutional barriers (detailed below).

BARRIERS TO INCLUSION



The in-depth analysis meant that projects could:

- focus on the intersectional identities that girls experience in GEC programme contexts
- promote responses that focus on systemic issues rather than being entirely impairment-based.

One of the core expectations was that all projects would collect and collate disability prevalence data using Washington Group questions and that data would be disaggregated by impairment and level of disability.⁴ The approach adopted by the Girls' Education Challenge is that a girl identified as having a disability is one who records as having 'a lot of difficulty' or 'cannot do at all', in one or more domain in the Washington short set or Child Functioning.

⁴ Forthcoming work will analyse the data sets from all LNGB projects from baseline to midline.

What are we learning about supporting girls with disability?

1. Use of the Washington Group questions has instigated more responsive, focused programming for girls with disabilities

The expectation that all projects use the Washington Group set of questions, a standardised, rights-based and straightforward way to collect disability disaggregated data, offers an opportunity to improve the evidence base significantly. Additionally, at the same time, it is helping raise awareness around the importance of ensuring all education programmes are inclusive of disability. Moreover, projects with adolescent age cohorts using the child functioning module questions over the short set questions identify a significant number of girls with affective/psychosocial difficulties, which would not be identified by the short set. This has drawn attention to 'invisible disabilities' and the need for wellbeing/MHPSS interventions to be mainstreamed alongside individual support. COVID-19 has exacerbated this and pushed the need for wellbeing/mental health and psychosocial interventions to the forefront of programming.

Many projects were surprised at the prevalence rate at baseline, which necessitated a rethink in programming. Most significantly, it provided good evidence that disability is a universal characteristic: projects should expect to see some girls with disabilities in population groups regardless of whether they were a target for inclusion. Furthermore, having the evidence to show that girls with disabilities are present in communities has helped raise awareness and encourage projects to reflect on what they need to do to adapt activities to reduce barriers to participation. These data sets also enabled projects to think more deeply about

disability, promoting conversations and awareness-raising with stakeholders and project staff. In this respect, data has increased the visibility of girls with disabilities and stimulated meaningful discussions around barriers and discrimination amongst mainstream (i.e. non-disability specialist) organisations.

As the prevalence rate is not diagnostic, projects have sought more detailed data and information than was collected at baseline. However, many projects used the baseline data as a starting point from which they created a more detailed assessment of the learning situation for girls with disabilities. This has included individual impairment-based reviews (and in a very few cases medical referrals), but, in the main, projects have been looking more deeply at barriers to learning and how to better track the learning and transition outcomes of disabled girls in regular monitoring processes.

2. A twin-track approach with a variety of interventions drives change

Similar to the multifaceted approach to girls' education, where different barriers to education are addressed, the complex issue of addressing barriers to education for girls with disabilities needs a layered approach, with barriers tackled from multiple angles.

Disability inclusive activities: Most *Leave No Girl Behind* projects are not exclusively disability focused, but instead aim to address barriers experienced by girls with disability throughout their activities. This approach promotes a more inclusive environment which brings benefits to a wide range

of direct and indirect beneficiaries, regardless of disability status. For example, projects focus on training teachers to use inclusive pedagogy and training mentors to provide psychosocial support, including psychological first aid, which has benefits for more than just GEC beneficiaries. In these activities, disabled and non-disabled girls with disabilities are supported by learning interventions, safeguarding training and support, learning materials, teachers trained in inclusive pedagogy and practice, inclusive system strengthening and addressing barriers around stigma through awareness-raising.

Targeted activities: As part of wider interventions, the barriers experienced by girls with disabilities are specifically addressed to ensure they can benefit alongside their non-disabled peers. For example this might include developing specific learning or transition accommodations for girls with disabilities within cohorts or providing cash transfers which are targeted at all girls with disabilities. In general, this covers project activities which are needed to ensure that girls with disabilities can access and actively participate in education. Most girls with disabilities are unlikely to attend school/learning centres without these targeted activities.

Individualised activities: These activities are designed to support individual girls with disabilities. This includes the arranging of more detailed disability assessments (carried out by health professionals), one-off support activities (such as the provision of recommended assistive technology), and individualised learning interventions (e.g., individualised education plans). These more specific activities have helped girls with complex needs (such as deaf blindness) or those who experience multiple intersecting inequalities (for example, girls with disabilities who are young mothers living in rural areas) who otherwise would be excluded from education programming.

Working with girls with disabilities

TEAM Girl Malawi

Girls with disabilities are one of the marginalised groups selected to participate in TEAM Girl Malawi. Looking at the three critical aspects of inclusion, we aim to ensure that girls with disabilities are present throughout the project activities, participate in learning and achieve a desirable outcome at the end of the project.

We link with local specialists to provide assistive devices such as hearing aids, glasses, and wheelchairs to support girls in their daily lives. With local communities, we conduct accessibility audits and renovate learning centres to enhance accessibility for all. The project has also invested in building the capacity of learning facilitators in inclusive teaching methodologies.

One of the main challenges they have faced is teaching girls with intellectual impairments. As each learner requires a different pace and set of teaching methodologies, each of these girls has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) developed to cater to their specific needs and allow them to learn together with their fellow students.



3. To improve outcomes for the most marginalised girls, you need to understand the nature of their multiple identities

A girl with a disability is likely to face barriers to education based on multiple identities (e.g., gender, disability and other barriers such as poverty) rather than just her impairment status. To understand these barriers, it is essential to uncover the intersectional factors that make those barriers more difficult to overcome. It is often assumed that the main barriers experienced by girls with disabilities are related to their impairments, rather than the interplay between wider social norms and stigma (such as those associated with being a girl, a mother or a member of an ethnic or religious minority) – alongside an education system that is not set up to meet their needs. Projects experience the most success and improvement in outcomes when addressing the intersectionality of disability with other social identities (see our recent [Value for Money and Disability](#) paper).

Most projects have developed in-depth analysis and understanding of the girls in their project's context by carrying out needs assessments, analysis of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) and evaluations. They have then developed structured and intentional interventions to reach them.

Projects in Nepal have found that intersectional discrimination is also an issue, particularly for women and girls with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, autistic girls, and those from ethnic, Dalit, Madhesi and Muslim communities. All projects have found that mitigating the intersectional barriers that girls with disabilities face requires continual monitoring, identifying their evolving needs in a fluid context and adapting programmes and interventions to meet them. It is vital to engage closely with and listen to the girls to develop holistic and tailored approaches that respond to girls' specific needs and circumstances.

Tackling myriad barriers that girls face

SAGE, Zimbabwe

SAGE, Zimbabwe found that although our work had increased overall positive community attitudes towards the value of education for children with disabilities, we still needed to tackle bullying and stigma. Relationships and collaboration between community education and parents in supporting learners with disabilities had improved, and feedback received from girls with disabilities confirmed the positive shift in support from their parents, guardians and spouses. “My mother has started learning the use of Braille with help from our Community Educator so that she can help me with my work at home,” remarked one learner with a disability.

However, feedback also showed that girls with disabilities still face bullying and discrimination from their peers. We are working to address this through monthly awareness-raising for girls on safeguarding standards and reporting mechanisms. We are reinforcing messages on bullying and codes of conduct, and providing refresher training for volunteers on safeguarding standards and their code of conduct.

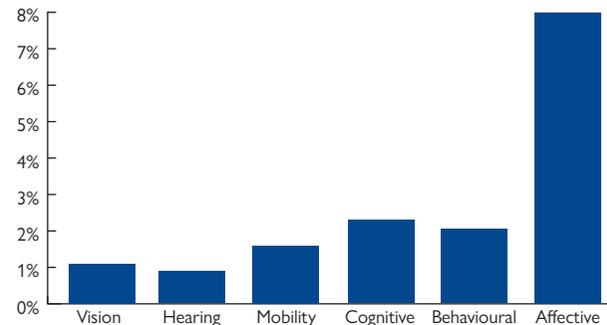


4. Mental health and psychosocial support needs have risen, and affective/psychosocial difficulties have been reported more in than Washington Group data than anticipated

The prevalence rates for girls with disabilities in these highly marginalised cohorts are now known through project baselines. While these are not necessarily representative of population prevalence, remarkably high numbers of affective disabilities are reported which is informing project responses.

There is an increasing awareness of disabilities and project responses are evolving to provide a broader range of support for girls with disabilities. This includes life skills, social and emotional learning, psychosocial support structures, improving general wellbeing, and creating space for communities to talk about barriers unique to their girls (e.g., Girls Clubs). This work is having the enhanced impact of connecting programme responses with safeguarding work.

Disability prevalence across projects



During COVID-19 lockdowns, projects worked to stay ‘tuned in’ to the psychosocial aspects of girls’ current experiences and high incidents of anxiety and depression through a support network of mentors, peer-to-peer connections and community education committees.

Working with girls with anxiety and depression

EAGER, Sierra Leone

We carried out targeted work to support girls with anxiety and depression by providing stress management techniques with both girls and mentors. Girls and mentors indicate that this has positively impacted their coping mechanisms. For example, at baseline, 54% of girls could identify and discuss at least one coping strategy they used, which increased to 100% at the midline.

We targeted some of the most marginalised, adolescent girls in the country with high rates of psychosocial disabilities, pregnant, young mothers, girls who have married early and those affected by Ebola or gender-based violence. Many of these demonstrated significant gaps in social and emotional learning. So, women-led, safe spaces that use young, local female mentors were set up to reach those girls and teach them life and business skills sessions and support transition.

5. A ‘one size fits all’ approach to safeguarding does not reach girls with disabilities

Through the safeguarding action plan process (SGAP), projects worked on access to safeguarding for girls with disabilities. The GEC Fund Management team worked with the projects to identify gaps in their delivery of safeguarding for girls with disabilities and develop effective procedures to remove these gaps, recognising the increased risk of abuse of girls with disabilities (see ‘[Protection is Possible](#)’ page 21). One element that led to the successful support of girls with disabilities was the ability of projects to link up globally to support the practical application of safeguarding with girls themselves.

As a result, more girls with disabilities felt safer in their learning spaces and reported knowing how to report safeguarding incidences. For example, SAGE developed and disseminated child-friendly information on

safeguarding, including information on referral pathways which were adapted for children with disabilities to include large fonts and Braille information. Another example was in the ENGAGE project which used sign language in COVID-19 public health messaging on social media.

During COVID-19, the need became more obvious, as girls faced increased stigma and discrimination. Targeted approaches to safeguarding were more likely to reach girls with disabilities. All projects responded to the need to maintain connections with families/households to ensure that girls were well, safe and learning, making re-entry into education more likely. For example, STAGE Ghana conducted home visits to check on girls (including those with disabilities) and to engage and sensitise parents and caregivers on gender, disability, child protection and safeguarding issues during the pandemic/lockdown period.

6. A focus on learning levels needs to include an understanding of progress

Initial analysis of girls with disabilities learning levels found:

- Higher rates of non-learners in reading comprehension
- Fewer non-learners in numeracy than literacy but with mixed performance across skills

Despite lower absolute levels of attainment (girls with disabilities compared to their non-disabled peers), girls with disabilities are progressing in their learning. Merely comparing absolute scores does not support understanding of what is effective in promoting learning amongst girls with disabilities as it is important to recognise the generally low learning levels on entry into education. Challenges around high levels of cognitive impairments in some cohorts and understanding difficulties such as dyslexia and the lack of access to professional support, coupled with how disability is not static (all projects report changes over time when

using the Washington Group questions), means that triangulation of data is crucial to understand what is happening at any one time.

While it is clear from baselines that disabled girls are starting out with lower literacy and numeracy levels than girls without disabilities, midline evaluations are showing positive gains in learning outcomes for girls with disabilities, despite the challenges of COVID-19.

ENGAGE's midline evaluation demonstrates gains for girls with profound/multiple disabilities, increasing self-care and reliance skills. STAGE Ghana reported that girls with disabilities experienced the most significant learning gains. EAGER Sierra Leone has seen the gap in numeracy scores between girls with disabilities and their non-disabled peers decrease.

However, exploratory analysis by the GEC suggests that some of the attainment gaps may be linked to the effects of intersectionality rather than an inherent gap created by having an impairment. In other words, multiple forms of disadvantage combine with disability in the marginalisation experienced by disabled girls, contributing to the attainment gaps being reported.

Mobilising flexible and multi-modal learning pathways has effectively supported educationally marginalised girls to access high-quality accelerated learning and life skills sessions.

7. Organisational capacity and collaboration – is as important as the intervention

Delivering the best programming and maximising outcomes for girls with disabilities lies more in the capacity of the projects/organisation to change and adapt than the intervention alone.

Projects/organisations that are reflective and build this into adaptive management processes internally are better able to drive change. They are also conscious of what they can (or cannot) achieve alone and seek to engage professionals and other experts to drive successful outcomes. This includes working with Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) organising training for project staff and stakeholders, investing in strong monitoring, evaluation and learning systems that are better able to target disabled girls and understand their needs. This helps projects deliver efficiently and adapt to changes and challenges.

Using adaptive management

TEAM Girl Malawi

TEAM Girl Malawi used an adaptive management approach when they saw mid-way through the first year that the data indicated on average learners were able to attend classes around 60% of the time and that the causes of these absences were diverse and changed over time depending on multiple marginalisation factors. They recognised that although they were working to remove attendance barriers, this would not happen instantly. Therefore they adapted their delivery by reducing the number of subjects in the curriculum and developing a system for supported self-study to enable learners to keep progressing.

Further information and resources:

TOOLS AND GUIDANCE

- [Learning Renewed: Ten Lessons from the Pandemic, Education Development Trust](#)
- [Disability and COVID-19. Guidance note for projects](#)
- [Inclusive approaches to drop out and retention in low-resource settings. Guidance note](#)
- [Disability inclusion in the Girls' Education Challenge: The story so far](#)
- [The impact of an inclusive education intervention on learning outcomes for girls with disabilities within a resource-poor setting | Carew | African Journal of Disability \(ajod.org\)](#)

BLOGS AND EVENTS

- [Girls from Kenya joining the GEC celebration of International Day of the Girl 2021](#)
- [Challenging assumptions: why girls with disabilities return to school](#)
- [All means all: What happens when you include girls with disabilities?](#)
- [Seeing the whole person: Madalitso's journey and our shared responsibility to support her](#)



Find out more: learningteam@girlseducationchallenge.org | www.girlseducationchallenge.org

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