PLAN INTERNATIONAL

For children and equality for girls

S·A·G·E SUPPORTING ADOLESCENT GIRLS' EDUCATION

Girls' Education Challenge

UKaid from the British people

MIDLINE ALTERNATIVE RESULTS REPORT FOR THE SUPPORTING ADOLESCENT GIRLS' EDUCATION (SAGE) PROGRAMME

Plan International Zimbabwe

A young mother attends SAGE learning session

cbm global disability inclusion

Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust

The Open University

ECONET Wireless

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ATL	Accelerated Teaching and Learning
AWET	Apostolic Women's Empowerment Trust
CBLH	Community Based Learning Hub
CBM	Christian Blind Mission
CDTS	Curriculum Development and Technical Service
CE	Community Educator
CoGE	Champions of Girls' Education
CPC	Child Protection Committee
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DSD	Department of Social Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EGMA	Early Grade Maths Assessment
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EPA	End Progress Assessment
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FM	Fund Manager
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GEC	Girls' Education Challenge
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
HDC	Hub Development Committee
IO	Intermediate Outcome
IPA	Initial Progress Assessment
ISOP	Integrated Skills Outreach Programme
KAP	Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices
KII	Key Informant Interview
LA	Learning Assistant
LNGB	Leave No Girl Behind
LPA	Learning Progress Assessment
LEPSI	Learner Welfare and Psychological Services

MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MoPSE	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
MoY	Ministry of Youth
MPA	Mid Progress Assessment
MSC	Most Significant Change
MTRP	Medium-Term Response Plan
MWACSMED	Ministry of Women's Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprise Development
NFE	Non-Formal Education
OOS	Out-of-school
OU	The Open University
PA	Programme Area
PFA	Psychological First Aid
PIZ	Plan International Zimbabwe
PSS	Psychosocial support
SAGE	Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education
SeGMA	Secondary Grade Math Assessment
SeGRA	Secondary Grade Reading Assessment
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SMS	Short Message Service
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TTC	Teacher Training College
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Associations
VTC	Vocational Training College
WRAT	Wide Range Assessment Test

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This executive summary will present the key findings, conclusions and recommendations arising from the alternative midline approach adopted by the Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE) programme in Zimbabwe, as well as an overview of the programme, the scope of the midline approach and the methodologies drawn on in this report.

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO SAGE

The Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) now led by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has been the leading global fund dedicated to girls' education since 2012[1], supporting over 40 projects in 17 countries. As part of its second phase, a second cohort of girls have been supported through its Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) funding window, with a focus on the most educationally marginalised girls.

The Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE) programme as funded through the LNGB window is a five-year programme which commenced in August 2018 and aims to achieve improved learning outcomes and assist transition into formal education, training or employment for 13,200 highly marginalised, out-of-school adolescent girls in 11 districts across Zimbabwe. SAGE aims to reach the most educationally marginalised girls who have been unable to attend or sustain their attendance in formal schools to successfully acquire foundational literacy and numeracy skills at the proficiency level of Grade 5. As a gender transformative education programme, SAGE seeks to work at multiple levels to promote and improve education for girls by tackling the root causes of gendered social and economic barriers and to create an enabling environment for transforming unequal gender norms[2].

The programme led by Plan International UK is implemented through a consortium of faith-based, academic and private sector partners which include Plan International Zimbabwe (PIZ), the Open University (OU), Christian Blind Mission (CBM) UK, the Apostolic Women's Empowerment Trust (AWET) and ECONET.[3] The programme is implemented under the oversight of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) and seeks to operationalise their Non-Formal Education (NFE) Policy[4] which promotes alternative pathways to increasing access to quality education for marginalised learners.

SAGE focuses on providing high-quality, accelerated, non-formal education across 88 accessible and girl-friendly Community-Based Learning Hubs (CBLHs). SAGE aims to deliver sustainable and transformative change through skills training, engagement with civil society and government stakeholders, and the mobilisation of parents, boys and the wider community to adopt more positive gender attitudes to support and protect girls and their education.

1 Launched by the legacy Department for International Development (DFID)
2 Guidance Note: Gender Transformative Education and Programme: Plan International (2021)
3 Zimbabwe's largest provider of telecommunications services and a leading telecommunications, media, and technology company
4 MoPSE (2015) The National Non-Formal Education Policy For Zimbabwe: Promoting Alternative Pathways To Increase Access To Quality Education In Zimbabwe.

As part of a community-driven approach, services are based from CBLHs, which are aligned to a local school and supported by a Hub Development Committee (HDC) which leads the selection of hub sites, identification of volunteers and wider community mobilisation. Staff from Plan International, CBM and AWET provide in-country technical and operational leadership and maintain monitoring, evaluation, research and learning (MERL) and financial standards. Services are directly provided by a network of over 500 incentivised community volunteers in roles spanning Community Educators (CEs), Learning Assistants (LAs), Non-Formal Education (NFE) mentors, Champions of Girls' Education (CoGE) facilitators and Mastercrafts persons.

SAGE's learning programme is centred around all girl learners attending six hours of session per week, consisting of four hours of the accelerated teaching and learning (ATL) sessions which cover numeracy and literacy and two hours of CoGE sessions. For boys, their focus in SAGE is promoting gender equality and girls' rights. Therefore, they do not attend ATL sessions but undertake two hours of CoGE sessions. In CoGE, using a gender-synchronized programme, boys and girls work through most of the modules in their curriculum separately, but covering similar topics. They then come together for four sessions to dialogue on gender issues and other topics.

SAGE's Theory of Change[5] (ToC) assumes that reducing barriers at the household, learning-space, community and system-levels will improve girls' access to high-quality education and skills acquisition, improve their confidence to learn, identify and proceed into positive transition pathways, as well as creating sustainable supportive and enabling environments at the community, district, and national-level.

The three primary programme outcomes that SAGE and the GEC are striving for are:

- **Learning:** the improvement in literacy and numeracy performance of out-of-school girls as well as their increased self-efficacy and life skills.
- **Transition:** an increase in likelihood of highly marginalised adolescent girls transitioning through non-formal education or back into formal education, into vocational or life skills training or into fully paid employment which could be self-employment.
- **Sustainability:** the expectation that the changes brought about through SAGE are sustainable following the end of the programme, due to fundamental shifts in social norms, practices, behaviours or attitudes in the programme communities and through the continued efforts and increased capacity of local stakeholders and by relevant government stakeholders including the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprise Development (MWACSMED).

5 As per the revised Theory of Change as provided to the Fund Manager in August 2021

SAGE's three overarching final outcomes are underpinned by five intermediate outcomes, specifically:

- Highly marginalised adolescent girls regularly attend high-quality, accelerated learning sessions (IO1);
- Highly marginalised adolescent girls have increased self-efficacy and life skills (IO2);
- Highly marginalised adolescent girls have improved levels of market relevant livelihood skills (IO3);
- Communities demonstrate more positive gender attitudes and actively support and protect girls (IO4);
- Strong and active partnerships with MoPSE officials and other civil society actors actively advocate for more inclusive, gender-responsive education policies (IO5).

These final and intermediate outcomes are supported by six outputs with the accompanying key interventions which seek to remove these barriers:

i. Out-of-school (OOS) adolescent girls are able to access high-quality accelerated learning programmes

ii. Community Educators & formal sector Non-Formal Education (NFE) mentors are trained and supported to employ inclusive, gender-responsive teaching strategies

iii. Adolescent girls and boys are supported to learn about and discuss life skills and their Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

iv. Adolescent girls and their families are supported to participate in skills development opportunities

v. Adolescent and adult champions of gender equality engage others in their communities in dialogue on girls' rights

vi. Programme evidence and learning – including girls' own voices and experiences – are shared with key stakeholders at district and national level.

Overview of SAGE learners:

The SAGE programme currently includes six cohorts of girls who have joined the programme on a rolling enrolment basis. With a staggered launch approach, the first cohort (Cohort 1) was enrolled in seven districts and the second cohort (Cohort 2) in a further four districts, starting June 2019 and January 2020 respectively.

Since November 2020, an additional four cohorts have joined across all 11 districts as the challenge of enrolling marginalised girls necessitated the shift towards a rolling enrolment approach instead of defined enrolment periods.

Cohort Number	Number of districts	Entry Date	Number of girls enrolled in this cohort
1	7	May 2019 – Dec 2019	4,456
2	4	Jan 2020 – Oct 2020	2,285
3	11	Nov 2020 to Jan 2021	849
4	11	Feb 2021 to July 2021	1,996
5	11	Aug 2021 to October 2021	1,324
6	11	Nov 2021 to January 2022	957
Total	**11**	**May 2019-January 2022**	**11,867**

SAGE also works with girls from seven sub-groups, based on an analysis of key characteristics that contribute and intersect to compound the educational marginalisation of girls.

These are: gender, age, marital status, school experience, ability, religion, ethnicity and level of poverty/socio-economic status. Recognising the intersectional reality of girls participating in SAGE, girls can belong to multiple sub-groups.

No.	Characteristic	Sub-group	Definition	Number of girls from this subgroup enrolled at midline point	% of overall cohort at midline point
1	Marital status Age	Young mothers / expectant	Girls who are pregnant or have at least one child	4,741	40%
2	School experience	Girls who have never been to school	Girls who have no formal school experience	580	5%
3	Religion	Girls from the Apostolic community	Girls who belong to an Apostolic family / community or identify as Apostolic	7,256	61%
4	Ability	Girls living with disabilities	Girls who are living with at least one disability	703	6%[6]
5	Ethnicity	Girls from ethnic minorities	Girls who are from the Kalanga and San ethnic groups	529	4%
6	Marital status Age	Married girls	Girls who are currently married	4,172	35%
7	Level of poverty / socio-economic status	Girls engaged in labour	Girls who are engaged in income generating or subsistence activities to support their families	11,507	97%

6 This is the latest figure (as at March 2022) based on an updating of the programme's database with data from CBM. Girls with disabilities have been identified using the Washington Group questions.

1.2 SCOPE OF ALTERNATIVE MIDLINE REPORT

This is not a traditional, external evaluator-led midline evaluation report. Following the inception of the SAGE programme, the evaluation strategy centred on four external evaluator-led evaluations to be conducted at the baseline, two midline and final endline points. However, between 2019-20, SAGE's evaluation strategy evolved due to the impact of the severe economic crisis in Zimbabwe which prompted a significant programme redesign. As a result, it was agreed to move to a simple pre-post evaluation model with no comparison cohort and a reduction from four to three evaluations following a shortening in programme duration.

Due both to the impact of the economic crisis in Zimbabwe and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown restrictions, SAGE, in consultation with the GEC Fund Manager, decided to adopt an alternative approach to the midline evaluation led internally by the SAGE consortium, utilising the funds in an innovative, independent, and creative way.

The alternative midline approach model centres on three key components which are broadly guided by the following questions:

- What progress can the programme demonstrate for each of its outcomes and intermediate outcomes?
- What were the specific impacts of the pandemic on our intervention?

These three key components are:

- **Enhanced monitoring:** The enhanced monitoring component sought to strengthen the programme's capacity in both quantitative and qualitative data collection, analysis and reporting through targeted capacity building which will support SAGE to generate robust, high-quality data to inform programmatic adaptations until the programme closes in July 2023.
- **Capacity building:** The aim of this component was to support internal learning and enhanced monitoring for the remainder of the programme. As part of this initiative, Plan International expanded the scope of technical support from its existing partner, The Open University (OU), to strengthen its capacity in the monitoring and evaluation of progression towards learning outcomes in the SAGE programme. Further internal capacity was also led by teams in Plan International Zimbabwe. Structured capacity building has focused on boosting qualitative evidence as well as supporting the Plan International Zimbabwe (PIZ) team to develop quantitative data analysis skills.

- **Research study:** The SAGE consortium compiled a research overview to streamline and align consortium research interests and identify appropriate research proposals across the remainder of the programme, including for the midline alternative. These research interests were then compared against evidence held for Outcomes and Intermediate Outcomes (as detailed below) to identify gaps which would guide prioritisation of research focus. The focus of the research selected via consortium consultation focused on the issue of attendance and retention, with the following research objectives identified:
  - To assess risk factors leading to irregular attendance;
  - To explore the viability of opportunities pursued by the girls who have transitioned to employment before completing SAGE learning activities;
  - To evaluate the effectiveness of strategies for retention and follow-up.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGIES

Within the overall scope of the alternative midline approach, a suite of different data collection methodologies was used to generate both quantitative and qualitative data relating to programme outcomes and intermediate outcomes. The majority of data collection was undertaken internally by the SAGE consortium and supported by the capacity building approach detailed above.

The methodologies employed as part of the midline alternative approach and the timeframes for data collection were as follows:

Methodology	Timeframe of data collection
Learning Progress Assessments	November-December 2020
Most Significant Change stories	June 2021
Girl-to-girl learning conversations	June-December 2021
Lessons learnt	September 2021
KIIs with Apostolic community	September 2021
Externally commissioned research study into attendance and retention	July-November 2021

Learning Progress Assessments:

- Drawing on technical leadership provided by the OU, the SAGE programme has developed an alternative approach to assessing girls' learning from the EGRA/EGMA and SeGRA/SeGMA model conventionally used within the sector and across other GEC programmes. The rationale for this is based on a consideration of the SAGE girls' backgrounds and circumstances, their potential prior learning experiences (both formal and informal), the purpose of the SAGE programme and the experience of SAGE hub volunteers in carrying out assessments. Since November 2020, the SAGE programme has been utilising Learning Progress Assessments (LPAs) designed by the OU, whereby Community Educators (CEs) lead the assessment of a girl's learning progress at three points throughout her learning journey to form a picture of a girl's learning in the three subjects (literacy, numeracy and English). LPAs tell CEs, district staff and the wider team how well girls have learned in the three different subject areas (literacy, numeracy, English) and indeed, their level of attainment. They are also designed to support CEs to strengthen and tailor their support to girls.

- Within this model, there are four assessment points for each girl:

  - **Screening tool:** a screening tool is used to determine a girl's eligibility to join the SAGE programme. Girls are eligible to join SAGE if they have never been to school or have dropped out of school and have learning levels equivalent to below Grade 5 of formal schooling in either literacy and numeracy, or both subjects.

  - **Initial Progress Assessment (IPA):** The IPA takes place within two to five weeks of a girl joining the SAGE programme and is carried out by the Community Educators, who are known to the girls. The IPA is framed as a starting point of both the girl's actual learning level and the Community Educator's knowledge of the girl.

  - **Mid Progress Assessment (MPA):** The MPA is administered to girls midway through their SAGE learning journey by Community Educators, after the completion of module 1c (equivalent to 1 year of the 2-year learning programme).

  - **End Progress Assessment (EPA):** The EPA takes place when a girl completes the SAGE programme, at the end of module 2c (Year 2). The EPA is designed to capture the progress by girl from the initial data point to end point, as the girl graduates from SAGE.

- For the purposes of this midline, analysis and reporting has focused on two distinct LPA datasets collected in November to December 2020. MPA data was collected from 2,713 girls in Cohort 1 and IPA data from 756 girls in Cohort 2.

- The IPA cohort data here reflects the scores for girls after five weeks within the programme. The MPA data for Cohort 1 girls reflects the scores for girls after completing module 1c, which is equivalent to a year's exposure to the programme. However, it is important to note that these girls' engagement with SAGE has coincided with a period of immense disruption due to COVID-19 which has affected the consistency of their exposure to the programme and means that their experience of SAGE learning interventions has been characterised by multiple interruptions. It is therefore difficult to state with certainty the precise length of these girls' exposure to SAGE learning interventions.

Most Significant Change (MSC) stories:

- As part of the enhanced monitoring component of the midline approach, the SAGE programme collected 103 positive stories of change from girls and young women involved in the programme in June 2021. Participants in the MSC process were purposively sampled to ensure representation of SAGE's seven identified sub-groups. The consortium then undertook a selection process to identify the seven stories (one for each sub-group) that most clearly demonstrated the impact that the SAGE programme has had on the girls' lives.

Girl-to-girl learning conversations:

- This methodology centred on the facilitation of girl-to-girl conversations involving 14 girls, with each pair consisting of two girls from each of SAGE's seven sub-groups. The conversations were guided by a set of questions focusing on what girls valued in their learning, their motivation for joining SAGE and their biggest successes since being part of the programme. These conversations were then converted into seven cameo case studies highlighting the diverse experiences of SAGE girls.

Lessons learnt process:

- As part of the midline, the SAGE team brought together hub volunteers in a participatory exercise to collect and document lessons learnt at hub level, focusing on four thematic areas linked to girls' learning: progress assessments, enrolment, attendance and follow-up. The objective of the lessons learnt process was to improve programme outcomes by identifying opportunities for improvement or the wider adoption of successful practices at hub level by Community Educators.

KIIs with members of the Apostolic community:

- The Apostolic Women's Empowerment Trust (AWET) undertook a series of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with members of the Apostolic community – including religious leaders and girls themselves – to gain deeper insights into the experiences of Apostolic girls, who constitute the second largest sub-group amongst the SAGE cohort, and to more fully understand the attitudes, beliefs and practices that influence their lives and education.

Externally commissioned research study:

- PIZ commissioned an independent study which was conducted by two Zimbabwean academics as part of the alternative midline approach to analyse risk factors associated with irregular attendance and risk of dropout from SAGE's learning hubs and to assess the impact of dropout prevention strategies being employed by the programme. This area of inquiry was chosen for the study in response to programme monitoring data indicating that girls' attendance at SAGE hubs was lower than expected and that a significant proportion of SAGE girls were exhibiting erratic attendance at SAGE sessions. The report can be found at Annex 7.

1.4 ANALYTICAL APPROACH

The analytical approach employed throughout this report is underpinned by the SAGE programme's Theory of Change, linking to the three core outcomes of learning, transition and sustainability, and, where relevant, to the programme's five intermediate outcomes. The findings in this executive summary have been structured according to the programme's three core outcomes and, where relevant evidence has been collected, to its intermediate outcomes.

Although the midline alternative does not constitute an external evaluation study, the SAGE programme is committed to using the learning it produces to inform as many recommendations as possible to support programme adaptions.

1.5 LIMITATIONS

The alternative midline approach agreed with the Fund Manager is an ongoing process rather than a standalone evaluation. This report is not based on a single overarching methodological design and was not intended to gather data on every programmatic indicator; rather, it synthesises a combination of different data collection methodologies and approaches from which the consortium aimed to draw meaningful conclusions and develop actionable and contextualised recommendations, rather than deriving from a holistic evaluation design.

Capacity building is a key element of the alternative midline approach, and one of its strengths. However, this means that the majority of data collection and analysis presented in this report, was conducted internally by consortium staff as part of a learning process. This will strengthen monitoring and research functions for the duration of the programme but for this process it has led to some challenges with data collection and analysis and a lengthier analytical process.

Access to stakeholders was limited due to COVID-19 restrictions. Certain types of data conventionally collected as part of an external evaluation, such as Household Survey data, were not collected, both because of logistical constraints and because they were not within the agreed scope of the alternative midline approach. There was limited data collection with community members, including men and boys, and no representation of Government officials.

The qualitative data collection undertaken for this midline has generated rich and valuable insights into individual girls' experiences of SAGE and helped to build the programme's understanding of girls' learning journeys across diverse sub-groups, complementing SAGE's girl-centred model. Although the volume of qualitative data is not sufficient to draw representative conclusions relating to the underlying factors influencing girls' learning results, the girl-to-girl conversations and resulting cameo case studies have begun to explore girls' experiences and perceptions of their own learning across the seven sub-groups.

This is not a longitudinal study of girls' learning as the learning data was collected from two different cohorts (girls from Cohorts 1 and 2). Thus, it cannot currently be used to track individual learners' progression from IPA to MPA, which limits the conclusions that can be drawn relating to the impact of the SAGE model on learning outcomes. However, at endline the programme will have individual girls' learning data across multiple assessment points, allowing for longitudinal tracking of girls' learning journeys.

Given the difference in learning assessment methodology from EGRA/EGMA to internal Learning Progress Assessments, the programme does not have direct comparative learning data from baseline, although there is sufficient alignment between sub-tasks in the LPA assessments and EGRA/EGMA to enable illustrative mapping of learning data from baseline to IPA and MPA, as shown in Section 7.1.5. As the learning data analysed for this report was collected from two of the SAGE cohorts, it cannot be considered representative of all six current cohorts but provides a valuable snapshot of girls' learning attainment at individual, hub and sub-group level.

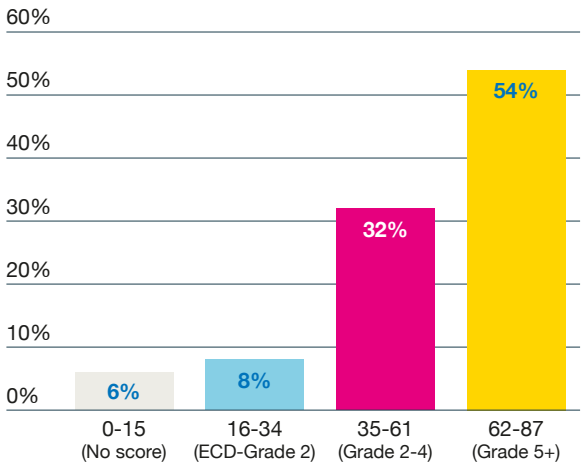
1.6 KEY FINDINGS

1.6.1 LEARNING (OUTCOME 1)

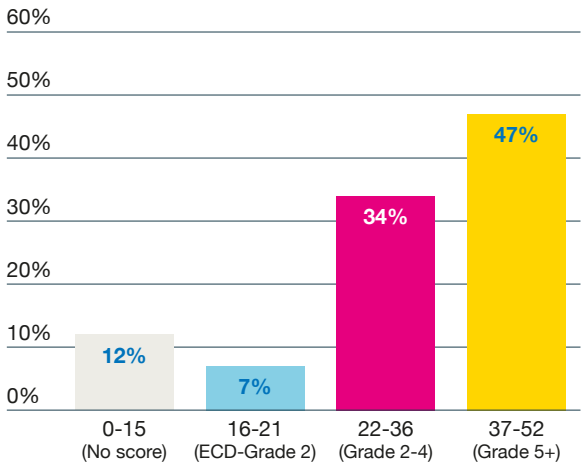
Initial Progress Assessment results, gathered when girls have been attending the programme for 5 weeks, indicate a higher proportion of girls displaying weaker scores in numeracy than literacy, with a greater number of girls attaining 'no score' or Grade 2 and below for numeracy. Explanations for this may include that those girls who have been unable to access schooling are less likely to have developed number skills, including number sense. This compares with girls who may have been using and accessing literacy as part of their everyday lives, for example, speaking and listening.

Of girls who undertook the IPA (Cohort 2), 18% attained a 'no score' in literacy and 27% in numeracy. At MPA, however, only 6% attained a 'no score' in literacy and 12% in numeracy. Conversely, at IPA 15% of girls achieved the highest scoring band (equivalent to Grade 5+) in literacy and 17% in numeracy, whereas amongst the girls who undertook the MPA after the equivalent of a year's exposure to the programme, 54% achieved the highest scoring band in literacy and 47% in numeracy.

MPA literacy total scores



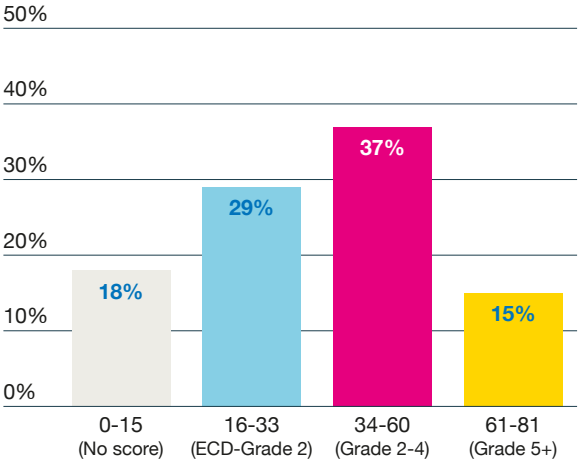
MPA numeracy total scores



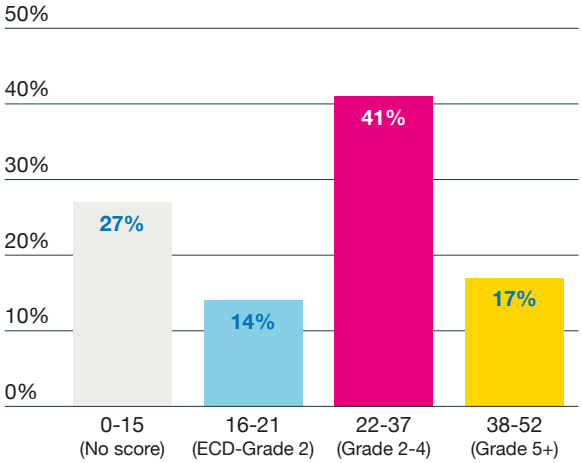
At Mid Progress Assessment stage, girls performed better in literacy than numeracy. In MPA results, collected when girls have had the equivalent of a year's exposure to SAGE learning interventions, girls scored much more highly in both literacy and numeracy than at IPA, as expected, but across the majority of sub-groups and sub-tasks a higher proportion of girls scored in the top two bands in literacy than in numeracy.

This suggests that numeracy skills acquisition remains an area where girls require targeted support.

IPA literacy total scores



IPA numeracy total scores



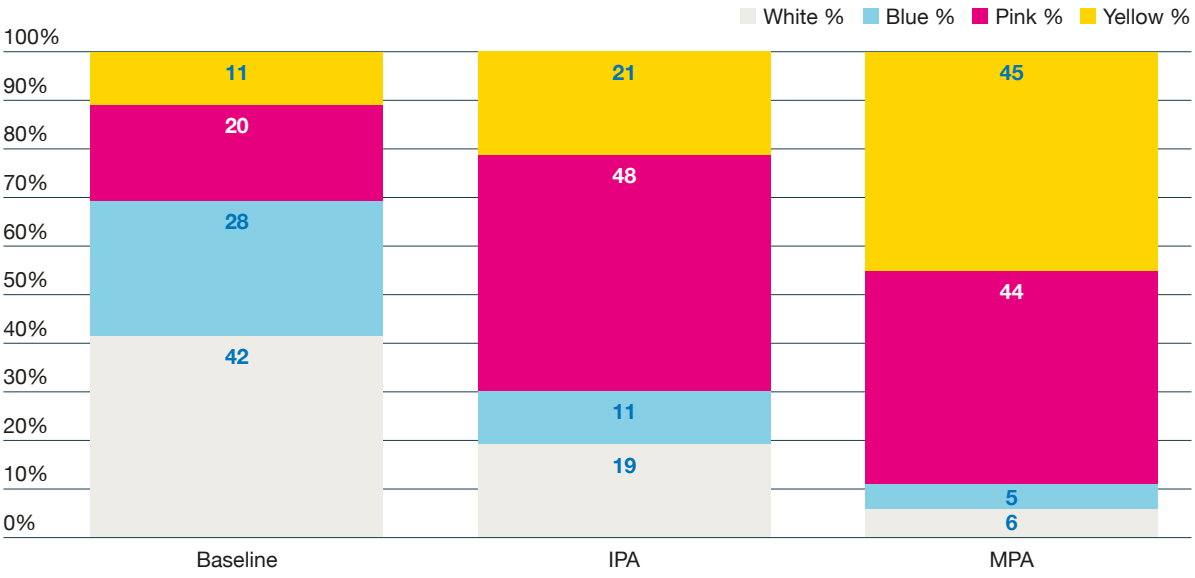
After a year's exposure to the programme, over 80% of girls achieved scores equivalent to Grades 2-4 or Grade 5+ in both literacy and numeracy, suggesting that SAGE has supported girls to develop knowledge and skills across both subjects.

The MPA results suggest that after a year's exposure to the programme (equivalent to completing module 1c), girls are predominantly performing in the higher-grade colour bands, with a much smaller proportion of girls attaining 'no score' or a score equivalent to Grade 2 and below. While the cohorts for IPA and MPA potentially differ in terms of the literacy and numeracy skills they had acquired from prior school attendance, this strongly suggests that after a year's exposure to the programme girls display knowledge and skills acquisition across both subjects in a severely disrupted context.

This is reflected by an illustrative mapping of results in equivalent sub-tasks from baseline to IPA and MPA, noting that these datasets pertain to different cohorts. While the sub-tasks at IPA and MPA are not identical to those used within the EGRA and EGMA assessments at baseline, there are some sub-tasks which broadly reflect the same area of subject knowledge or skill development within literacy and numeracy (see Annex 4). **This mapping confirms the picture of overall progress, with girls scoring more highly at MPA than IPA, and at IPA than at baseline.** The graph below illustrates this progression for the reading comprehension sub-task.

Proportion of students by learner category colours

Reading comprehension (short story)/comprehension



At IPA for literacy, a significant proportion of girls attained a 'no score' in Short Passage Reading (29%), Writing (25%), Word Reading (19%) and Comprehension (19%), indicating that these are areas where girls require targeted support in the first year of the programme. Of the girls who undertook the MPA, however, 70% scored in the highest colour band (equivalent to Grade 5+) for Short Passage Reading and 45% for Comprehension. **While these results pertain to two different cohorts, they suggest that the SAGE ATL curriculum is supporting girls to develop reading and comprehension skills in the context of severe disruption resulting from COVID-19.**

At IPA for numeracy, over 40% of girls scored in either the white or blue colour bands (equivalent to 'no score' or ECD-Grade 2) in the majority of sub-tasks. At MPA, however, and noting that these are not the same girls assessed at IPA, the majority of girls scored in the higher bands for most sub-tasks. The exceptions were Multiplication and Division number operations, where there were around 22% and 24% respectively scoring in the white band (equivalent to 'no score'). This is not surprising given that these are more complex concepts and skills to grasp. **These results suggest that SAGE is supporting girls to build foundational numeracy skills, but that areas for enhanced attention in the latter half of the programme (as reflected in the existing module materials) should include a focus on higher-order number operations including Multiplication and Division.**

At IPA, girls with disabilities had the lowest mean scores of any sub-group across both literacy and numeracy, and the highest proportion attaining 'no scores' (70% for literacy and 67% for numeracy). At MPA, however, and noting these are not the same girls as those assessed at IPA, girls with disabilities had higher mean scores than girls who had never been to school and a significantly lower proportion in the 'no score' colour band than at IPA. At MPA, 41% of girls with disabilities achieved the highest yellow colour band in literacy (equivalent to Grade 5+) and 33% in numeracy. **This suggests that after a year's exposure to the programme, SAGE is supporting girls with disabilities to build literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge.**

At MPA, girls who had never been to school displayed the lowest learning levels of any SAGE sub-group. While not surprising, this indicates the need for these girls to receive targeted support to build foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

Young mothers were the highest scorers at IPA in both literacy and numeracy. At MPA stage this group also performed highly, achieving the second highest mean score (behind girls from ethnic minorities) and with a high proportion scoring in the yellow colour band (equivalent to Grade 5+), particularly in literacy. The highest mean score at MPA was achieved by girls from ethnic minorities, although it should be noted that this group constituted a much smaller portion of the overall MPA sample than young mothers.

Numeracy skills are particularly highly valued by girls participating in SAGE, who link it to their ability to generate income and achieve financial security. A recurring theme in the qualitative data (including the cameo case studies, the MSC stories and the attendance study) is the connection between the acquisition of numeracy skills and girls' ability to go into business and generate income for themselves and their families.

1.6.2 ATTENDANCE (IO1)

The expansion of learning pathways available to girls in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been very effective in increasing access and attendance. In Year 3, the SAGE programme successfully expanded beyond learning at only static hubs to a fully operationalised four-modality model which enabled girls to be reached through four learning support pathways: namely door-to-door, by telephone, community-based small groups and hub-based learning. Shifting to a more flexible and inclusive model has enabled girls to choose their preferred pathway for accessing learning, with positive results. This strategy enabled the programme to reach 88% of SAGE girls in Year 3 (August 2020-July 2021), a substantial increase from 23% in the first programme quarter following the onset of COVID-19 when only phone-based support was available (May-July 2020).

Support from communities and partners plays a critical role in girls' attendance. In communities with high levels of community support for SAGE, girls' self-reported attendance was higher than those without. Amongst girls who reported attending SAGE sessions regularly, the common factor mentioned across the hubs was strong community support based on appreciation of the benefits that the SAGE programme would bring to the girls. Some girls reported that their husbands encouraged them to attend, often because of the perceived benefits that participation in SAGE would bring to the household's income.

There was a preference for practical skills training over literacy and numeracy sessions, especially amongst older learners and young mothers. Amongst older girls, married girls and young mothers, there was a perception that SAGE's practical skills training component (ISOP) was more valuable to their future lives than ATL sessions, and some girls expressed a frustration that it had not yet started.

According to the externally commissioned attendance study, learners from SAGE's older age groups were more likely to think that the SAGE programme resonated with their wider aspirations than younger girls. 89% of girls aged 20-22 felt that the programme objectives aligned with their aspirations, dropping to 76% of girls aged 16-19 years and 63% of girls aged 10-15 years. This could be linked to the belief that SAGE would support them in their livelihoods, which is a higher priority for older girls due to their increased responsibilities and desire to support their families.

The household chore burden is the biggest barrier to girls' attendance at SAGE sessions, especially amongst older girls. This was the most common reason given by girls surveyed for the attendance study for missing both ATL sessions (cited by 26%) and CoGE sessions (cited by 22%). The highest proportion of girls who cited this barrier were in the 20-22 age group, reflecting the likelihood of older girls bearing greater domestic responsibilities. This is linked to known entrenched gendered norms which expect girls and young women to fulfil a particular role within the household.

Sickness was the second most common reason for non-attendance, defined as including menstruation and the sickness of their children. 16% of girls cited this as a reason for missing ATL sessions and 12% for missing CoGE sessions. Girls listed a lack of sanitary items and pain relief as barriers to attending SAGE sessions during their periods. **Other barriers to attendance include long distances to hubs and engagement in labour, particularly in rural areas.**

Some girls faced a backlash from husbands and communities resulting from patriarchal norms, particularly in rural areas. The externally commissioned attendance study found that, particularly in rural areas, married women and young mothers faced resistance from their husbands and families for a variety of reasons including the need to focus on household chores and care responsibilities, the fear of stigma related to having an 'uneducated' wife, the refusal by husbands who fear that the women might challenge their power after being more enlightened and concerns that the young women might engage in extra-marital affairs. Some girls also mentioned that they faced the risk of intimate partner violence if their husbands opposed their participation in SAGE. **In rural hubs, some of the young married girls in polygamous families were prevented from attending SAGE sessions by the older wives, ostensibly out of jealousy.**

Girls from the Apostolic community face particular barriers to attendance. 60% of girls from this group, which traditionally upholds restrictive patriarchal norms, reported that they attended sessions regularly, compared to 75% of girls from mainstream churches such as Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist denominations. A higher proportion of girls from the Apostolic community cited a lack of time as a barrier to attending SAGE sessions than from other religious groups, which could relate to the volume of religious activity as well as the domestic burden faced by girls from this community due to restrictive gender norms.

Girls with disabilities continue to face challenges attending SAGE sessions. A lower proportion of girls with disabilities (53%) reported attending SAGE sessions regularly, compared to 60% of other girls. Similarly, 79% of girls with disabilities reported that they had missed at least one ATL session compared to 63% of girls without disabilities. This indicates that learners with a disability face numerous barriers in accessing learning facilities and lessons. Unlike other sub-groups, sickness rather than time poverty was the most common reason girls with disabilities cited for missing sessions.

Support for girls' participation in SAGE was also lower amongst certain ethnic groups, which has implications for girls' attendance. Self-reported attendance at SAGE sessions was significantly lower among ethnic minorities such as Kalanga (20%), and Tonga (25%).

1.6.3 SELF-EFFICACY AND LIFE SKILLS (IO2)

Qualitative evidence from interviews with girls who participate in both ATL and CoGE sessions indicates that they have contributed strongly to improvements in girls' self-efficacy, confidence and relationships with others.

Participation in SAGE, and particularly CoGE sessions, has helped strengthen girls' self-efficacy, and this is linked to the development of their identities as learners. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their own capabilities, particularly their abilities to face challenges ahead and complete tasks successfully. Girls credit their participation in SAGE with helping them to believe that they can achieve their goals and handle whatever they face in life. A theme that emerges from the qualitative data is that becoming a learner and the confidence associated with developing this identity has led to a shift in girls' belief in their ability to deal with future challenges. There is evidence that girls are also able to track the evolution of their identities as learners, which they perceive as developing over time. There is a clear recognition by the girls of their own progress, successes and areas of weakness; girls are aware of where they are in their learning, where they are going next and how to get there. A girl who participated in the MSC stories, for example, says that because of her participation in the programme she feels confident that she will be able to complete a dressmaking course, and subsequently build a career that will enable her to provide for her family.

The acquisition of both literacy and numeracy and life skills through SAGE has contributed to an increase in girls' self-confidence. Girls link being able to read and write to practical skills that they believe will enable them to support their families and generate income. Girls also welcome the opportunity to learn practical skills, such as dressmaking, which they feel will empower them economically and give them greater agency over their futures.

CoGE sessions have played a significant role in building girls' confidence and agency. Qualitative evidence indicates that girls have gained confidence to build networks, speak out for themselves, and act as advocates for girls' rights in their households and communities, including by encouraging peers and family members to join the programme. Girls also commented on the value of SAGE in introducing them to wider networks and the effect this has had on their outlook.

Participation in SAGE, and particularly in CoGE sessions, has improved girls' understanding of their rights which has the potential to have transformative effects on their relationships. There is evidence that, through learning about their rights in relation to GBV and SRHR, girls have been able to educate their partners and husbands and assert their autonomy within their households, which has positively influenced their relationships. CoGE sessions have also provided girls with a space in which they can question gender norms and stereotypes, expanding their notions of the roles that women can occupy in life.

While SAGE has supported girls to strengthen their self-efficacy and challenge gender norms, some stereotypes remain entrenched amongst SAGE girls. Whilst the CoGE sessions have helped in building girls' knowledge on negative gender norms and SRHR, it appears there are some entrenched norms which persist and affect girls' participation in programme activities. Programme monitoring data from May-July 2021 indicated that 40% of girls did not agree with the statement that men and women should equally share household chores.

1.6.4 TRANSITION (OUTCOME 2)

At midline, girls express a preference for transitioning into skills training or employment over re-entering education. This was identified at baseline stage and substantiated both by monitoring data and midline findings. In June 2021, SAGE followed up with 1,561 learners who had been identified as at risk of dropping out due to their erratic attendance rates. From the 1,561 girls, 21% (321 girls) had transitioned. Of these 321 girls, 82% had transitioned to either employment or self-employment.

The ISOP component is a major incentive for participation in SAGE, as it is perceived as providing opportunities for income-generation. A recurring theme emerging from the attendance study was that, according to Head Teachers and CEs, girls in several hubs preferred the CoGE sessions to the ATL and were eager to participate in ISOP as they perceived them as offering routes to employment and income.

The ISOP component is also a motivating factor for girls to attend ATL sessions, as participation in ISOP is conditional upon completing the ATL programme. Some girls were frustrated at delays in rolling out the ISOP component, which they felt should follow on more quickly from the completion of ATL.

Participation in SAGE supports girls to envisage and map out transition pathways. Girls value the skills they have gained or anticipate gaining through ATL, CoGE and ISOP sessions in supporting them to identify and achieve a variety of transition pathways. There is a clear link identified by girls between the development of their literacy and numeracy skills and their ability to transition into vocational training or employment pathways, validating the SAGE Theory of Change that supporting girls with access to high-quality education and skills acquisition will improve their confidence to learn, identify and proceed into positive transition pathways. Numeracy skills are particularly highly valued as enabling girls to generate income and transition into paid employment. Girls comment that SAGE has helped them to identify new directions in life and map out routes to achieve them, as well as strengthening their confidence through the acquisition of new skills to achieve existing aspirations.

Girls are supported to identify routes into paid employment and value the role SAGE plays in helping them identify viable employment pathways. SAGE's role in supporting girls to envisage a transition into paid employment is a theme that occurs frequently throughout the midline data. Girls comment that the opportunity to learn practical skills will enable them to start their own businesses and provide for themselves and their families. Girls also identify professions which they believe SAGE will help them to achieve, such as the law or teaching, and the potential to achieve these pathways acts as a motivational factor for their participation in the programme.

Re-entering education remains an ambition for some SAGE girls. There is considerable evidence that entering training or employment is a more attractive transition pathway for many girls than re-entering education, particularly for older girls. However, there is a subset of SAGE girls for whom re-entering education remains a desirable transition pathway.

1.6.5 COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER (IO4)

There is evidence of male stakeholders demonstrating their support of SAGE girls in practical ways. This has been illustrated by religious leaders, boys and young men, husbands, parents, and caregivers aiding recruitment of girls, encouraging consistent attendance and providing additional materials. For example, this included start-up cash for some girls as part of their independently established savings groups and contributing additional ingredients, materials and tools, as part of the ISOP component. Qualitative evidence also indicates that levels of support for SAGE have changed over time as husbands, in particular, began to realise the benefits that their wives' participation in SAGE could bring to their households.

SAGE has had some success in securing buy-in from community and religious leadership. For example, the AWET study found that the programme had received approval from the Head of Denomination in a particular district with high rates of child marriage through persistent engagement with church leadership. As noted in the attendance study, support from community leaders is a powerful tool in influencing attitudes and encouraging participation.

Whilst there has been progress in shifting male community attitudes towards gender, patriarchal norms are still entrenched. A KAP survey conducted as part of routine project monitoring with 117 adult men in October 2021 revealed relatively high levels of progressive attitudes towards gender amongst men in SAGE communities. The men participating in the survey were parents or guardians of SAGE girls, including men who had taken part in intergenerational dialogues and male engagement sessions. 91% of respondents believed that young women should have the same opportunities to work outside the home as young men, and 85% disagreed that women should have to tolerate domestic violence. The high levels of positive knowledge are linked to male engagement sessions, which aim to shift regressive attitudes towards gender equality. However, negative attitudes towards gender equality continue to persist: 16% (n=19) of the male respondents said they believed women are not good leaders and 56% (n=66) believed that a wife should always obey her husband.

Since their launch in March 2021, **the programme has encountered some challenges engaging men in male clubs and inter-generational dialogues,** predominantly due to a lack of time and motivation. Scheduling these sessions around sports events or planned government meetings has so far proved to be the most successful strategy for attracting male community members and engaging them in conversations around gender and girls' education.

1.6.6 RELATIONSHIP WITH MINISTRY OFFICIALS/GOVERNMENT (IO5)

SAGE's engagement and coordination with national and district stakeholders has facilitated a shift towards the sustainable handover of the programme to the Government of Zimbabwe and enabled a two-way process of systems strengthening and knowledge exchange. For example, in Year 4, professional development trainings for SAGE volunteers have started to be led by MoPSE staff such as District Lifelong Learning Coordinators (DLLCs) and District School Inspectors, with Plan staff providing technical support. Safeguarding and Child Protection trainings have been led with the Department for Social Services District officers, strengthening volunteers' understanding of existing community-based child protection structures. Additionally, the engagement of the Ministry of Youth at national level to support the rollout of the ISOP component, has seen the programme being recognised by the ministry as contributing towards the achievement of its key result area of youth empowerment.

Since the baseline evaluation was conducted, the SAGE programme and its consortium members have consistently grown and maximised strong relationships with national and district stakeholders. This has resulted in sharing of programme learning, influencing of national policy, improved community access, co-design of teaching and learning materials for the ATL and ISOP components, conducting assessments together, joint monitoring and embedding sustainable approaches.

Partnerships have grown with multiple Ministries beyond MoPSE to include the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Department of Social Development and the Ministry of Youth, spanning all eleven districts, with coordination at local, district, provincial and national-level platforms. District-level coordination and the support of district-level stakeholders has been invaluable to the rollout of SAGE activities and enabled girls to access learning even in the most challenging of circumstances, as shown through the granting of permission to conduct small group learning during strict lockdown periods in six districts.

Substantial achievements have been made in the uptake of SAGE's learning materials. Through national and district level stakeholder engagement with MoPSE departments, particularly the Curriculum Development and Technical Service (CDTS), Non-Formal Education (NFE) and Learner Welfare and Psychological Services (LEPSI) departments in the accelerated learning material development process, the programme was able to facilitate the approval of SAGE materials for use in learning hubs. Furthermore, in 2021, SAGE accelerated learning materials were approved by MoPSE for use in schools and communities, resulting in the formal launch of the SAGE modules by the MoPSE Permanent Secretary in April 2021.

SAGE has influenced the recognition of teaching and learning approaches in supporting blended learning. For example, the small group learning concept introduced by the three GEC Zimbabwe partners is now part of the MoPSE Learning Catch Up Strategy. Also, some of SAGE teaching and learning reading cards have been integrated into the draft Implementation Framework of the MoPSE National Learning Catch Up Strategy.

1.7 CONCLUSIONS

As the Education sector globally and in Zimbabwe rethinks and resets education service provision in the era of COVID-19, the SAGE programme as an innovative NFE model focused on out-of-school girls offers an example of how educationally marginalised girls of various identities, abilities, ethnicities and circumstances can be supported to learn, lead and thrive before and during a pandemic[1].

At the end of this alternative midline process, it is useful to revisit the guiding questions which underpinned it, namely:

- What progress can the programme demonstrate for each of its outcomes and intermediate outcomes?
- What were the specific impacts of the pandemic on our intervention?

Learning Outcome

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

By pivoting to a multi-modal and flexible delivery model involving learning pathways spanning door-to-door learning, phone-based learning, small group learning and hub-based sessions, SAGE has enabled girls to exercise more control over how they would like to access learning content in the context of their individual circumstances. This is evident through the increase in service uptake, as well as the sustained demand for these modalities from girls even when the hubs reopen. This underpins SAGE's strong progress towards its goal of supporting girls' learning outcomes by enabling access to high quality learning and life skills.

In early 2020, the SAGE programme acknowledged the need to move towards distance learning but the onset of COVID-19 fast-tracked this adaption. It is rewarding to see that the impact of COVID-19 has also been to open up new opportunities for girls who have been historically left behind but can now learn in a modality that meets their needs and enables them to access learning whilst balancing wider childcare, household and livelihood demands. The SAGE multi-modal model demonstrates how learning spaces and education services can fit around the lives of educationally marginalised girls. Its innovative design holds substantial potential to be tested at scale and influence how education provision at the system-level can be made flexible to accommodate the diverse needs of girls.

Regular attendance requires the holistic support of peers, volunteers, families, male partners and communities

The SAGE programme's Theory of Change is founded on the assumed causal link between girls' regular attendance at high-quality learning sessions and improved learning outcomes. This alternative midline process provides useful evidence as to the holistic and multi-pronged approach required to achieve this and the areas where SAGE is making progress towards this as well as areas of improvement needed.

Supportive enabling environments at household, hub and community-level are highlighted as integral to girls' attendance. For girls who reported attending SAGE sessions regularly, the common factor mentioned across the hubs was strong community support based on an appreciation of the benefits that the SAGE programme would bring to the girls. Some girls reported that their husbands encouraged them to attend, often because of the perceived benefits that participation in SAGE would bring to the household's income. Girls also highlighted the strong support of volunteers, who have demonstrated their commitment to the girls' learning.

Through the research study and wider qualitative methods, the SAGE programme has gained a greater understanding of the barriers which impede girls' learning journeys beyond initial access and their nuanced impact dependent on girls' characteristics. This alternative midline process also unearthed examples of where SAGE's standards and expectations may not be enacted, as well as the scale of transformative change needed. Evidence of the backlash some girls receive from their communities, peers and partners, as well as the burden of household chores and care responsibilities, demonstrate the importance of gender-transformative programming which seeks to tackle the root cause of gendered social barriers and mobilise change at the community-level. Efforts by the SAGE consortium continues to be essential to transform harmful patriarchal norms and highlight the ongoing journey still ahead in enacting girls' rights to education.

SAGE is supporting out-of-school girls to develop literacy and numeracy skills during a time of severe educational disruption

The rollout of the Learning Progress Assessment (LPA) model has enabled the SAGE programme to follow a girl-centred approach by utilising a volunteer-applied assessment methodology. Its results from 2,713 girls in Cohort 1 (who undertook the MPA) and 756 girls in Cohort 2 (who undertook the IPA) provide evidence that SAGE is successfully progressing girls towards improving their learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy.

Results showing that girls have achieved higher learning scores in both literacy and numeracy, after a year's exposure to the programme, despite being in a period of disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, offer evidence as to the effectiveness of SAGE's gender-responsive, learner-centred and innovative accelerated teaching and learning programme and relevant adaptations made during the COVID-19 response. Encouragingly, the findings presented from the SAGE learning progress assessments undertaken between November and December 2020 present evidence that, after the equivalent of a year's exposure to SAGE's learning interventions, SAGE learners are achieving stronger results in literacy and numeracy despite the disruption caused by the pandemic. This reflects an approach whereby SAGE has focused on important foundational skills and, through the LPA approach, sought to understand where individual students are in their learning via a continuous assessment model.

However, due to the cross-sectional nature of the learning assessment data analysed for this report, the programme is unable to track individual girls' learning journeys and thus to identify definitively the extent to which SAGE has supported individual girls to improve their learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy. At endline, the programme will have data for individual girls across multiple assessment points, which will enable it to draw further conclusions about SAGE's impact on learning. The consortium is proud of the achievements to date on the rollout of the LPA model and welcomes the learning resulting from this process that will help to refine the approach, including through further strengthening of data processes, communication and linkages into SAGE's adaptive management approach.

Skills-based, gender-responsive and practical learning facilitates girls' aspirations and motivation to enrol in accelerated learning programmes

This alternative midline process has strengthened the programme's understanding of what educationally marginalised girls want to learn. Skills-based, gender-responsive and practical learning has been found to broaden girls' aspirations and propel girls into new and previously unimagined pathways.

SAGE has centred itself on the importance of acquiring practical skills, which girls have strongly associated with their ability to transition successfully and engage in income-generating activities in the future. This is particularly the case among older girls and young mothers, who voiced their preference for practical or vocational skills training over purely literacy and numeracy learning. The programme has been able to harness the desire for vocational skills training as an effective incentive for girls to enrol into and attend literacy and numeracy sessions by linking participation in ISOP to completion of the ATL component. For future programmes targeting out-of-school girls, this points toward the need for a holistic set of interventions incorporating a vocational skills or livelihoods element alongside other forms of learning.

The CoGE model is an effective and valued mechanism for improving girls' confidence, self-efficacy and agency, and should be considered for integration into other OOS programmes

SAGE has made successful progress in continuing to support girls to learn, build confidence and life skills and access vocational training through a time of immense disruption.

The CoGE component is one of the programme's core strengths and is valued highly by girls participating in SAGE. Evidence gathered in this process indicated that participation in CoGE has introduced girls to a variety of future pathways, while the confidence gained through CoGE sessions has strengthened girls' belief in their capability to learn and achieve their chosen transition route, in line with SAGE's ToC. Evidence has emerged through qualitative data that participating in CoGE sessions has supported girls to improve their self-efficacy and gain the confidence to advocate for themselves and others.

Although results in this report are encouraging, other sources of data indicate that gendered norms are still prevalent, with 40% of girls disagreeing with the statement that men and women should equally share household chores. Evidence within this midline suggests that CoGE sessions provide girls with a space in which they can question gender norms and stereotypes and explore and expand their understanding of the roles that women can occupy in life. It is not clear yet whether this behaviour change process has been slowed by the onset of COVID-19 whereby girls have been challenged to gather in groups in and outside of SAGE sessions and whether one-on-one phone or household sessions by SAGE volunteers allow this exploration to fully take place.

Becoming a Champion of Girls' Education has a wider transformative influence

The CoGE curriculum not only invokes change at the individual-level but evidence gathered in this process demonstrates that when girls learn about their rights relating to GBV and SRHR, they share these messages within their households and communities, creating a ripple effect that contributes to positive changes in attitudes and behaviours. Evidence from girls that they themselves have become educators, by sharing their knowledge and experience with their partners and husbands, and that this has had a positive influence on their inter-personal relationships, is enlightening and demonstrates the strength of the CoGE component.

Transition Outcome

Girls' preferred transition pathways may not conform to programme assumptions and more exploration of the impact of contextual and intersectional factors that shape girls' aspirations is needed

Despite four different transition pathways being promoted through SAGE, at midline, girls continued to express a preference for transitioning into skills training or employment over re-entering education. This was identified at baseline stage and has been substantiated both by monitoring data and midline findings.

Findings in this process highlight a perception amongst girls and their husbands that participation in ISOP will aid their household income. In the context of the protracted economic crisis in Zimbabwe, compounded by the impact of COVID-19, it is unsurprising that pathways linked to skills acquisition and income generation are particularly valued.

The preference amongst older girls and young mothers for vocational skills training is also indicative of a wider need to tailor and nuance interventions according to the needs of girls and young women at different life stages. Whilst there is considerable evidence that entering training or employment is a more attractive transition pathway for many girls than re-entering education, some girls expressed a desire to return to formal or non-formal education.

As the first cohort of SAGE girls graduate from early 2022, SAGE has an opportunity to assess transition preferences and add to the evidence base on how characteristics such as socio-economic status, age and marital status could influence both girls' pathways and their successful transition. The programme has also yet to fully understand how information about available opportunities, as well as improved financial and emotional support from their families, influence girls' preferences and success in pursuing their preferred transition pathways.

Skills training is a major incentive for enrolment and participation in SAGE

The SAGE ToC proposes that transition outcomes will be achieved by highly marginalised adolescent girls having improved levels of market-relevant livelihood skills. This alternative midline process has demonstrated that SAGE's skills training component which is centred on a community-based market driven approach has successfully progressed towards this outcome.

This report's inclusion of qualitative evidence provides a refreshing insight into what girls who are often seen as the 'hardest to reach' want in an accelerated learning programme and their transition journey when their ambitions and aspirations have been ignited.

Although findings are based only on SAGE's first cadre of ISOP participants, who have yet to graduate and for whom a larger body of evidence will be gathered in early 2022, the feedback from girls and their wider community has signalled that the ISOP component has been a major incentive for participation in SAGE, as it is perceived as providing opportunities for income-generation and employment. By tying entry to ISOP with attendance, the SAGE programme has been able to utilise girls' energy and motivation to improve their participation in ATL and CoGE elements. By focusing on a community-based approach utilising local Mastercrafts people rather than supporting girls to access static or residential settings, it has demonstrated a more inclusive and resilient model.

Girls value the skills they have gained or anticipate gaining through ATL, CoGE and ISOP sessions in supporting them to identify and achieve a variety of transition pathways. With a clear link developed between the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills and their ability to transition into vocational training or employment, this validates the SAGE Theory of Change that supporting girls with access to high-quality education and market-relevant skills will improve their confidence to learn, identify and proceed into positive transition pathways.

Sustainability Outcome

Support from the community and male stakeholders is key to supporting girls' education with more work ahead on shifting harmful gendered norms

Since its inception, the SAGE programme has employed a community-driven approach with community-based structures and members playing an integral role in the establishment of learning activities, enrolling girls and mobilising wider community support. This has provided positive indications that SAGE's communities have been able to adopt more positive and supportive attitudes toward girls' education and suggests that the impact of the programme will be sustained in the long term as per SAGE's ToC. This approach has been intensified in SAGE's third year, with the launch of specific interventions in the form of CoGE's intergenerational dialogues and male engagement sessions.

Findings have presented evidence of male stakeholders demonstrating their support to learners in practical ways. This has been illustrated by religious leaders, boys and young men, husbands, parents, and caregivers aiding the recruitment of girls, encouraging consistent attendance and providing additional materials. It also appears that mobilisation of support has taken time as SAGE's reputation has grown within communities.

Although progress towards mobilising positive gendered attitudes is promising, the consortium is conscious of the longer journey ahead, with programme monitoring data still detecting a substantial minority of men who expressed regressive views. The programme has also encountered challenges in engaging men in men's clubs and intergenerational dialogues due to a lack of time and motivation. The consortium will continue to adapt to not only mobilise support but facilitate transformative shifts at community-level.

Strong partnerships with national and district-level stakeholders have been established and hold promise for the long-term and sustainable handover of SAGE's services

SAGE's collaboration with multiple government agencies at various levels has yielded tangible results and is one of SAGE's key achievements. The approval of its accelerated learning materials by MoPSE in April 2021 for use in schools and communities, as part of a suite of resources to complement distance learning during school closures, remains one of the programme's greatest contributions to the long-term provision of non-formal education in Zimbabwe. The SAGE programme has established itself as a programme that is able to demonstrate to government agencies the operational reality of implementing their policies as they aim to provide inclusive, equitable and quality education for highly marginalised learners. These small steps are contributing to ensuring the larger policy environment is made more responsive to girls' needs.

SAGE's effective collaboration and engagement at district level have also facilitated a shift towards service delivery being taken over by MoPSE staff, a practical step towards meaningful sustainability ahead of the programme closing in July 2023.

By maximising its community-driven approach, the SAGE programme has offered an example of how community-based volunteers can maintain learning support through the most challenging of events. This level of independence and autonomy will aid the programme as it moves towards embedding a hub-specific focus through which hubs and their surrounding communities are taking ownership of activities and systematically reflecting on how they can strengthen support to learners. This has been bolstered by capacity building efforts through this alternative midline process and ongoing professional development activities which have provided technical support to programme staff, hub volunteers and district-level MoPSE staff.

SAGE has made substantive progress towards its core outcomes and will continue to build on this to strengthen the support provided to out-of-school girls in Zimbabwe

Overall, evidence collected through this innovative and creative alternative midline approach indicates that the SAGE model has made strong progress towards the attainment of its three key outcomes of learning, transition and sustainability.

For the SAGE consortium to be able to deliver services, enhance its monitoring of them, analyse and present those findings whilst mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout 2020-2022 is a testament to the SAGE consortium's commitment to learning within itself and for the girls, communities and government partners it supports. The SAGE consortium has valued the opportunity to utilise evaluation funds in what transpired to be an innovative, flexible and collaborative approach that has strengthened programme learning and the capacity of the wider consortium. It has also recognised and amplified the experiences and voices of girls, who have been "been out of sight and too silent for too long". Cumulatively, this assists the SAGE consortium and wider stakeholders to continue to strengthen the quality of the services they deliver to out-of-school girls in Zimbabwe.

1.8 RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations were developed through a participatory and reflective process involving the wider SAGE consortium. The emerging findings were shared with the consortium for review and each partner engaged in an internal reflection exercise to consider actionable recommendations to take forward based on the report's findings.

The consortium then conducted a participatory workshop to share the outcomes of each partner's internal reflections and to create space for discussion. The ten recommendations below are for new actions and originate from this participatory reflection and discussion process. They are also complemented with existing adaptive measures which feature in previous chapters.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO AID LEARNING OUTCOMES

1 Enhancing SAGE's existing 'Communities of Effective Practice'

The SAGE programme, with the technical leadership of the Open University, has established a strong and responsive continuous professional development model which has supported volunteers to implement the SAGE teaching and learning strategy, utilising gender-responsive, inclusive and learner-centred pedagogies in pre- and current COVID-19 periods. This has been aided by the establishment of a 'community of effective practice' which draws upon a range of modalities including direct and virtual trainings, mentoring support, reflective tools, lesson observations, videos of good practice and partnerships with Teacher Training Colleges and district-level MoPSE representatives.

This alternative midline process has indicated areas for volunteers to further develop and suggested adjustments of existing modalities, with those that support SAGE's sustainability outcomes of particular interest.

LPA findings indicated a trend for lower learner scores in numeracy than literacy at IPA and MPA. Based on this, the consortium recommends pairing district teams based on identified areas of weakness and strength to further facilitate the sharing of expertise within SAGE's communities of reflective practice. Additionally, the consortium will look to develop online CPD trainings focused on numeracy and incorporating EPEL videos. Community Educator trainings will look to include a focus on specific numeracy sub-tasks to identify where the issues are, both in terms of girls' understanding and teaching practices.

To support learners who are already attaining yellow band scores (Grade 5+) at MPA stage, the consortium recommends supporting educators to understand how they can provide extension work to stretch and motivate higher-achieving girls through differentiation of activities. As extension activities are already incorporated into SAGE's ATL modules, this support will be undertaken through refresher training.

2 Strengthening learning support to specific sub-groups

In terms of further support required, IPA findings indicate that girls with disabilities enter the programme with the lowest literacy and numeracy attainment levels and hence have the furthest to travel in their learning to attain SAGE's aim of Grade 5 equivalent proficiency. The programme will continue to encourage volunteers to utilise the SAGE Disability Directory, which was designed to support volunteers' understanding of girls' individual needs. However, the consortium recommends maximising its existing partnership with Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) to aid the assessment of learners with disabilities. This would strengthen the programme's ability to obtain data which reflects the true picture of the learners' performance level and provide a mechanism for communities to understand how to support learners with disabilities even after SAGE closes. The consortium also recognises the benefits of further targeted hub-specific CPD on how to support learners with disabilities, which would build on learning gained from existing centralised programme-wide trainings.

Given the lower scores at MPA stage for girls who have never been to school, it is recommended that CEs identify girls from this group and provide targeted support upon entry. It would also be beneficial for the programme to explore in more detail the specific barriers to learning for this group. Feedback gained in the early implementation of the MTRP indicated that girls who had never been to school struggled to study independently in times of limited movement. As the programme seeks to enhance its home-based learning component, it is envisaged this group will particularly benefit from this adaption which will engage and strengthen parents' capacity to support learners at the home-level.

3 Increasing learners' awareness of SAGE objectives

The girl-to-girl learning conversations illustrate the pride, value and identity that girls develop within the SAGE programme and in becoming a learner. The diverse benefits that learning brings them, from reading text messages to being able to calculate profits, is testament to the holistic model that SAGE has created.

The challenge of this holistic model is maintaining a consistent understanding of what SAGE can provide and its objectives, which if misunderstood can also impact on learner engagement and wider enrolment and attendance. The feedback of some girls, particularly older girls and those with children, indicating that they perceive SAGE as too elementary for them and consequently feel that there is stigma attached to their attendance, or their preference for ISOP over ATL, challenges SAGE's core principles that foundational literacy and numeracy underpin girls' progression into life and vocational skills.

For girls who struggle to understand SAGE's objectives and the linkage between foundational skills and life and vocational skills (the three components of SAGE being ATL, CoGE and ISOP) the consortium recommends further messaging and sensitisation at the community and hub-level to link the components and strengthen girls' and communities' understanding of how the ATL curriculum can facilitate girls' transition into vocational and employment pathways. This would emphasise all three components' crucial impact on their individual success, realistic timeframes for accessing ISOP, and the long-term benefits of SAGE.

4 Facilitating Safe and Gender Equitable and Socially Inclusive Learning Environments to aid attendance

By continuously seeking to understand the barriers external and internal to SAGE, SAGE aims to facilitate safe and inclusive learning environments for girls across a wide range of ethnicities, ages, identities and circumstances. Maintaining regular attendance of girls has been an ongoing challenge within SAGE, not aided by the disruptive onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Girls' feedback from the research study related to bullying and violence in the hubs prompted thorough investigation and follow-up measures and highlighted the need for consistent understanding by learners and volunteers of appropriate behavioural standards and reporting mechanisms. Current recommendations include monthly awareness raising to girls on safeguarding standards and reporting mechanisms by reinforcing messages currently in modules; including a module on bullying and hub codes of conduct in CoGE sessions; and refresher training for hub volunteers on safeguarding standards and their code of conduct.

In relation to reports of tension in some sessions due to mixed age and ability-grouping, based on wider programme learning, the consortium believes mixed sessions can be effective for learning but recognises that issues can arise from this model. Therefore, it is recommended that a more hub/context-specific approach is required whereby if incidents occur and hub monitoring findings report concerns, then hub teams may be supported to reflect on whether a return to non-mixed groups is preferable.

In relation to girls' reports of attendance being hindered by sickness and menstrual hygiene management, the programme is committed to referring girls to available local SRHR services and other programmes within and outside of PIZ and will renew efforts to identify more community-based sustainable approaches such as self-production of reusable pads.

For girls with disabilities who reported challenges accessing hubs, the team will seek to ensure these girls are fully aware of and linked to small group or door-to-door sessions. However, it is recognised that this reduces opportunities for peer interaction. The team will explore the possibility of girls with disabilities being able to support site selection of future satellite hubs.

Key to ensuring hubs meet girls' needs is learning through follow-up activities what prevents girls from attending. Given 61% of girls surveyed reported not being aware of SAGE's follow-up measures, the consortium recommends increasing follow-up processes through its MERL team as well as through sustainability meetings held with HDCs at hub level, which reinforce the role of HDCs in supporting following up on girls identified as at risk of dropping out.

5 **Shifting harmful norms and attitudes**

Findings in this alternative midline process illustrate promising and positive experiences of support from the wider community and men following involvement in SAGE's CoGE focused activities.

Recommendations are for the content and discussion topics of male engagement and boys' CoGE sessions to be adjusted to mobilise the shift of entrenched negative gender norms related to women's leadership and GBV as well as on sharing of household responsibilities to aid girls' participation in SAGE, in response to the findings from the attendance study that girls' household chore burden was the biggest barrier to attendance. This would be particularly useful in Apostolic communities where a higher proportion of girls cited a lack of time as a barrier to attending SAGE sessions than from other religious groups.

There is also an acknowledgment that behaviour change can be achieved through methods other than delivery of the CoGE curriculum. Many social norms approaches recognise and promote the power of role models in the change process. By acting as advocates and exemplifying positive change, role models can inspire changes in behaviour and practice within communities. Therefore, the SAGE programme will explore the possibility of publicising role models to promote the benefits of shifts in behaviour and attitudes that align to its gender-transformative agenda.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO AID TRANSITION OUTCOMES

6 **Expanding post-training support**

SAGE's vocational skills component (ISOP) has proven to be an extremely popular and motivating component. However, findings suggest that more expansive support may be valuable to girls after the training period to consolidate their skills into viable self/employment and by maximising linkages with existing services, government departments or supportive networks. These are to include the development of a 'Transition Guide' to aid signposting to further advisory services, facilitating access to local financial services, providing further information in management, marketing, technology, resources etc. through government departments, linking with and mainstreaming into local economic development programmes (such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs Development Fund and Bank) and follow-up visits from these wider advisory and technical services. Key to girls' success could be facilitating the creation and registration of sustainable community structures (self-help, savings and credit groups, business centres, girls and youth clubs, associations, association of those with disabilities peer to peer support networks).

7 Mobilising community support

Adequate and appropriate equipment is essential to the production of quality products that are viable and competitive in the market. Cognisant of its budget constraints, the consortium proposed that the ISOP component strengthen its business development element and self-help, savings and credit groups as a strategy for equipping girls with a means to access capital and hence obtain profits that could assist them to purchase equipment and other resources that can help them grow, diversify and sustain their small businesses. This builds on programme learning which has found some hubs have independently organised themselves into savings and lendings groups and have managed to purchase extra resources to ensure continuity and growth of ISOP.

8 Supporting transition to formal school

Whilst it is acknowledged that the majority of learners have shown a preference to transition to employment/self-employment, the programme is also conscious of the fact that there are younger girls (10-14 years) who require support to enrol into formal schooling as per the policy provisions. In order to facilitate transition to formal school, support to learners will be provided in two ways: firstly through BEAM[1] support and secondly by signposting girls to other organisations supporting learners with school fees. Regarding BEAM support, the programme will leverage the support of the established Hub Development Committees (HDCs) to facilitate the enrolling of learners in formal school. This will be accomplished by linking HDCs and community level BEAM selection committees to co-opt SAGE learners under the BEAM support scheme.

A community mapping exercise will be conducted by the programme to identify existing opportunities from other organisations that may be focusing on offering school fees assistance to out-of-school learners to enrol back into formal schools. The programme will engage with the identified organisations to facilitate girls to be considered for support.

The programme will look to further assess the impact of age as a factor on transition pathway preference. This will enable the SAGE programme and similar NFE programmes to balance efforts and accommodate transition focus between two substantially different age-groups and direct these girls to the appropriate government partners for all viable pathways, which in the case of Zimbabwe sit under MoPSE and MoY.

Underpinning all this support will be raising awareness to girls and parents/caregivers about the New Education Act[2] which prohibits schools from turning away learners for non-payment of school fees and on the basis of pregnancy.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUSTAINABILITY OUTCOMES

9 Enhancing the sustainability of the CoGE component

The CoGE component has demonstrated its value in improving girls' self-efficacy and would benefit from strengthened partnerships and community linkages to ensure these changes and reach can be sustained post project-closure. The consortium recommends strengthening links with the most appropriate partners that will own, reinforce and support the intervention and ensure its impact. These include the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MWACSMED), traditional and religious Leaders, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and women's rights organisations. Although the SAGE programme has already been engaging with the MWACSMED, there is a need to strengthen that engagement by ensuring that CoGE clubs are integrated in MWACSMED's action plans at community level. MWACSMED is the parent ministry under which CoGE clubs fall, hence its role will be essential to facilitate integration and recognition of CoGE clubs within their community level structures.

Other forums which the SAGE consortium believes could be of value in strengthening government engagement would be through the participation of the programme in the national-level Education Coordinating Group as a platform to advance SAGE's influencing agenda. This would be aided by the support of the FCDO Zimbabwe office to gain access to this forum. This is in addition to the existing participation in national-level forums such as ECOZI and the Education Cluster.

10 Sustainability of SAGE's Learning approach

The programme has tested innovations by offering different learning support pathways as part of COVID-19 adaptations and developed models around NFE delivery aligned to the updated curriculum's objective of having learners exiting the education system with competency skills. These approaches offer great opportunities for strengthening the implementation of an inclusive NFE policy. To facilitate the recognition of the tested innovations at system level by the MoPSE, the programme will focus on delivering multi-stakeholder learning events, starting with one scheduled for March 2022. These multi-stakeholder learning events will create an opportunity to disseminate results such as those in this report and for relevant stakeholders to learn about the programme's positive impact on the delivery of learning opportunities to hardest to reach marginalised girls. It is hoped that through such learning events, SAGE's programme learning will support the effective rollout of an inclusive, relevant and quality NFE policy in Zimbabwe.

A SAGE learning receiving learning support by phone

Plan International Zimbabwe

2. INTRODUCTION TO SAGE

The Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) now led by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has been the leading global fund dedicated to girls' education since 2012[7], supporting over 40 projects in 17 countries. As part of its second phase, a second cohort of girls have been supported through its Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) funding window, with a focus on the most educationally marginalised girls.

The Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE) programme as funded through the LNGB window is a five-year programme which commenced in August 2018 and aims to achieve improved learning outcomes and assist transition into formal education, training or employment for 13,200 highly marginalised, out-of-school adolescent girls in 11 districts across Zimbabwe. As a gender transformative education programme, SAGE seeks to work at multiple levels to promote and improve education for girls by tackling the root causes of gendered social and economic barriers and to create an enabling environment for transforming unequal gender norms[8].

The programme led by Plan International UK is implemented through a consortium of faith-based, academic and private sector partners which include Plan International Zimbabwe (PIZ), the Open University (OU), Christian Blind Mission (CBM) UK, the Apostolic Women's Empowerment Trust (AWET) and ECONET.[9] The programme is implemented under the oversight of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) and seeks to operationalise their Non-Formal Education (NFE) Policy[10] which promotes alternative pathways to increasing access to quality education for marginalised learners.

SAGE focuses on providing high-quality, accelerated, non-formal education across 88 accessible and girl-friendly Community-Based Learning Hubs (CBLHs). SAGE aims to deliver sustainable and transformative change through skills training, engagement with civil society and government stakeholders, and the mobilisation of parents, boys and the wider community to adopt more positive gender attitudes to support and protect girls and their education. As part of a community-driven approach, services are based from CBLHs, which are aligned to a local school and supported by a Hub Development Committee (HDC) which leads the selection of hub sites, identification of volunteers and wider community mobilisation. Staff from Plan International, CBM and AWET provide in-country technical and operational leadership and maintain monitoring, evaluation, research and learning (MERL) and financial standards. Services are directly provided by a network of over 500 incentivised community volunteers in roles spanning Community Educators (CEs), Learning Assistants (LAs), Non-Formal Education (NFE) mentors, Champions of Girls' Education (CoGE) facilitators and Mastercrafts persons.

7 Launched by the legacy Department for International Development (DFID)
8 Guidance Note: Gender Transformative Education and Programme: Plan International (2021)
9 Zimbabwe's largest provider of telecommunications services and a leading telecommunications, media, and technology company
10 MoPSE (2015) The National Non-Formal Education Policy For Zimbabwe: Promoting Alternative Pathways To Increase Access To Quality Education In Zimbabwe.

SAGE's learning programme is centred around all girl learners attending six hours of session per week, consisting of four hours of the accelerated teaching and learning (ATL) sessions which cover numeracy and literacy and two hours of CoGE sessions. For boys, their focus in SAGE is promoting gender equality and girls' rights. Therefore, they do not attend ATL sessions but undertake two hours of CoGE sessions per week. In CoGE, using a gender-synchronized programme, boys and girls work through most of the modules in their curricular separately, but covering similar topics. They then come together for four sessions to dialogue on gender issues and other topics.

The three primary programme outcomes that SAGE and the GEC are striving for and to which progress is reviewed towards in this alternative midline process include:

- **Learning:** the improvement in literacy and numeracy performance of out-of-school girls as well as their increased self-efficacy and life skills.
- **Transition:** an increase in likelihood of highly marginalised adolescent girls transitioning through non-formal education or back into formal education, into vocational or life skills training or into fully paid employment which could be self-employment.
- **Sustainability:** the expectation that the changes brought about through SAGE are sustainable following the end of the programme, due to fundamental shifts in social norms, practices, behaviours or attitudes in the programme communities and through the continued efforts and increased capacity of local stakeholders and by relevant government stakeholders including the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprise Development (MWACSMED).

3. PROGRAMME THEORY OF CHANGE AND BENEFICIARIES/ PARTICIPANTS:

Girls in Zimbabwe face a multitude of barriers to access an inclusive, quality education (see Section 3.2). SAGE's Theory of Change[11] (ToC) assumes that reducing barriers at the household, learning-space, community and system-levels will improve girls' access to high-quality education and skills acquisition, improve their confidence to learn, identify and proceed into positive transition pathways, as well as creating sustainable supportive and enabling environments at the community, district, and national-level. See Annex 3 for the latest ToC as revised in August 2021.

SAGE's three overarching final outcomes are underpinned by five intermediate outcomes, with the programme working on the basis that:

- **Learning** outcomes will be supported by highly marginalised adolescent girls regularly attending high-quality, accelerated learning sessions and increasing their self-efficacy and life skills.
- **Transition** outcomes will be supported by highly marginalised adolescent girls improving their levels of market relevant livelihood skills.
- **Sustainability** outcomes will be supported by communities adopting more positive gender attitudes and mobilising to support and protect girls, as well as strong and active partnerships being formed with Ministry officials and other civil society actors to advocate for more inclusive, gender-responsive education policies.

These final and intermediate outcomes are supported by six outputs with the accompanying key interventions which seek to remove these barriers:

i. Out-of-school (OOS) adolescent girls are able to access high-quality accelerated learning programmes

ii. Community Educators & formal sector Non-Formal Education (NFE) mentors are trained and supported to employ inclusive, gender-responsive teaching strategies

iii. Adolescent girls and boys are supported to learn about and discuss life skills and their SRHR

iv. Adolescent girls and their families are supported to participate in skills development opportunities

v. Adolescent and adult champions of gender equality engage others in their communities in dialogue on girls' rights

vi. Programme evidence and learning – including girls' own voices and experiences – are shared with key stakeholders at district and national level.

11 As per the revised Theory of Change as provided to the Fund Manager in August 2021

3.1 BENEFICIARIES AND SUB-GROUPS

SAGE aims to reach the most educationally marginalised girls who have been unable to attend or sustain their attendance in formal schools to successfully acquire foundational literacy and numeracy skills at the proficiency level of Grade 5.

As per the communication shared with the GEC Fund Manager (FM) in March 2020, the SAGE programme streamlined its recommendations into seven sub-groups to specifically target support for and tailor its interventions in line with their needs, as well as to focus monitoring, evaluation and learning activities.

These sub-groups originate from key axes of vulnerability and characteristics that contribute and intersect to compound the educational marginalisation of girls. These are: gender, age, marital status, school experience, ability, religion, ethnicity and level of poverty/socio-economic status. Therefore, the seven sub-groups included in the SAGE intervention and hence monitored by this alternative midline process are in the following table, along with their accompanying total enrolled numbers and the proportion of each sub-group within the overall cohort at the time of reporting. Please note, girls can hold multiple characteristics e.g. be a young mother, with a disability and from an Apostolic community so individual girls will be reported across multiple fields when analysis is presented.

Table 1

Total Number of girls enrolled

At midline approach reporting point
(January 2022)
11,867

At baseline evaluation reporting point
(Aug-Sept 2019)
4,075[12]

No.	Characteristic	Sub-group	Definition	Number/% of girls from this subgroup enrolled at midline point	Number/% of girls enrolled at baseline evaluation point
1	Marital status Age	**Young mothers / expectant**	Girls who are pregnant or have at least one child	4,741/40%	921/23%
2	School experience	**Girls who have never been to school**	Girls who have no formal school experience	580/5%	1,546/37%
3	Religion	**Girls from the Apostolic community**	Girls who belong to an Apostolic family / community or identify as Apostolic	7,256/61%	1,351/33%
4	Ability	**Girls living with disabilities**	Girls who are living with at least one disability	703/6%[13]	54/1.3%[14]
5	Ethnicity	**Girls from ethnic minorities**	Girls who are from the Kalanga and San ethnic groups	529/4%	Not available
6	Marital status Age	**Married girls**	Girls who are currently married	4,172/35%	805/19.7%
7	Level of poverty / socio-economic status	**Girls engaged in labour**	Girls who are engaged in income generating or subsistence activities to support their families	11,507/97%	Not available

12 Enrolment figures as reported in the Q5 report and stated in baseline evaluation report in Annex 5: Beneficiaries table
13 This is the latest figure (as at March 2022) based on an updating of the programme's database with data from CBM. Girls with disabilities have been identified using the Washington Group questions.
14 This figure was based on the programme's internal mapping exercise at baseline across the entire SAGE cohort, during which there may have been inconsistent application of the Washington Group questions on disability. The external evaluator identified that a much higher proportion of girls within the treatment sample at baseline had a disability – 123 out of 416 girls in the sample (29.57%).

SAGE programme participants enter and receive learning interventions as part of a cohort model. Theoretically, the Accelerated Teaching and Learning (ATL) programme offers each girl two years of learning. The first year of learning covers modules 1a to 1c and the second year covers modules 2a to 2c. This comes with the caveat that not all girls will have two years' exposure to the ATL programme because they may start at a higher learning level than module 1a. Additionally, girls who are enrolled later in the programme may not complete the two years before SAGE closes in July 2023. For these girls, the programme's aim is that they will continue to learn using the SAGE approach under the oversight of MoPSE and communities post-programme closure.

With a staggered launch approach, Cohort 1 was the first cohort in seven districts and Cohort 2 in four districts, starting June 2019 and January 2020 respectively. Since November 2020, an additional four cohorts have joined as the challenge of enrolling marginalised girls necessitated the shift towards a rolling enrolment approach instead of defined enrolment periods. Therefore, girls' exposure length to SAGE's interventions will vary. Please see below for a breakdown of the cohort enrolment numbers and enrolment dates.

Table 2

Cohort Number	Number of districts	Entry Date	Number of girls enrolled in this cohort
1	7	May 2019 – Dec 2019	4,456
2	4	Jan 2020 – Oct 2020	2,285
3	11	Nov 2020 to Jan 2021	849
4	11	Feb 2021 to July 2021	1,996
5	11	Aug 2021 to October 2021	1,324
6	11	Nov 2021 to January 2022	957
Total	**11**	**May 2019-January 2022**	**11,867**

The SAGE intervention is intended for two years although this has been altered, given recurrent lockdown measures throughout 2020-2021, with the first round of girls' exits/graduations scheduled for March 2022 for girls in Cohorts 1 and 2.

3.2 EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

With a strained and under-resourced Education system, the right to access an inclusive and quality education in Zimbabwe has been unattainable for many children. In 2019, when SAGE's direct services began, UNESCO reported 434,723[15] out-of-school children of primary-school age in Zimbabwe, which represented 15% of all primary-school aged children. Of these, 199,509 were female, representing 14% of female primary school-aged children.

Marginalised girls in Zimbabwe face complex and interdependent barriers to accessing education. Gendered barriers are compounded by interaction with other axes of identity and marginalisation, including age, religion, economic status, ethnicity, geography, and disability, among others. Girls' limited access to education is fundamentally underpinned by pervasive gender inequality. This manifests in discriminatory and harmful social norms and high rates of gender-based violence and harmful practices such as early child marriage.

At a girl level, barriers to learning can be understood through studies such as SAGE's baseline evaluation conducted in August-September 2019, which can be found in Annex 11. It found the most frequently experienced barriers to be physical accessibility/distance to school (70.53% of girls), menstruation (55.89%), a lack of safety net for GBV (36.71%) and a lack of voice and ability to speak up (20.35% of girls). The most cited reason for not enrolling in formal school was an inability to afford school fees, as reported by 91.12% of surveyed girls, in the treatment cohort.

In the life of the SAGE programme, significant contextual changes had occurred even before the COVID-19 pandemic, with the Zimbabwe Education Cluster noting, "The education system in Zimbabwe was already stretched before the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of multiple crises, including the impact of Cyclone Idai last year [2019], the economic crisis and hyperinflation and the ongoing drought"[16]. Pre-pandemic, the Cluster had estimated that of the more than 3.4 million children of school-going age (3 to 12 years) in Zimbabwe, at least 1.2million (35%) needed emergency and specialised education services in 2020[17].

The Government of Zimbabwe swiftly responded to the onset of COVID-19 with a national disaster declared on 17 March 2020. National lockdown measures were instigated from 24 March 2020 (Year 2) prompting the closure of schools and aligned non-formal education interventions, such as SAGE.

15 UNESCO Institute for Statistics – Data as of December 2021 https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.UNER.FE?locations=ZW
16 Education Cluster Strategy: Zimbabwe Preparedness and Response Strategy, 26 March 2020
17 Zimbabwe Education Cluster: Humanitarian Response and COVID-19 Sitrep: 09 July 2020 – https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/zimbabwe_education_cluster_situation_report_7_09.07.2020.pdf

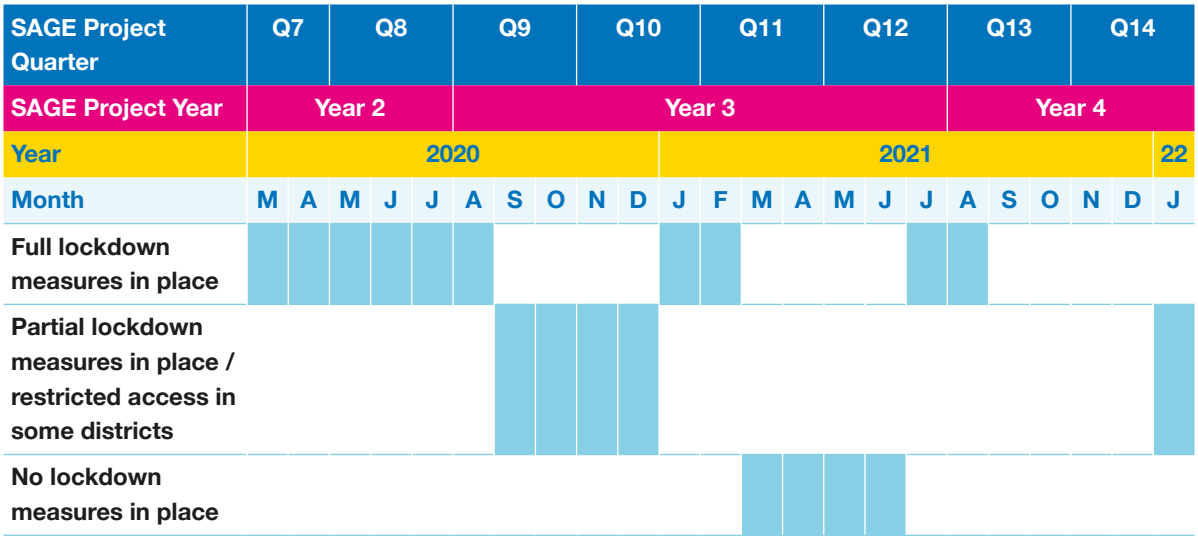
3.3 COVID-19 CONTEXT

As seen globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has enacted irreversible harm on children's education. Girls' education has been especially hit hard by the pandemic. COVID-19 has exacerbated existing barriers such as an increase in gender-based violence, greater risk of unplanned or unintended pregnancy and having to take on the gendered burden of care work[18] and increased livelihood activities. This has coincided with the disruption, closure or inaccessibility of vital safety, protection and SRHR services.

With the guidance of the GEC Fund Manager, the SAGE consortium partners galvanised to assess the needs at girl, community and volunteer-level as well as access to technology; coordinate with key stakeholders including the Education Cluster; review secondary data and identify how to pivot services with appropriate adaptations that could flex to a new operational model which anticipated phased re-openings of hubs/schools but recurrent periods of lockdowns on a national and district basis.

These findings guided the development and implementation of adapted activities as outlined in SAGE's Immediate Response Plan (May-August 2020) and the subsequent Medium-Term Response Plan (MTRP) implemented in Year 3 between August 2020 to July 2021. Based on these timelines, all data presented in this alternative midline approach was collected and analysed since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the face of multiple waves of increased and then decreased COVID-19 cases, the Zimbabwean government has employed a model of cyclical lockdowns dovetailed with periods of lessened or no restrictions. Since March 2020, this appeared as the following pattern of full, partial or no lockdowns.



18 'Education in crisis: COVID-19 and adolescent's education in fragile contexts', Plan International UK, July 2021

This has affected all levels of the SAGE programme – from girls being unable to attend learning hubs and access community-based services and peer support, to volunteers being unable to physically reach learners, periods of home-based learning and working for staff and volunteers and a shift to a flexible and agile delivery model – with 'windows of opportunity' where implementation is accelerated in line with reduced measures in place. SAGE has developed contingency plans and now operates within four operational categories spanning Red to Green, which align to the government lockdown phases. An additional complication has been regional/district variations in lockdown measures, with ongoing negotiations by PIZ teams with district stakeholders to secure some opening of access to allow continuation of small group and household-based direct contact activities.

For SAGE learners, the main barriers to learning which initially emerged in the pandemic included:

Variation in access by phone: Physical access to static learning hubs was prevented by the start of lockdown measures. The SAGE programme's first analysis exercise was the verification of beneficiary contact details between March and May 2020, to assess whether a shift to phone-based support was feasible. First results indicated that only 56% (2,731) of beneficiary girls had access to mobile phones. This access also varied across the sub-groups with a SAGE's needs assessment/ girls' survey finding that access to a phone was less likely for girls with a disability, girls who have never been to school and girls from an Apostolic community[19]. In the programme's first full quarter of phone-based support (May-July 2020), it transpired that access to a phone did not translate to consistent usage of a phone.

Only 45% of accessible girls (of those with access to a phone) and 23% of the overall cohort were successfully contacted and supported remotely through phone calls. Subsequent programme quarters have shown that whilst phone-based support can remain popular even when face-to-face contact has resumed, the main challenges on phone usage have been network connectivity, access to electricity for recharging and permission being granted via the primary phone user who is often a parent, caregiver or partner.

Digital inequity: MoPSE in collaboration with the Education Cluster developed initiatives to continue providing education through three strands comprising radio lessons, digital learning and distribution of print materials. Whilst these efforts played a significant role in ensuring continued quality learning support to learners, it has also raised equity related issues for SAGE learners who were already in marginalised communities. UNICEF reported that in Zimbabwe, only 26% of school-aged children from the poorest quintile have a radio at home and this reduces to .02% for television[20]. This was substantiated by a finding from SAGE's needs assessment conducted in May 2020, in which 48.7% of girls reported access to a radio and only 15.5% of girls had access to the internet.

19 Results found that of the girls surveyed who did not have access to a phone, 65% are Apostolic, 52% were girls with disabilities and 43% were girls who have never been to school.

20 https://blogs.unicef.org/evidence-for-action/can-broadcast-media-foster-equitable-learning-amid-the-COVID-19-pandemic/

Continuation in learning for most marginalised groups: SAGE's needs assessment provided indications that a shift to independent, home-based remote learning would be possible, with 40.8% of girls feeling confident and 32.8% feeling somewhat confident to study by themselves. However the sub-groups of girls which reported being the least confident were girls living with a disability, girls from a migrant community and girls who have never been to school. This was later supported by volunteer feedback in the programme's first full quarter of phone-based support (May-July 2020) whereby girls who faced difficulties in grasping concepts via phones were particularly girls in Cohort 2 who had only experienced one term before lockdown and those who had never been to school or had a disability. Further challenges related to expectations of available parental support for learning. This was indicated by analysis of SAGE beneficiary identification data which showed that almost 13% of heads of households have no schooling experience and a further 42.3% had only achieved ECD or Grade 1 level.

Limited access to safety, protection and SRHR services: The SAGE COVID-19 needs assessment noted that 78% of girls said there were no support services available in their communities. Within this result, 100% of girls from ethnic minority groups and 84% of girls with disabilities noted having challenges in accessing safety and protection services. A national Child Rights and Protection Assessment (CRPA) in May 2020 further noted that 31% of girls and 4% of girls with disabilities faced challenges in reporting abuse cases, with the main reasons including only 31% understanding reporting channels and 13% lacking knowledge of where to report cases.[21] In a Rapid Assessment carried out by Plan International Zimbabwe in May 2020, issues of inadequate Menstrual Hygiene Management essentials, as well as contraceptives, condoms and other SRHR services, featured prominently in the findings. Consequently, there was an increased risk of unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and gender-based violence (GBV) among SAGE's adolescent learners, which could greatly hinder their opportunity to continue learning.

Threatened resilience, self-efficacy and socio-emotional wellbeing: Recognising the socio-emotional impact of COVID-19 on learning was key, especially for marginalised adolescent girls. SAGE was already cognisant of baseline evaluation findings in which nearly 8% of girls in the treatment group reported difficulties with anxiety and 6% with depression, 22% reported a lack of voice and 14% of girls gained low scores for self-efficacy. Following the onset of the pandemic, in its needs assessments survey, the SAGE programme found 51% of girls noted feeling isolated, with variations across sub-groups; of those reporting feelings of isolation, 70% were girls from Apostolic communities and 46% were young mothers.

Increased household demands and livelihood responsibilities: SAGE learners are predominantly from socio-economically vulnerable households, as demonstrated in the baseline evaluation, which reported that the most cited reason for girls not being enrolled in formal school was an inability to afford school fees, as stated by 91.12% of girls in the treatment cohort. SAGE's cohort has been consistently made up of a high proportion of girls engaged in labour, as highlighted in Table 1 as 97% of the current cohort. With Zimbabwe's pre-pandemic economy already fragile and 90% of the employable population working in the informal sector, it was anticipated that the pandemic would exacerbate existing vulnerabilities for SAGE learners and see an increase in responsibilities for income generation, on top of their existing heavy household and childcare demands. SAGE's needs assessment found 42% of hub volunteers had observed shifts in learners' household responsibilities and, in terms of girls' expectations of how often they could study, results found 87% of girls anticipating they could study at least twice a week and 13% only once a week.

21 Child Rights and Protection Assessment report (April-June 2020)

Gaps in volunteer capacities: An analysis of SAGE volunteers' access to phone showed high levels of phone ownership, including 100% amongst Community Educators (CEs), CoGE Facilitators and NFE mentors and 75% for Learning Assistants (LAs). A Hub Volunteers Needs Assessment reported needs and priorities for girls and volunteers as accessing information on COVID-19, inclusive education for girls with disabilities, virtual learning and communication skills and dealing with sensitive issues.

In response to these needs and barriers, the SAGE programme prioritised the following three areas: keeping girls safe; continuing to support girls in their learning journey; and monitoring their safety and learning. These formed the basis of the following adaptations which were incorporated into SAGE's Immediate and Medium-Term Response Plans and started from April 2020.

Continuation of learning and life skills support through expanding learning pathways: In Year 3, the SAGE programme successfully expanded access to learning beyond being held at only static hubs to a fully operationalised multi-modality model which enabled girls to be reached through four learning support pathways. These pathways were:

This flexible and innovative approach to distance learning enabled a more bespoke and individualised approach, with certain modes prioritised for specific sub-groups of girls and their unique needs. For example, for girls that were less likely to be able to learn on their own due to having young children, living with a disability or not having access to a phone, support via small group and door-to-door contact was prioritised. Furthermore, services were more resilient to changes in the operating context, with services maintained through the provision of SAGE's existing literacy and numeracy support and life skills, with boys and girls receiving additional risk awareness messaging to strengthen access to health, wellbeing and safeguarding information.

Continuation of services has required significant and ongoing efforts spanning from community mobilisation, the adjusting of teaching and learning materials for both the ATL component and CoGE, as well as capacity building to aid volunteers to deliver sessions which rapidly shifted to being delivered remotely. For example, in the ATL component, the programme developed learning cards that established the key learning objectives from each unit/module that would enable the girls to complete the module assessment. The learning cards were designed around telephone learning activities and small group learning and were also differentiated for three levels of ability. The consortium has also recognised the iterative nature of service delivery and the need to adjust interventions as the reality of accessing girls in a cyclical pattern of no, partial or full lockdown measures became apparent. Recent adaptions have focused on developing audio versions of sessions for use in radios, so that girls who have been repeatedly unable to utilise phone support in times of full lockdown, can continue with home-based learning.

Strengthening access to safety and protection services: One of the most significant impacts of COVID-19 has been the weakening of accessibility of safety and protection services. The SAGE Girls' survey noted that 78% of girls said there were no support services available in their communities. Within this result, 100% of girls from ethnic minority groups, 89% of internally displaced girls and 84% of girls with disabilities noted having challenges in accessing safety and protection services. In response to the gaps identified, the programme committed to building the capacity of community-based Child Protection Committees (CPCs) linking them to the Department of Social Development at district level. SAGE in its safeguarding activities also implemented direct awareness raising activities to girls, focusing on signposting services as captured in routinely updated service mapping which encompasses services for SRHR, GBV and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MPHSS). This information is disseminated to volunteers to facilitate referral pathways, with the aim of increasing reporting of cases. SAGE's own safeguarding protocols were reviewed with the development and rollout to staff and volunteers of new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) focused on best practice when maintaining contact with programme participants, particularly with the expansion of phone-based contact.

Expanding CoGE support services to include psychosocial support (PSS): The programme invested in strengthening volunteers' capacity to integrate MHPSS into CoGE sessions to aid girls and boys to develop positive coping mechanisms. This integration was implemented with support from REPSSI, a consulting organisation engaged to build staff and volunteers' capacity on Psychological First Aid (PFA) training and to aid the integration of PSS activities into existing modules. This would enable volunteers to be better equipped to recognise PSS needs and hence refer to local specialised services for further support. Girls and boys also received wellbeing checks from volunteers, monthly SMS's with messaging related to safeguarding and well-being.

Expansion of Continuous Professional Development through embracing low-cost technology: COVID-19-induced closures meant the programme could not continue to provide face-to-face delivery of its continued professional development trainings to volunteers. However, the programme showed its agility in responding to the new contextual realities by adapting to use low-cost WhatsApp technology as a platform to maintain contact with volunteers and to deliver continued professional development trainings. Through continued reflection on the use of the technology and feedback from volunteers, the programme modified its approach on WhatsApp usage by making it more volunteer and practice driven. The modified approach allowed an integration of offline tasks, which volunteers would practise before the actual remote WhatsApp training. Through this approach, volunteers have been able to receive trainings, which included: disability support, progress assessments, screening assessments, Psychological First Aid training, supporting virtual reflective conversation and learning differentiation. Feedback from facilitators on this model has been positive; for example, one noted: "The [training] model enables teamwork at hub level and by so doing they collectively take responsibility of what is happening at hub level, unlike in the old model where individual participation was key." Another commented: "From the feedback I have received so far, the volunteers feel that the new model was good as it allowed them to share ideas during group work as well as learning from the other hub volunteers."

With the shift in the operational model due to recurrent lockdowns, the programme has now evolved to a hybrid model whereby trainings are delivered virtually or face-to-face, dependent on the lockdown measures in place at that time.

Strengthening of community-based structures: The consortium quickly recognised that its greatest asset at a time of restricted movement was its pre-existing and extensive community-based volunteer network, as well as its strong relationships with wider community stakeholders and groups such as Hub Development Committees, parents, religious leaders, and Child Protection Committees (CPCs). Therefore, adaptions focused on mobilising parents and caregivers to support different learning modalities, the recruitment of 65 new volunteers to support the rollout of the multiple learning pathway model, provision of PPE and additional airtime to volunteers and strengthening of community referral pathways for safeguarding, protection and PSS services.

For monitoring and evaluation activities to proceed in a new operating context, it also necessitated adapted approaches, which have included:

- **Adapted results frameworks:** Monitoring was required to shift from indicators in the original logframe to the MTRP framework. The review and merging of these results frameworks into SAGE's revised logframe was finalised and approved by the Fund Manager in October 2021. This results report is hence reviewed against this revised logframe, as found in Annex 2.
- **Digital modalities:** Lockdown measures and restricted movement resulted in the shift from face-to-face modalities to phone-based tools and later hybrid approaches utilising both modalities. This has necessitated the revision of monitoring tools, revised survey durations, retraining of staff and enhanced safeguarding measures and operating protocols.
- **Agile planning:** Monitoring activities have been accelerated in windows of opportunities between lockdowns to ensure group-based activities, face-to-face trainings or observations are prioritised and that girls without phones could be included in monitoring activities.
- **Increased mobilised and learner engagement to ensure inclusion when using digital modalities:** For those learners with access to phones, additional engagement has been needed to firstly ascertain phone numbers and then to regularly update records as they change. This has required volunteer and community members' follow-up and collaboration with Plan teams. Also, connectivity can be challenging particularly in border areas which has necessitated hybrid approaches including face-to-face follow-up.
- **In-country capacity supported virtually with technical support:** International technical teams or consultants have been unable to visit Zimbabwe and directly support monitoring and research activities or capacity building. Therefore, support has shifted to virtual means and increased virtual workshops, guidance documents and new techniques such as paired work.
- **Inclusion of girls with disabilities:** Shifting to phone-based services and monitoring has been vital but SAGE teams have been cognisant of its potential to exclude certain learners, particularly girls with disabilities who can be experiencing speech/language, visual, learning, intellectual, physical impairments or chronic health-related disorders. Therefore, without in-person support, SAGE liaised with parents, caregivers and members of the wider household to support the learners in phone-based monitoring exercises, as well as extending survey times.

3.4 PROGRAMME STATUS FOR YEARS 4 AND 5

The SAGE programme is now beyond its mid-point and in Year 4 of implementation, which will run between August 2021 to July 2022. Year 5 will mark the final year of the SAGE programme, ahead of the programme's closure on 31 July 2023.

Consequently, SAGE's strategic approach is now focused on four key elements for years 4 and 5. Recommendations from this alternative midline process will inform implementation of activities and necessary no/low-cost adaptations in Year 4 and 5. The four key elements are:

- **Impact:** Year 4 is the final full year of direct service implementation led by Plan International and the year when all SAGE learning and transition-focused outputs will come to fruition and hence the full impact of interventions should be first observed. This reflects the first round of graduations from the Accelerated Teaching and Learning (ATL), Champions of Girls' Education (CoGE) and Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOP) components, as well as the progression of activities within CoGE's wider gender-transformative approach which includes male engagement clubs and intergenerational dialogues following their launch in Year 3.

- **Learning:** Aligned with the above impact, Year 4 and 5 will be when the SAGE consortium intensively gathers, compiles, reflects and disseminates programme evidence, research and learning to key stakeholders including the Fund Manager and FCDO, communities, ministerial partners and the wider international development sector. This will feed into written learning products, videos, events, research papers and blogs.

- **Transition:** With the first graduations in early 2022, SAGE's first two cohorts should be proceeding into four exit pathways including skills training, education or self/employment with support and appropriate monitoring and follow-up to understand whether their intended paths are successfully accessed. Within these cohorts, over 2,700 girls will be supported to proceed in SAGE's directly led Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOP).

- **Sustainability:** SAGE's Sustainability Plan is currently grounded on three key aspects and underpinned by a strategic approach which values the handover of services to community and government actors to maximise long-term impact.

A gradual phasing out of direct support will occur with a simultaneous increase in leadership of services at the hubs by community structures and relevant ministries. It is anticipated that from December 2022, the programme's direct leadership on delivery of services will end and have been sufficiently transitioned to enable community structures to lead services, with Plan providing technical support only between January to July 2023. This period will also be when the SAGE team fully finalises its Close-Out Plan including monitoring, evaluation and operational aspects. From August 2023, with the SAGE programme closed, the learning hubs and learners will be supported by community structures with technical support from MoPSE/relevant ministries.

As detailed in the current Sustainability Plan (to be revised in Spring 2022), the key aspects are:

1. Uptake of SAGE accelerated learning materials and support approaches within the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE)

2. Community capacity to support learning and social development of out-of-school (OOS) learners

3. Champions of Girls' Education (CoGE) community clubs to be sustained at the community-level.

4. INTRODUCTION TO SCOPE OF MIDLINE ALTERNATIVE

Following the inception of the SAGE programme, the evaluation strategy centred on four external evaluator-led evaluations to be conducted at the baseline, two midline and final endline points. The baseline evaluation employed a mixed-methods, longitudinal, cross-over design. Quantitative data was collected from 35 CBLH's from Cohort 1 serving as a treatment cohort and from 12 communities in Cohort 2 serving as a comparison cohort. A total sample of 720 girls were surveyed (458 in the treatment sample and 262 in the comparison sample), with the final report approved by the Fund Manager in May 2020. Please see the report at: https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/swvdgiu0/sage-lngb-baseline-evaluation.pdf and Annex 11.

Between 2019-20, SAGE's evaluation strategy evolved due to the impact of the severe economic crisis in Zimbabwe which prompted a significant programme redesign. Hence, it was agreed to move to a simple pre-post evaluation model with no comparison cohort and a reduction from four to three evaluations following a shortening in programme duration.

As planning for the midline evaluation began in early 2020, following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, it was agreed with the Fund Manager that, given the challenging context in Zimbabwe and extensive lockdown measures which restricted access to programme participants, the impact of COVID-19 on the cohorts' exposure to the learning intervention, the necessary programme changes and the longer remaining duration planned for existing cohorts, it would not be 'wholly ethical, meaningful or represent good value for money to continue with the Midline Evaluation for this cohort'. Therefore, the budget was recommended to be utilised for an alternative approach which would increase programme-level monitoring of the Medium-Term Response Plan and adaptations due to COVID-19.

The SAGE consortium seized the opportunity to utilise substantial evaluation funds in an innovative, independent, and creative way and as part of an internal exercise. Led by Plan UK, cross- consortium consultations were undertaken which explored consortium partners' interests of enquiry in relation to SAGE's performance at this mid-way point. Questions explored included:

- *What were the things we would have wanted to know at this point if COVID-19 had not struck?* This included reviewing against the original key research/ evaluation questions included in the MEL Framework and assessed in the baseline evaluation.
- *What are the things we want to know now, given the changes caused by the pandemic? Are any of the pre-pandemic questions still valid?*
- *How can we best utilise the midline budget, particularly when considering value for money?*

Possible options were reviewed spanning standalone monitoring exercises, enhanced monitoring by existing teams, light-touch evaluative exercises looking at specific outcomes for the cohorts not covered by the external evaluations, commissioning consultants, specific research only as well as no action. Reflections included consideration of existing team capacity, identified areas of gaps in monitoring and versus the baseline evaluation recommendations for the midline exercise (e.g. qualitative evidence) and the reliability of existing tools (e.g. OU-designed learning assessments versus EGRA/EGMAs).

The main preferred option was enhanced monitoring, alongside specific research studies. There was unanimous agreement on including an element of boosting qualitative evidence and associated capacity building for Zimbabwe teams, as well as establishing more capacity at the community and country-level for learning progress assessment and attendance data collection, entry and analysis. It was also suggested that the additional elements explore the themes of learning, access and protection to build the story of how SAGE is performing at a higher level (beyond output-level) and to understand the impact of the pandemic. The consortium felt strongly that midline evaluation funds could be efficiently used as part of an internal exercise to enact a more sustainable impact, which sharply contrasts with the traditional requirement of commissioning external evaluators. By investing in expanding internal monitoring capabilities this would lead to strengthened monitoring outputs for the remainder of the programme (beyond the life of the MTRP) and would also enable the introduction, testing and integration of new methodologies and resources in a time when flexibility and adaptability of approaches is key.

These discussions informed the design of the alternative midline approach model which were formalised in the Midline Alternative Inception Report (See Annex 1) as approved by the Fund Manager in May 2021.

The alternative midline approach model centres on three key components which are broadly guided by the following questions:

i. What progress can the programme demonstrate for each of its outcomes and intermediate outcomes?

ii. What were the specific impacts of the pandemic on our intervention?

These three key components are:

Its aim is to be a thorough review of progress made towards achieving programme goals, in the time-period following the baseline evaluation conducted in December 2019 (Year 2) to the time of report writing in January 2022 (Year 4). Gathering of in-depth learning evidence will support the programme's work and adaptation for its remaining two years (Years 4 and 5).

The results reported in this alternative midline approach are not directly comparable to the baseline evaluation, given the differing methodologies. Findings are a snapshot of a range of activities undertaken over a long-term period, as opposed to a defined short-term period of data collection. Furthermore, as multiple different methodologies were chosen with different sampling approaches, it was decided that there would be no one single midline sample. Please see Table 5 (Respondent Table) for the overall breakdown of respondents.

4.1 PROCESS DESCRIPTION

4.1.1 ENHANCED MONITORING

Components:

- Learning Progress Assessments
- Most Significant Change stories
- Girl-to-girl learning conversations

Timeframe: May 2021 – January 2022 with continuation of tools and approaches until end of programme.

Logframe update:

Considering the significant changes enacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of context and programme delivery, the consortium decided that as part of this process, it would be appropriate to map the initial SAGE logframe against the Medium-Term Response Plan (MTRP) framework and produce an updated framework, as agreed with the FM. This would enable the MEL team and wider consortium to have clarity on the gaps in the programme's regular monitoring and determine which tools would be needed as part of an 'enhanced monitoring approach'.

The revised logframe was approved by the Fund Manager in October 2020 (see Annex 2) with a revised Theory of Change from September 2021. This updated results framework incorporates the adaptations in SAGE service delivery, as well as the shift to a cyclical lockdown operational model. Results of this process are therefore reviewed against this revised logframe which incorporates MTRP and original logframe elements.

The consortium identified the need for higher-level data for Outcome 1 (Learning) by **harnessing existing learning progress assessments,** as well as to **boost qualitative evidence** on the result of learning within the SAGE programme, through learning about girls' experiences, skills gained and how these new skills will impact their lives.

Harnessing learning assessments:

Since November 2020, the SAGE programme has been utilising learning progress assessments (LPAs) as designed by the consortium member Open University (OU), whereby Community Educators (CEs) lead the assessment of a girl's learning progress at three points throughout her learning journey to form a picture of a girl's learning in the three subjects (literacy, numeracy and English). LPAs tells CEs, district staff and the wider team how well girls have learned in the three different subject areas and indeed, their level of attainment. They are also designed to support CEs to strengthen and tailor their support to girls. To ensure reliability, the assessments provide a commentary for the CEs to follow, as well as guidance for what they should look out for in a girl's response when allocating a score. Complemented by a Screening Assessment undertaken as part of the enrolment programme, the programme aims for four data points gathered for each girl.

The consortium recognised learning assessment data would be a rich source of evidence at multiple levels for various stakeholder groups and for various purposes:

- **At hub-level:** For use by Community Educators, Non-Formal Educators and Headteachers as well as SAGE district staff to assess learning progress of individual students as well as understand overall hub performance. This would enable corrective measures if no or limited learner progress was being made, through tailored teaching and learning interventions, increased capacity building and strengthening gaps in pedagogical approaches.

- **At district-level:** For use by SAGE district staff and MoPSE district officials to understand performance across multiple hubs at district-level and identify corrective or adaptive measures if gaps in progress were identified.

- **At national-level:** For use by SAGE national staff and national MoPSE staff to understand SAGE's programme impact across 11 districts, how progress assessments can evaluate improvements in learning outcomes and evidence impact of the SAGE model in meeting the learning needs of out-of-school girls. Evidence would aid influencing and advocacy efforts and support implementation of SAGE's Sustainability Plan which seeks the national uptake of the SAGE model.

- **At programme-level:** For use by SAGE consortium members, Fund Manager and FCDO to understand progress against outcome-level results, identify volunteer capacity building needs and evidence the effectiveness of the SAGE model in improving highly marginalised girls' learning outcomes and for dissemination within the wider Education sector. It would aid the Fund Manager in understanding the value of progress assessment tools beyond the EGRA/EGMA model. It also affords the unique opportunity of informing the non-formal education sector about the importance of analysing data at different levels, and the tools by which learning can be assessed.

Furthermore, the SAGE programme intends to continue using Learning Progress Assessments (LPAs) until programme close (as detailed later), with the intention that the LPA model provides more robust summative data than the previously used EGRA/EGMA tools in an external learner assessment evaluation model. This will support continuous programme adaptations and capacity building to improve the programme's pedagogic process, and crucially to improve the educational outcomes of SAGE learners.

However, gaps in internal capacity to compile, analyse, interpret and disseminate robust data at all these levels were acknowledged. Therefore, funds were allocated for the Open University to expand their scope of work through the following objectives:

- To develop a technical guidance paper on 'SAGE approach to the assessment of girls' learning'.

- To develop a learning progress analysis framework.

- To provide guidance and support to the analysis of progress assessment data at the three data points.

- To provide academic and technical interpretation of the learning data analysed.

- To support the SAGE team to develop a series of qualitative case studies to better understand girls' lived experiences of learning progress.

- To participate in and provide guidance to Fund Manager and MoPSE discussions.

- To develop skills and capacity of MERL, programme and District team members in these areas.

This scope of work has been designed across two phases: Phase 1 (March 2021-February 2022) and Phase 2 (February- July 2022). A revised draft ToR (currently under review) can be viewed at Annex 9.

To 'learn about learning', the consortium appreciated that alongside robust quantitative data on learning progress, there was an equal need for qualitative evidence. A girl-to-girl learning conversation approach was selected to explore what girls value in their learning. This also aligned with SAGE's MTRP results framework which proposed the start of case study collection. Again, internal capacity gaps were acknowledged and Plan International were keen to learn from OU's academic expertise, given their role in leading existing case studies developed within the GEC-T Improving Girls' Access through Transforming Education (IGATE) programme.

Boosting Qualitative Evidence

Recommendations in the baseline evaluation had noted for consideration at midline, the need to 'place greater emphasis on qualitative data at future evaluation points, particularly as the baseline was limited in exploring 'why' and 'how' to better understand the reasons behind the quantitative results observed'. Although this midline process is not comparable, the consortium recognised the need for more qualitative data, including on gender norms, which enhanced monitoring could provide. Additionally, the baseline evaluation recommended, 'At future evaluation timepoints, SAGE should consider increasing the number of community leaders to participate in KIIs. By incorporating additional perspectives, SAGE can gain a better understanding of the enabling environment for sustainability at the community level'.

The consortium identified the specific tools to be used would be:

- **Most significant change stories:** This tool would involve the collection and selection of stories of change, developed by SAGE or its stakeholders, to assess change up to the midpoint of the intervention.
- **KIIs:** Key Informant Interviews with community members.
- **Lessons learnt:** thematic-focused exercise utilising Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and KIIs where lessons learnt are documented through workshops at a hub level to directly gather volunteer feedback.

4.1.2 CAPACITY BUILDING

Timeframe: May 2021-January 2022

With an ambitious approach and a desire for high-quality enhanced monitoring for the remainder of the programme, the consortium reviewed where budget investment would have the most economical and effective results and build capacity across the entire monitoring process spanning from collection, cleaning, analysis, participatory review to dissemination. Although SAGE has dedicated MERL staff at UK and Zimbabwe-level, capacity building was also for wider district and community-level Plan and partner staff who also hold MERL responsibilities and guide programme delivery. In all, over 50 people at Zimbabwe and UK-level benefitted from at least one of the following activities. The main areas identified included:

- **Learning Progress Assessment:** As detailed above, the OU expanded their scope of technical support to aid stakeholder capacity strengthening in compiling, analysis and dissemination of assessment results. Given travel restrictions, this was provided through only virtual means and included:
  - The development of the 'SAGE Assessment Strategy – External' which details the SAGE approach to the assessment of girls' learning. This was shared with the Fund Manager in September 2021 – see Annex 8.
  - Development of an analysis framework and templates for dissemination to a) MERL teams b) Fund Manager c) District teams d) national government.
  - Advisory support to Plan International team members as they undertook data analysis of LPA datasets.
  - The leadership of three virtual workshops with Plan International Zimbabwe and UK teams to collaboratively understand and interpret progress assessment data from different perspectives (e.g., girl, CE, hub, District).
  - The leadership of four virtual workshops held to collaboratively design and understand methodology and protocols for the girl-to-girl learning conversations component.
  - Guided pairwork on case study write-up as well as review and cross-case analysis of the initial seven pairs of girl-to-girl learning conversations.

Further capacity building in this time period has also included the OU, Plan UK and Zimbabwe teams leading an orientation meeting with the Fund Manager team on 27 September 2021. This focused on the learning assessment approach, which should aid the FM team as they interpret this results report.

The above is in addition to the ongoing training supported by Plan and OU teams to hub volunteers in this period. For volunteers, training in Year 3 built on initial training in Year 2 and was heavily focused on how assessments should be carried out, the interpretation of results and then how to develop practice accordingly. Trainings included how to assess girls with disabilities, how to group girls based on assessment outcomes, how to accommodate girls with disabilities and low and high attainment levels, as well as how to understand the LPA data and use learnings to develop a hub action plan. Rollout of training was particularly impressive given the recurrent and strict lockdowns in Zimbabwe throughout this period which prompted the pivoting from face-to-face to Whatsapp-based training.

- **Qualitative tools and analysis:** Structured capacity building was led by the Plan International team through an in-person four-day training to 46 SAGE consortium staff in September 2021. Training facilitators were from across the consortium including Plan International, CBM and AWET. In response to feedback collected via a survey on capacity needs, the training was designed to equip SAGE consortium members with analysis and report writing skills utilising qualitative and quantitative data with a participatory and practical training format. Results from pre-and post-tests indicated an increase in the proportion of participants who were able to create and interpret pictorial representations of data and were aware of qualitative data collection methods. Participants reported feeling empowered by the training, with recommendations for similar training on a regular, bi-annual or annual basis.

This training was complemented by a one-day training in September 2021, held prior to the documentation of lessons learnt, in which the project team comprising of District Coordinators, MERL Coordinators and hired enumerators were supported to gain expertise in the documentation of lessons learnt by employing Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) as the major data collection techniques. The training sessions took the format of role plays and plenary discussions to ensure that participants gained knowledge on the expected approaches to the collection of data.

- **Data entry and compilation:** The procurement of six laptops was recommended to aid data compilation across the three Programme Areas/ provinces. Items have been procured and received by relevant teams.
- **Data analysis and review:** Capacity building initiatives by the OU and Plan teams are to be complemented by the procurement of analysis software such as SPSS. At the time of reporting, budget allocated to this, as well as contributing towards database hosting costs/ subscriptions, was still to be utilised with internal follow-up in progress.

Staff also gathered in two in-person MEL Working Group meetings May and October 2021 to review quarterly results and plan and review the outputs of enhanced monitoring.

- **Dissemination and integration of results into engaging learning products and communications:** The procurement of four DLSR cameras was recommended so Plan Zimbabwe teams in the three provinces and the PIZ Communications Specialist could compile photographs of SAGE girls and activities to accompany monitoring and learning products, rather than relying on limited centralised resources. These items have been procured and distributed accordingly.

Budget has been retained to support the printing of hard copies of this report for key stakeholders within Zimbabwe, as well as the design of a brochure to aid dissemination of results in an accessible format. This is planned for quarter 15 which spans February-April 2022.

4.1.3 RESEARCH STUDY

Timeframe: May 2021-January 2022

The consortium led by Plan UK compiled a research overview to streamline and align consortium research interests and identify appropriate research proposals across the remainder of the programme, including for the midline alternative. These research interests were then compared against evidence held for outcomes and intermediate outcomes (as detailed below) to identify gaps which would guide prioritisation of research focus.

The programme has focused on one research study given increased costs due to the research model needing to be adapted around lockdown measures in place. The research study chosen via consortium consultation focused on the issue of enrolment and retention, with the following research objectives identified:

- To assess risk factors leading to irregular attendance
- To explore the viability of opportunities pursued by the girls who have transitioned to employment before completing SAGE learning activities
- To evaluate the effectiveness of strategies for retention and follow-up

From there a Terms of Reference (ToR) was developed between Plan UK and Zimbabwe teams and advertised in Zimbabwe, with international consultants not considered given travel restrictions and the preferred contextual knowledge, local language abilities and availability of reputable Zimbabwean academic and research actors. Plan Zimbabwe teams then led coordination with the consultants, provided primary documents and access to SAGE databases, mobilised respondents, facilitated data collection via phone and community-based contact and facilitated the review and validation process. Plan UK facilitated the process with the Fund Manager and internal technical teams to ensure research tools were appropriately approved and met required standards. Draft reports from the consultants were then reviewed thoroughly by consortium members and presented as part of a validation meeting in November 2021.

The below table as included in the Inception report assists in understanding how evidence gained by these components would aid understanding of progress at the outcome and intermediate outcome levels and would complement evidence obtained in the baseline evaluation.

Table 3

Outcome	Measured at baseline	Evidence gathered by midline alternative
Outcome 1 – Learning: Highly marginalised adolescent girls have significantly improved learning outcomes	Yes	Yes – Enhanced Monitoring and Capacity Building
Harnessing learner progress assessments		
Intermediate Outcome 1: Highly marginalised adolescent girls regularly attend high-quality, accelerated learning sessions	No	Yes – Research study
Intermediate Outcome 2: Highly marginalised adolescent girls have increased self-efficacy and life skills	Yes	Yes – Enhanced Monitoring and Capacity Building: Boosting qualitative evidence
Outcome 2 – Transition: Highly marginalised adolescent girls have transitioned through key stages of education, training or employment	No	Yes – Enhanced Monitoring and Capacity Building: Boosting qualitative evidence
Intermediate Outcome 3: Highly marginalised adolescent girls have improved levels of market relevant livelihood skills	No[22]	No
Outcome 3 – Sustainability: The programme can demonstrate that the changes it has brought about (which increase learning and transition through education cycles) are sustainable	Yes	Yes – Enhanced Monitoring and Capacity Building: Boosting qualitative evidence
Intermediate Outcome 4: Communities demonstrate more positive gender attitudes and actively support and protect girls	Yes	Yes – Enhanced Monitoring and Capacity Building: Boosting qualitative evidence
Intermediate Outcome 5: Strong and active partnerships with MoPSE officials and other civil society actors actively advocate for more inclusive, gender-responsive education policies	No	Yes – Enhanced Monitoring and Capacity Building: Boosting qualitative evidence

22 However, the VSLA study conducted by Plan Zimbabwe in March 2021 provides some evidence of this before the start of this intervention component.

5. OVERVIEW OF MIDLINE DATA

As part of the SAGE alternative midline approach, a suite of different data collection methodologies was used to generate both quantitative and qualitative data relating to programme outcomes and intermediate outcomes. Most data collection was undertaken internally by the SAGE consortium and supported by the capacity building approach detailed above. The SAGE consortium will continue to build upon and leverage the data collection skills developed through the midline process for the remainder of the programme to enhance and strengthen programme monitoring activities and generate robust, nuanced and in-depth data for the purposes of programmatic adaptations and learning.

The methodologies employed as part of the midline alternative approach and the timeframes for data collection were as follows:

Table 4

Methodology	Timeframe of data collection
Learning Progress Assessments	November-December 2020
Most Significant Change stories	June 2021
Girl-to-girl learning conversations	June-December 2021
Lessons learnt	September 2021
KIIs with Apostolic community	September 2021
Externally commissioned research study into hub attendance and retention	July-November 2021

The following sections will outline each of these methodologies in more detail, including (where appropriate) the sampling approaches used, the process for data collection and the analytical approaches employed. Because multiple different methodologies were used as part of the midline process which had different sampling approaches, there is not one single midline sample referred to in this report.

The below table outlines the number of respondents in each methodology. A maximum of 3,920 girls have been engaged across this process, including through the IPA and MPA assessments, although it is likely that some girls will have been engaged in more than one methodology.

Table 5: Respondent Table[23]

Methodology	Sub-group breakdown (girls)							Community Leaders	Religious Leaders	Volunteers	Head Teachers/ mentors/NFE buddies	Parents/caregivers/ partners	Total Number of Respondents
	Young Mothers	Apostolic Community	NBTS	Girls with disabilities	Ethnic minority girls	Girls engaged in labour	Married girls	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	
Initial Progress Assessments	46	413	81	33	0	676	39	0	0	0	0	0	756
Mid Progress Assessments	1415	1492	132	158	171	2618	1170	0	0	0	0	0	2713
AWET Kits	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	6
MSC stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	103
Case studies	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	14
Lessons learnt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	64	0	0	94
Research study	113	196	29	19	26	323	93	3	0	47	33	124	538

23 Of girls participating in the MSC stories, some chose to remain anonymous and thus the programme could not identify which sub-group(s) they belong to, hence only including the total number in this table.

5.1 LEARNING PROGRESS ASSESSMENTS

Background:

Drawing on technical leadership provided by the OU, the SAGE programme has developed an alternative approach to assessing girls' learning from the EGRA/EGMA and SeGRA/SeGMA model conventionally used within the sector and across other GEC programmes. The rationale for this is based on a consideration of the SAGE girls' backgrounds and circumstances, their potential prior learning experiences (both formal and informal), the purpose of the SAGE programme and the experience of SAGE hub volunteers in carrying out assessments.

Based on an understanding of the diverse profile of the SAGE cohort, and the intersectional barriers that SAGE girls face, the SAGE team felt that EGRA and EGMA could not adequately capture different forms of achievement beyond purely academic outcomes, and that the SAGE assessments needed to capture additional elements of a girl's learning that would demonstrate all that she could achieve. EGRA and EGMA were originally designed to capture young children's initial learning, which was felt to be too limiting in capturing a SAGE girl's progress. For example, a 15-year-old girl with a disability who has never been to school before may find making friends, being accepted in a group and singing to be significant learning experiences and achievements. The SAGE assessments are designed to be more like a conversation than a test, to ensure the girl is at ease and able to respond as fully as possible. At the advice of one of the school psychologists, it was also suggested that one sub-task should be picture reading to enable girls with learning difficulties to be successful.

These small steps of learning have been at the core of the design process, achieved through the way a girl's scores are recorded. The SAGE team also considered that administering formal tests to SAGE girls would not be ethical or appropriate given the disruption to girls' lives and learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The SAGE consortium continues to engage with the Fund Manager team as to whether the SAGE assessment approach which is seen as a robust and rigorous alternative to the traditional EGRA/EGMA assessments of learning and can be used at future evaluation points.

Assessment design:

An initial starting point for the screening tool was to use the analysis of the baseline EGRA and EGMA sub-tasks to identify the four specific areas in numeracy and literacy where girls scored lower. In addition, the team reviewed test materials in usage in the region, and ones beyond EGRA and EGMA. A core feature of the assessment approach was also that Community Educators who are known to the girls would administer the assessments, unlike with the EGRA and EGMA process where different enumerators may work with different girls each time.

The design of the SAGE assessments was influenced by the sample tests carried out by an organisation called Uwezo, part of Twaweza, an independent East African initiative that 'promotes access to information, citizen agency and improved service delivery outcomes across the region' (Uwezo, 2013). Since 2010 the Uwezo network has completed annual learning assessments in three countries in East Africa: Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. In 2019, it published its eighth learning assessment report. The sample tests were reviewed both for content and layout, and a similar structure was used for the girl copy required to complete the LPA assessments. The Uwezo tests also provided content and context reliability. In addition, a globally available diagnostic test – the Burt Word Reading test – was used to level up the difficulty for the word reading sub-tasks across the SAGE assessments.

To ensure that girls were not over-pressurised and therefore not able to demonstrate their best, advice was taken from all three tests to offer girls 3-5 (sub-task dependent) tries at an answer. This decision was based on a recognition of the critical importance for SAGE girls of avoiding feelings of failure, which may have been their previous school experience. The SAGE assessments were shared with district teams for piloting, and feedback was incorporated into the IPA/MPA training package for CEs and NFE mentors.

Assessment process:

Assessment for learning is embedded throughout the SAGE ATL programme and ongoing assessment is considered part of, rather than separate from learning. This is demonstrated within SAGE's teaching and learning approach where learning sessions and materials are presented around a four-part structure of Plan, Do, Assess/Feedback and Reflect. Community Educators routinely use Progress Books to capture each girl's individual progress as they develop in an ongoing formative assessment process. This process of formative assessment enables CEs to differentiate tasks for learners, so that tasks are accessible to all with scope to challenge. It is anticipated that CEs will be more confident in recording girls' learning in their Progress Books and, as such, they will become more experienced in completing the summative Learning Progress Assessments.

Assessment of learning (also called 'summative assessment') takes place at the end of specific blocks of learning. In SAGE, this type of assessment is called a progress assessment. It tells Community Educators, district staff and the wider team how well girls have learned in the three different subject areas (literacy, numeracy and English) and their wider level of attainment. To ensure reliability, the assessments provide a commentary for the CEs to follow, as well as guidance for what they should look out for in a girl's response when allocating a score. Each of the four assessments are also accompanied by a training package of support.

1. Screening tool

Prior to joining SAGE, a screening tool is used to determine a girl's eligibility to join the SAGE programme. Girls are eligible to join SAGE if they have never been to school or have dropped out of school and have learning levels equivalent to below Grade 5 of formal schooling in one or both literacy and numeracy. The screening tool is completed by the learning hub's attached NFE mentor as they are not the girls' direct educator and hence have some independence. NFE mentors are situated in the formal schools which are aligned to each hub and they hold a supervisory role within the SAGE programme. A core reason for NFE mentors undertaking the screening assessments was to avoid Community Educators being perceived as 'testers'. In addition, the NFE mentor only makes a recommendation of a girl's eligibility, with the final decision as to whether she joins determined by the SAGE programme team. In addition to being independent, completion by the NFE mentor (a member of school staff) avoids the possibility of hub volunteers facing backlash from the community if a girl is or is not recruited to the programme.

2. Initial Progress Assessment (IPA)

Once a girl is deemed eligible to join SAGE, an Initial Progress Assessment (IPA) takes place on her point of entry to the hub. The IPA takes place within two to five weeks of a girl joining the SAGE programme and is carried out by the Community Educators, who are known to the girls. The IPA is framed as a starting point of both the girl's actual learning level and the Community Educator's knowledge of the girl.

3. Mid Progress Assessment (MPA)

The Mid Progress Assessments are administered to girls midway through their SAGE learning journey by Community Educators, after the completion of module 1c (equivalent to the end of Year 1 of the ATL programme, although based on the screening tool and their existing learning levels not all girls necessarily join SAGE at the first module, module 1a). These are designed to provide a snapshot of a girl's progress midway through the programme and support the Community Educators to respond to each girl's learning needs.

4. End Progress Assessment (EPA)

The End Progress Assessments take place when a girl completes the SAGE programme, at the end of module 2c (Year 2). The IPA and MPA are both designed to work independently and build on the previous assessment. The EPA is designed as a test-retest to capture the progress by girl from the initial data point to end point, as the girl graduates from SAGE.

Assessment scoring:

As a girl completes the sub-tasks within the assessments, which are designed to be undertaken at two different times (one in numeracy and one in literacy/English) and are 10-15 minutes long, the CE records her progress. Within each assessment, a girl has the opportunity to score within a range or 'colour band', each of which corresponds to grades within the formal school system. The use of overlapping colour coding allows for a 'best fit' within and across the subtasks and means that girls can be referred to as working within a particular colour band, rather than being reduced to a single absolute score. The colour bands (and their equivalents within the formal school system grades) are as follows (see table 8 in Section 7.1.2 for more detail):

- White (no score)
- Blue (ECD – Grade 2)
- Pink (Grades 2-4)
- Yellow (Grade 5+)

Cohorts and timeframes:

The SAGE Learning Progress Assessments (LPAs) were approved for use in July 2020 and were rolled out for the first time in November/December 2020. Cohort 1 of the SAGE girls were recruited between May-December 2019, and thus were midway through their SAGE journey when the LPAs were first administered. Cohort 1 therefore have not taken the IPA as they were too advanced in their learning by the time the LPAs were rolled out. Instead, Cohort 1 took the MPA in November/December 2020 and will take their EPA in early 2022. For Cohort 1, who did not take an IPA, the EPA will be a test/retest from MPA to EPA, whereas for Cohorts 2-6 their EPA will be a test/retest from IPA to EPA.

Cohort 2 SAGE girls were recruited between January-October 2020 and had recently joined SAGE hubs in November/December 2020. They therefore took their IPA during the data collection period (November-December 2020) and will take their MPA in early 2022 following completion of module 1 followed by the EPA in late 2022 or early 2023.

There are currently six cohorts of SAGE girls who have joined the programme on a rolling enrolment basis. See table 7 in Section 7.1 for more detail on the cohort structure.

The LPA data referred to in this report pertains to two different cohorts – MPA data for Cohort 1 and IPA data for Cohort 2. This is therefore not a longitudinal study. The IPA data and MPA data provide a cross-sectional snapshot of the learning levels of two different cohorts of SAGE girls in November/December 2020.

Sampling:

Every girl who joins SAGE is screened using the screening tool, and subsequently takes the IPA after two to five weeks at a SAGE learning hub (with the exception of Cohort 1 who only undertook initial screening due to the rollout of the IPA after they had commenced their studies). Similarly, every girl who completes Module 1c takes the MPA and every girl who graduates from SAGE takes the EPA (although for the later cohorts this may take place after the programme's endline). The process is therefore conducted on a rolling basis, as girls are recruited to SAGE at different times.

In practice, Community Educators administer Learning Progress Assessments to girls who are present at SAGE hubs during the assessment periods. If girls are not present on the day that the CEs are administering LPAs, CEs attempt to administer the assessment on a later date. Since the data collection period referred to in this report, the assessment period length has been increased from two weeks to one month to accommodate absenteeism.

Data collection:

The IPA and MPA data referred to in this report was collected over a two-week period in November and December 2020 by the CEs administering the assessments. During this data collection period, 2,713 Cohort 1 girls undertook the MPA and 756 Cohort 2 girls undertook the IPA. There are currently a total of 4,456 girls in Cohort 1 and 2,285 girls in Cohort 2, some of whom were not enrolled during the LPA data collection period due to SAGE's strategy of rolling enrolment.

Implementation of the tools was preceded and followed by significant capacity building of volunteers and staff. For volunteers, training in Year 3 built on initial training in Year 2 and was heavily focused on how assessments should be carried out, the interpretation of results and then how to develop practice accordingly. Trainings focused on how to assess girls with disabilities, how to group girls based on assessment outcomes including how to accommodate girls with disabilities and low and high attainment levels, as well as how to understand the MPA data and use learnings to develop a girl progress hub action plan.

With the onset of COVID, the programme pivoted from face-to-face to Whatsapp-based training, with February 2021[24] seeing the programme launch an adapted training model to make it more hub and reflective focused. This new four-part model (following the SAGE teaching approach of Plan, Do, Assess/ Feedback, Reflect) evolved to cluster 3-4 hubs in one group and assign them specific tasks to work on together, using the session guides and learner workbook. Each hub is then expected to present the product of their discussions to other cluster members, with the final activity being a participant and facilitator driven reflection, captured over two days on the hub cluster WhatsApp channel. The new training model increased participation amongst hub volunteers and gave staff members insight on the areas where hub volunteers are confident, and the areas with which they required further training and support. It also supported the Teaching and Learning Team (a core team comprised of SAGE – Plan UK and Zimbabwe, and the OU team) to gain insight into the pedagogic practices within each hub to inform and enhance programme adaptations.

24 Q10 of the programme – training entitled PD10

To ensure reliability, the assessments provide a commentary for the CEs to follow, as well as guidance for what they should look out for in a girl's response when allocating a score. CEs are equipped with a Scoring Guide which provides clear guidance on how to translate raw scores into colour-coded bands. The ongoing use of Progress Books means that CEs are experienced in recording girls' progress at the different sub-task levels, aligning to the programme's ongoing assessment for learning strategy. It is anticipated that CEs will be more confident in recording girls' learning in their Progress Books and, as such, they will become more experienced in completing the assessments. Each of the four assessments are accompanied by a training package of support, currently administered via a hybrid model involving both face-to-face and Whatsapp training. NFE mentors (from the attached school) are also included in the training as they undertake the screening assessments. This also enables them to be skilled in the process and support the CEs in their attached hubs. CEs record girls' assessments in paper forms which are then collated by district staff and can be used for immediate discussion as to how hubs and individual girls are attaining.

Data management:

As mentioned above, CEs record girls' responses to the assessments in paper forms which are then shared with district staff. District staff transfer the scores and colour-coding onto the SAGE database, and each girl's assessment is linked to her individual ID. As well as ensuring each girl's data is stored accurately, this also allows for any unusual progress (either way) to be highlighted and shared back with the district team.

Data analysis:

A core aspect of the capacity building component of the alternative midline approach has been supporting the SAGE team to analyse, interpret and utilise LPA data. The OU team led three workshops aimed at enhancing staff capabilities in quantitative data collection, data analysis, interpretation and dissemination (and a further four focused on qualitative data). For quantitative data, the three workshops included the co-development of an analysis framework to enable analysis at girl, subject and CE/hub level, how to support CEs, interpretation of data analysis results, how to explore potential adaptations to the programme at girl and hub level and how to take action at a district and national level.

To support this process, the MERL team at PIZ undertook analysis of the IPA and MPA data using Microsoft excel, disaggregating the data by subject, subtask, subgroup, district and hub, with quality assurance provided by the OU team.

5.2 MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORIES

Background:

"The Most Significant Change technique facilitates project and program improvement by focusing the direction of work away from less-valued directions toward more fully shared visions and explicitly valued directions, e.g., what do we really want to achieve and how will we produce more of it? It can also help uncover important, valued outcomes not initially specified. It delivers these benefits by creating space for stakeholders to reflect, and by facilitating dynamic dialogue." (Serrat, 2009)[25]

The Most Significant Change technique is a qualitative and participatory form of monitoring and evaluation based on the collection and systematic selection of stories of reported changes from development activities. The technique was developed by Rick Davies in the mid-1990s to meet the challenges associated with monitoring and evaluating a complex participatory rural development programme in Bangladesh.

In The *'Most Significant Change (MSC)' Technique: A guide to its use,*[26] written by the two original developers of MSC, Rick Davies and Jess Dart, Most Significant Change is described as:

"a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation. It is participatory because many project stakeholders are involved both in deciding the sorts of change to be recorded and in analysing the data. It is a form of monitoring because it occurs throughout the program cycle and provides information to help people manage the program. It contributes to evaluation because it provides data on impact and outcomes that can be used to help assess the performance of the program as a whole. Essentially, the process involves the collection of significant change (SC) stories emanating from the field level, and the systematic selection of the most significant of these stories by panels of designated stakeholders or staff."

It is particularly valuable for monitoring and evaluating complex programmes, often in conjunction with other methodologies, as it captures unintended outcomes and provides insights into how different stakeholders within a programme ascribe value.

Methodology and sampling:

SAGE programme staff collected 103 positive stories of change from girls and young women involved in the programme in June 2021. Participants in the MSC process were purposively sampled to ensure representation of SAGE's seven identified sub-groups, namely:

- Girls/young women who have never been to school;
- Girls/young women engaged in labour;
- Girls/young women who are married;
- Girls/young women from an ethnic minority;
- Girls/young women from the apostolic community;
- Girls/young women with a disability;
- Girls/young women who are young mothers.

In practice, a significant proportion of the girls who participated in the MSC process belonged to more than one of these sub-groups, strongly indicating the intersectional nature of identity and the multiple characteristics and barriers that SAGE girls possess and face.

25 https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/most-significant-change.pdf
26 https://www.mande.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2005/MSCGuide.pdf

Selection process:

From the 103 positive stories of change collected, SAGE staff initially selected 14 (two per sub-group) that they considered most significant, in that they most clearly demonstrated the impact that SAGE has had on the girls' lives. While there were no strict criteria for this process, the programme selected 5 'domains of change' to categorise the types of positive change the girls/young women had experienced. These domains were developed based on a light-touch thematic review of the 103 stories. The domains of change chosen were 'improved learning', 'self-efficacy', 'transition', 'gender equality' and 'positive community attitude'. As with the sub-groups, there was considerable overlap between the different domains.

Following this process, SAGE staff and PIZ and Plan UK undertook a further review of the 14 selected stories and were invited to vote on the seven that they felt were most significant, ensuring that each sub-group was represented. For each pair of stories, staff reflected on which of the two conveyed most strongly the aims and impact of the SAGE programme. Through this process, seven stories of change were selected, which can be found in Annex 6.

Data management and analytical approach:

All interviews were held in the language in which the girls felt most comfortable (primarily Shona or Ndebele) before being translated and transcribed into English by the PIZ team.

Once the seven most significant change stories were selected, SAGE undertook a thematic analysis process guided by the five domains of change and underpinned by both Plan International's Gender Transformative Approach and the GEC's Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) framework.

Plan International's approach to gender transformative programming identifies six elements which work together to facilitate meaningful and sustainable change to gender inequality and empowerment of girls and women. These six elements are:

1. identifying and addressing negative gender norms throughout the life course;
2. increasing the agency of girls, young women and marginalised groups;
3. working with men and boys to instil positive masculinities and create champions of gender equality;
4. improving both the daily conditions faced by girls, young women and marginalised groups and also shifting their position within society in a sustainable manner;
5. acknowledging and addressing the diverse intersecting identities and needs of the groups we are seeking to support;
6. creating an enabling environment to support gender transformation from community to national policy level.

The GEC's GESI approach outlines the spectrum from GESI absent to GESI transformative for gender and social inclusion. The most relevant distinction for Plan's programming is between GESI sensitive and GESI transformative, with an organisational expectation that programmes would always be operating as at least GESI sensitive. The distinction between the two levels speaks most closely to Plan's gender transformative element 4 (improving the daily condition and long-term position of girls, women and marginalised groups). GESI sensitive is described as working around existing gender, disability or social exclusion barriers to achieve project objectives i.e. improving the daily conditions faced by girls by working around existing gendered restrictions. GESI transformative is described as actively seeking to transform inequalities for children in the long term despite gender, disability or any other characteristic i.e. improving the position of girls, women and marginalised groups within society.

Within this report, the findings from this thematic analysis have been integrated and triangulated with other data sources and presented under the relevant programme outcomes and intermediate outcomes in the chapters that follow.

5.3 GIRL-TO-GIRL LEARNING CONVERSATIONS

Background:

As part of the enhanced monitoring element of the midline alternative approach, the PIZ team was supported by the OU to develop skills in collecting and presenting case studies highlighting the diverse experiences of programme participants.

To support the rollout of qualitative case study collection, four workshops were held to collaboratively design and understand methodology and protocols, focusing specifically on the area of power dynamics. These included developing a sampling framework which would be inclusive of SAGE's diverse sub-groups, agreeing the approaches, tools and logistics for case study data collection and examining research protocols and girl recruitment procedures. The methodology centred on the facilitation of girl-to-girl conversations involving 14 girls, with each pair consisting of two girls from each of SAGE's seven sub-groups.

Sampling:

The PIZ MERL team visited districts and engaged in conversation with SAGE community mobilisers, who work and live in the districts and know the girls and their families. COGE coordinators who were known to the girls worked closely with the MERL team to determine the sample of potential girls. Following these discussions, CoGE coordinators held an initial session to explain the nature and purpose of the research, the time commitment involved, safeguarding and COVID-19 guidelines and logistical considerations. The girls who remained interested in participating were then provided with more detail on the activity and the CoGE coordinator shared consent forms verbally, ensuring that the girl understood the voluntary nature of the research, scope and purpose. Consent was also confirmed at the start of the conversation with each girl, ensuring that the participants were aware they could withdraw at any point.

Methodology:

Peer-to-peer interviewing was chosen as the methodology for the case studies, to create space for the girls' own voices to come to the fore and mitigate the risk of unequal power dynamics influencing the data. Fourteen girls took part in seven girl-to-girl conversations, supported by a Plan International Zimbabwe MERL team member who had participated in the preparatory workshops. The conversations were guided by a set of questions focusing on what girls valued in their learning, their motivation for joining SAGE and their biggest successes since being part of the programme.

Further, the approach built on the work of early years research (Clark, 2005) to use prompts including photographs and pictures, chosen by the girls/young women to reflect their view of their learning during the last year or so in the SAGE programme.

Data management and analytical approach:

The conversations were held in the girls' mother tongue (either Shona or Ndebele) before being translated and transcribed into English by the PIZ team. A workshop, facilitated by the OU, was then held at which the PIZ team undertook an initial review of the transcripts to identify emerging themes and points of difference, reflecting on three key questions:

- What does learning progress mean at the level of an individual girl/young woman?
- How do girls/young women talk about their new skills?
- How do these skills feature in/impact on their lives?

Supported by the OU, the PIZ team built on the initial analysis undertaken during this workshop to convert the girl-to-girl conversations into seven cameo case studies, which can be found in Annex 5. Emerging themes from the cameo case studies are also integrated into the narrative against relevant programme outcomes and intermediate outcomes within this report.

5.4 LESSONS LEARNT

Background:

The SAGE programme is committed to promoting a culture of sharing knowledge and the use of existing knowledge to achieve programme goals and contribute to organisational learning. By understanding what went well and what did not work, the programme teams can adjust their processes and approaches to future programmes.

As part of the midline, the SAGE team collected and documented lessons learnt at hub level during a one-day event in September 2021. Collecting lessons learnt is an iterative process designed to improve the quality of outputs and provides an opportunity for team members and partners to discuss successes during the programme, unintended outcomes, and recommendations for others involved in similar future programmes. It also allows the team to discuss things that might have been done differently, the root causes of problems that occurred, and corrective actions to avoid these issues recurring.

Objective:

The objective of the lessons learnt process was to improve programme outcomes by identifying opportunities for improvement or the wider adoption of successful practices at hub level by Community Educators.

In this series of lessons learnt, the programme identified four thematic areas which are closely linked to girls' learning: progress assessments; enrolment; attendance; and follow-up. The team worked with Community Educators to share their experiences as part of lessons learnt documentation by reflecting on what they have observed as working and not working in supporting girls to access education. The targeting of Community Educators was deliberate as they directly deal with the identified themes on a regular basis as compared with other hub level volunteers.

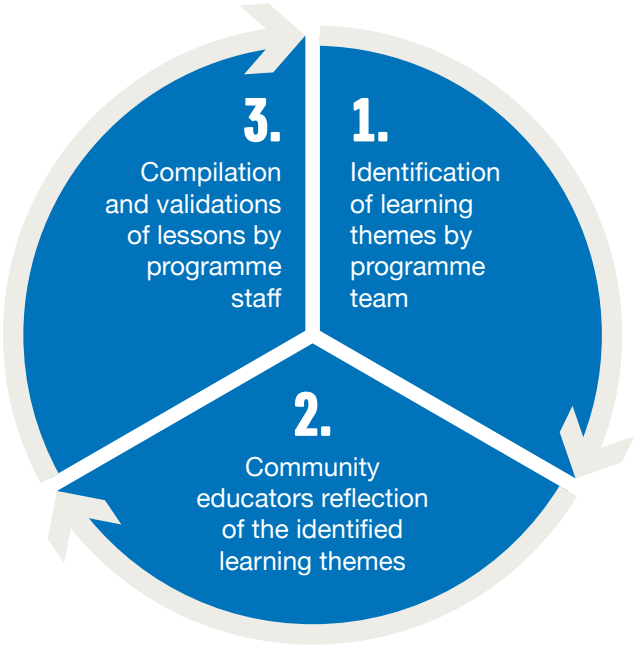
Methodology:

The lessons learnt documentation process applied a qualitative research methodology which involved Community Educators sharing their experiences on what has been working and not working around the identified learning themes. The process was conducted to fill in information gaps pertaining to trends, generated through quantitative routine monitoring tools, which were being observed as varying across the identified four themes and across different hubs. The lessons learnt activity provided an opportunity for Community Educators to reflect and share experiences on what has been working well for them and where there was room for improvement. It also provided an opportunity for peer learning amongst hub level volunteers.

Prior to the documentation of lessons learnt, the project team consisting of District Coordinators, MERL Coordinators and hired enumerators went through a one-day capacity development training on qualitative data collection methods in September 2021. It focused on documentation of lessons learnt by employing Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) as the major data collection techniques. The training sessions took the format of role plays and plenary discussions to ensure that participants gained knowledge on the expected approaches to data collection.

A three-step participatory reflection process was adopted for generating the lessons as shown in Figure 1 below. The first step involved the programme team deciding on learning themes informed by routine monitoring data. The identified themes were selected on their basis of being closely linked to learning success and where the programme was noticing disparities in terms of performance amongst the 88 hubs.

Figure 1



The second step saw 87 Community Educators and seven District Lifelong Learning Coordinators (DLLCs) engaged in Programme Area (PA) clusters to share their experiences around a particular topic. The programme team provided monitoring data to CEs on hub-specific performance. Community educators reflected on the monitoring data to reflect on what was working and not working across different hubs within a particular topic. This refection process gave rise to the documentation of lessons learnt which were documented by hired enumerators. The participatory nature of the documentation process created opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and sharing of ideas.

Dissemination:

The lessons learnt have been shared internally with programme staff to inform new programme adaptations to facilitate effective delivery. More importantly, they will also be shared with hub volunteers to facilitate cross learning. Externally, the lessons will be shared with other projects and partners in a process of knowledge exchange to share practical experiences on what works and does not work when supporting out-of-school girls to access education. Elements of the documented lessons learnt are also integrated into the relevant sections of this report.

5.5 KIIs WITH MEMBERS OF THE APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY

Background:

The Apostolic Women's Empowerment Trust (AWET), a SAGE consortium partner, undertook a series of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with members of the Apostolic community as part of the midline process to gain deeper insights into the experiences of Apostolic girls, who constitute the second largest sub-group amongst the SAGE cohort, and to more fully understand the attitudes, beliefs and practices that influence their lives and education. Their report can be found at Annex 13.

Girls and young women from the Apostolic community were identified as a key sub-group at the programme design stage due to the additional sources of marginalisation and barriers to education they face. Girls from Apostolic households are particularly affected by restrictive gender norms and harmful practices, and girls in Apostolic communities are much more likely to experience early marriage and early pregnancy compared to girls belonging to other faiths.

Data collection and sampling:

AWET used purposive sampling to conduct six KIIs: two with Apostolic religious leaders (aged between 30 and 70) and four with girls and young women from the Apostolic community who are participating in SAGE, who were aged between 15 and 19 years old. Face-to-face interviews were conducted over a one-week period.

Data management and analytical approach:

All interviews were recorded on hard copies in vernacular languages, then translated and transcribed into English. The translated versions were quality assured by AWET staff to ensure that no information had been misrepresented or lost during the direct translation process. Where questions were raised over the translation, AWET revised the English version to restore the original meaning as far as possible. Both the original handwritten interview scripts and the translated transcripts were assigned corresponding references.

Initially, the transcripts were manually read to comprehend the issues, extract themes and other classifications of data from the interview texts and gain an appreciation for the responses (both in vernacular and English translation). Transcripts were then systematically coded to generate themes and subthemes.

The study used the Appreciative Inquiry method, which allowed for the understanding of positive elements within the Apostolic religion and the elimination of preconceived, negative assumptions about Apostolic religious groups.

5.6 EXTERNALLY COMMISSIONED RETENTION AND ABSENTEEISM REPORT

Background:

Finally, PIZ commissioned an independent study as part of the alternative midline approach to analyse risk factors associated with irregular attendance and risk of dropout from SAGE's learning hubs and to assess the impact of dropout prevention strategies being employed by the programme. This area of inquiry was chosen for the study in response to programme monitoring data indicating that girls' attendance at SAGE hubs was lower than expected and that a significant proportion of SAGE girls were exhibiting erratic attendance at SAGE sessions. The research study was undertaken by two Zimbabwean academics working in education who were selected following a competitive tendering process.

Objectives:

The specific objectives of the study were as follows:

- To assess risk factors leading to irregular attendance
- To explore the viability of opportunities pursued by the girls who have transitioned to employment before completing SAGE learning activities
- To evaluate the effectiveness of strategies for retention and follow-up

The findings of the study were intended to inform SAGE's dropout prevention and retention strategy. The following guiding questions were outlined in the ToR, developed by PIZ:

- What are the risk factors leading to irregular attendance or dropping out from SAGE lessons?
- What are the perceptions of SAGE's follow-up measures from those beneficiaries with poor/ irregular attendance?
- What skills and knowledge do hub volunteers need for effective beneficiary retention?
- What are the key factors needed to facilitate the transition of highly marginalised girls into employment?
- What are the key factors and programme delivery components which create higher demand and incentivise attendance among educationally marginalised girls?
- What are the factors which have led to out-of-school girls not utilising SAGE services despite being eligible?
- What factors in each district predict the likelihood of more girls requiring SAGE services?
- Given the need for value-for-money, what adaptations need to be made to focus more resources on the most needy sub-groups or regions where we have more educationally marginalised girls?
- How effective are the retention mechanisms at hub level?
- How is the community involved in attendance follow-up for adolescent girls?
- How viable are the employment opportunities taken at the community level cited by those girls who have left for employment reasons?

Scope:

Under the initial design, the consultants had intended to conduct in-person data collection across all 11 SAGE districts. However, due to COVID-19 constraints this was then revised to involve two phases of data collection: one involving in-person data collection where possible and another reaching respondents who could not participate in face-to-face data collection via phone.

In practice, the consultants conducted a first stage of data collection via phone as field visits could not be conducted due to movement restrictions. Telephone interviews were conducted with targeted girls, Community Educators, CoGE facilitators, parents/caregivers of the targeted girls, community leaders head teachers and mentors in all the eleven SAGE districts between August and November 2021. In Bulilima district, participants could not be reached via telephone because of poor connectivity (this is due to most mobile phone users in Bulilima using Botswana cell phone lines, as they have better connectivity than Zimbabwean providers). As a result, the consultants conducted face-to-face data collection in Bulilima, abiding by COVID-19 restrictions.

Concerns were however raised by the SAGE team that conducting the majority of data collection over the phone in ten of eleven programme districts potentially excluded the hardest to reach girls and other stakeholders without access to phones. In response to these concerns, the consultants undertook a further phase of in-person data collection in November 2021 in four districts, spanning the three provinces in which SAGE is implemented.

Methodology and sampling:

The study employed a mixed-methods design involving a quantitative Girls' Survey, Key Informant Interviews and FGDs. In each district, two learning hubs were purposively selected: one with the highest absenteeism rate and one with the highest retention rate in that district, with the intention of drawing comparisons between hubs with these different characteristics. However, in both categories of hubs, there were girls that reported that they had irregular attendance and those with regular attendance. The consultants took the decision to analyse girls according to their self-reported categories of attendance (regular, fairly regular or irregular) rather than by hub. Where they considered the type of hub to be germane to the findings, the consultants referred to it in their report.

Participants were randomly selected from the database of SAGE participants provided by PIZ. At each learning hub the following participants were sampled:

- Girls with records of irregular attendance (0-49% attendance of sessions)
- Girls regularly attending SAGE sessions (more than 50% attendance)
- Community Educators (CEs)
- CoGE Facilitators (Championing of Girls Education)
- School heads/mentors
- Parents/Caregivers of girls participating in SAGE sessions or irregularly attending or have dropped out
- Community Leaders (traditional, religious, political)

Data management and analysis:

All qualitative interviews were audio recorded by the research team. Upon completion of each interview, the interviewers completed an interview summary form. The audio data was then transformed into narrative data through developing detailed notes on issues emerging from the interview for each of the questions on the question guide. The notes were then analysed through thematic content analysis to identify key themes and draw conclusions from the emerging data. Quantitative data from the Girls' Survey was imported from Kobo Collect into SPSS for cleaning and analysis.

6. EXPLANATION OF ANALYTICAL APPROACH

The analytical approach employed throughout this report is underpinned by the SAGE programme's Theory of Change, linking to the three core outcomes of learning, transition and sustainability, and, where relevant, to the programme's five intermediate outcomes, which are as follows:

1. IO1: Highly marginalised adolescent girls regularly attend high-quality, accelerated learning sessions
2. IO2: Highly marginalised adolescent girls have increased self-efficacy and life skills
3. IO3: Highly marginalised adolescent girls have improved levels of market relevant livelihood skills
4. IO4: Communities demonstrate more positive gender attitudes and actively support and protect girls
5. IO5: Strong and active partnerships with MoPSE officials and other civil society actors actively advocate for more inclusive, gender-responsive education policies

This report has been structured according to the programme's three core outcomes and, where relevant evidence has been collected, to its intermediate outcomes. Evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, gathered through the various data collection processes outlined in Section 5, has been assessed against SAGE's three core outcomes and intermediate outcomes with a view to demonstrating progress against programme goals. Data was not collected for IO3 (Highly marginalised adolescent girls have improved levels of market relevant livelihood skills) as the programme intervention relevant to this IO had not commenced by the time of data collection.

Although the midline alternative does not constitute an external evaluation study, the SAGE programme is committed to using the learning it will produce to inform as many higher-level conclusions as possible.

6.1 SAFEGUARDING

Ethical protocols:

All data collected as part of the midline approach was guided by the following ethical protocols and safeguarding policy, in line with the GEC Do No Harm policy and Plan International's Global Safeguarding Children and Young People policy.

The below table details some of the key actions undertaken to support activities conducted as part of this alternative midline approach.

Table 6

Category	Ethical protocols
Overall approach	• All monitoring, evaluation and research activities are guided by a strong safeguarding focus. This includes gaining informed consent, allowing participants to withdraw at any time, ensuring that data collectors are fully trained in ethical data collection and reporting mechanisms, maintaining participants' anonymity, ensuring that only female data collectors interview girls. • All staff, volunteers and external contractors involved in the alternative midline approach were required to sign Plan International's Safeguarding policy and participate in safeguarding training.
Quantitative and qualitative data collection methods and tools	• Specialists within the programme reviewed all tools and methods from the point of view of social inclusion and gender responsiveness, as well as local sensitivities and norms (for example, schedules for interviews with the girls and communities to fit household and community commitments). • All data collection tools used for this alternative midline were reviewed by Plan Zimbabwe's Safeguarding Coordinator with input from Plan UK technical specialists.
Quantitative and qualitative data collection process	• The SAGE project ensures that written consent from parents / carers are secured for participation in activities and comply with Plan International policies regarding videos, photography and the use of information. Assurance was given that any information collected will be confidential and will not be used for any purpose other than the stated purposes, which is primarily to improve the work of the SAGE programme. Participation of young people and / or usage of information and / or images and video can only take place after consent is obtained from both parents and young people. All data collection processes involved clear communication that consent can be withdrawn at any point without fear of losing any of the advantages delivered through the project. • The programme produced consent forms for each of the participants which are securely stored. • Forms and processes for obtaining consent were reviewed and adapted in line with the particular needs e.g. literacy levels, disability etc. • For this alternative midline, all data collection involving girls was conducted by female staff or volunteers, with the exception of the Learning Progress Assessments which were administered by a trusted hub volunteer. In general, the programme aims to have only female staff members conducting interviews and focus group discussions with girls, especially in cases where sensitive information is being discussed.

Category	Ethical protocols
Recruitment, training and supervision of personnel	• SAGE conducts regular safeguarding trainings for all staff and volunteers led by the SAGE Safeguarding Coordinator with technical support from Plan UK. For example, a refresher session for the consortium was held in November 2021 and included a focus on safeguarding and ethics in MERL. • All staff and volunteers are screened and vetted before being engaged by the programme or having any interaction with SAGE participants. • External contractors are recruited in accordance with the Fund Manager's relevant guidance and vetted before commencing work. They are also required to sign and adhere to Plan International's relevant policies. Internally, HR reviews employees' level of contact with children, access to child data and the level of prevention checks needed for all relevant post-holders on an annual basis. • Meeting safeguarding requirements is a key criterion in the selection of any external contractors. The consultants for the attendance study set out detailed safeguarding measures as part of their inception report, which the consortium monitored closely throughout the exercise. • The training of enumerators included ethical issues and protocols. Project staff were involved in this training to ensure the particular needs of the girls, their families and communities were respected. • Data collectors were trained in sensitive interviewing strategies (for instance, asking about hypothetical situations rather than probing for personal experience) and in how to make safe and sensitive referrals in the event of a disclosure. • All data collectors involved in collecting data for this report received training in COVID-19 safety protocols.
Dedicated Safeguarding Technical Support	• In line with the GEC Do No Harm Policy, the SAGE Safeguarding Coordinator is responsible for the mainstreaming, implementation and monitoring of child safeguarding and any protection risks within and outside the project, covering both staff and external evaluators. They are supported by Advisors at PIZ Country Office and Plan International UK.

Category	Ethical protocols
Risk Management	• Additional safeguards are in place given that SAGE's target beneficiaries are highly marginalised and vulnerable adolescent girls (some of whom are living with disabilities, others who may be survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) including child, early and forced marriage) and that sensitive subjects like SRHR may be discussed in MEL activities. The consortium-level risk register includes safeguarding risks, mitigation measures and escalation procedures. • SAGE has developed SOPs for working with girls with disabilities (as part of the SOPs on how to engage girls during COVID-19). Conducting monitoring and evaluation activities with girls with disabilities was also included in the programme's training on safeguarding and ethics in MERL. • The programme has conducted safeguarding trainings for girls in hubs specifically to address safeguarding concerns that surfaced during the attendance research study. This involves ensuring girls are aware of made aware of safeguarding reporting channels. • Safeguarding concerns raised through data collection activities conducted for this alternative midline approach have been followed up at hub level through technical monitoring visits and reported according to Plan International's Global Safeguarding Children and Young People policy and reported to the donor (the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office) as per the agreed protocol. • Risk assessments were conducted for all the data collection methodologies utilised within this report. Relevant permissions were gained, data collectors were trained in COVID-19 protocols, PPE was provided for data collectors and participants, and data collectors obtained informed consent.
Data recording, storage, analysis and reporting	• The MEL team is responsible for ensuring all data are entered correctly into the mobile data collection platform for internal pieces. External contractors do the same for the pieces they are responsible for. • All electronically collected data is securely stored at all times and is only accessible to consortium staff using authorised accounts. External reporting does not contain any personal or sensitive data. • Any paper-based records (such as attendance sheets) are securely stored at CBLH level and only accessible to Community Educators and consortium staff.

6.2 LIMITATIONS

Overall:

From this initiative, the SAGE consortium has gained learning in terms of the programme results but particularly in how to manage and implement this innovative approach. Learning will be useful for other projects within the GEC project portfolio but also the wider civil society sector.

The process required for this initiative has limitations and challenges. Overall, the timeframes of the alternative midline process required substantial extension from those stated in the Inception Report due to a range of challenges including compiling, synthesising and writing up results from assorted methodologies and to a standard that is in line with Plan International's requirements as well as Fund Manager expectations, significant staffing changes in Plan UK and Zimbabwe MERL teams between June 2021 and January 2022 and delays to data collection or capacity building workshops, due to recurring lockdown measures.

The alternative midline approach agreed with the Fund Manager is an ongoing process rather than a standalone evaluation. This report is not based on a single overarching methodological design and was not intended to gather data on every programmatic indicator; rather, it synthesises a combination of different data collection methodologies and approaches from which the consortium aimed to draw meaningful conclusions and develop actionable and contextualised recommendations, rather than deriving from a holistic evaluation design.

Capacity building is a key element of the alternative midline approach, and one of its strengths. However, due to this, the majority of data collection and analysis presented in this report was conducted internally by consortium staff and as part of a learning process. This will strengthen monitoring and research functions for the duration of the programme but has led to some challenges with data collection and analysis and a lengthier analytical process.

It was not within the agreed scope of this midline approach to collect data for all outcome and intermediate outcome indicators. Quantitative data was collected against the learning outcome and attendance intermediate outcome; all other outcomes and intermediate outcomes have been assessed using qualitative data as part of the enhanced monitoring component. While this limits our ability to report against these quantitative indicators in the logframe, it has generated valuable in-depth insights and amplified girls' voices within this report.

As the scope of the approach was centred on certain outcome and intermediate outcomes, it did mean that safeguarding which is seen as a cross-cutting thematic area spanning all outcomes was not explicitly explored within this process, nor SAGE's work towards referring girls into protection services. This was mainly due to prioritising the team's capacity given SAGE's comprehensive model, as well as the midline design process following a period of intensive focus on safeguarding standards, with the programme being approved as compliant with GEC Safeguarding Minimum Standards in October 2020. Girls' feedback amongst qualitative components of this process has been particularly illuminating on unintended harms such as community backlash, bullying and violence and will drive the programme forward in improving safeguarding practice.

Access to stakeholders was limited due to COVID-19 restrictions. Certain types of data conventionally collected as part of an external evaluation, such as Household Survey data, were not collected, both because of logistical constraints and because they were not within the agreed scope of the alternative midline approach. There was limited data collection with community members, including men and boys.

The qualitative data collection undertaken for this midline has generated rich and valuable insights into individual girls' experiences of SAGE and helped to build the programme's understanding of girls' learning journey across diverse sub-groups, complementing SAGE's girl-centred model. Although the volume of qualitative data is not sufficient to draw representative conclusions relating to the underlying factors influencing girls' learning results, the girl-to-girl conversations and resulting cameo case studies (Annex 5) have begun to explore girls' experiences and perceptions of their own learning across the seven sub-groups.

There is no representation of Government officials in the data collection, which was also the case at baseline. This is because the consortium team wanted to prioritise girls' and community voices at the midline but this group will be included as a stakeholder group as part of enhanced monitoring for the remainder of the programme and as part of the endline evaluation. Conclusions regarding the programme's engagement with key stakeholders are therefore based on programme monitoring and learning rather than data specifically collected for this midline.

Learning Progress Assessments:

The Learning Progress Assessment data used in this report was collected over a two-week period in November and December 2020. Initial Progress Assessment data referred to in this report was collected from Cohort 2, and Mid Progress Assessment data was collected with Cohort 1. Due to logistical constraints, and particularly the disruption of lockdown measures, assessment data was not collected from the entirety of these two cohorts. This data is therefore a cross-sectional snapshot of these girls' learning levels at a particular point in time. This is not a longitudinal study of girls' learning as the data was collected from two different cohorts and thus cannot be used to track individual learners' progression from IPA to MPA, which limits the conclusions that can be drawn relating to the impact of the SAGE model on learning outcomes. However, at endline the programme will have individual girls' learning data across multiple assessment points, allowing for longitudinal tracking of girls' learning journeys.

Given the difference in learning assessment methodology from EGRA/EGMA to internal Learning Progress Assessments, the programme does not have direct comparative learning data from baseline, although there is sufficient alignment between the LPA assessments and EGRA/EGMA sub-tasks to enable illustrative mapping of learning data from baseline to IPA and MPA, as shown in Section 7.1.5.

The learning assessment data analysed and reported on in this midline was collected in November-December 2020. The SAGE team focused on this dataset for analysis as it was compiled and quality assured in sufficient time to be used throughout the capacity building component and can be used to present findings at district, sub-task and subgroup level, as well as to support teaching practices at the hubs. For Cohorts 3-5, although some IPA data was collected during 2021, it was collected on a rolling basis after the analysis process had already begun. COVID-19 related lockdowns also resulted in some delays in this data being shared by the hub teams.

Due to the timeframes for the analysis of the LPA data captured and the need to undertake the capacity building utilising the data sets with national and hub level staff, the cohort included in the data presented within this report is therefore not representative of all six current cohorts. However, the data provides a valuable snapshot of girls' learning attainment at individual, hub and sub-group level. See Section 8.1 for further discussion of the learning generated by the rollout of the LPA model.

Most Significant Change stories:

The selection of the seven Most Significant Change stories from the 103 collected in total was not based on any formal criteria, and did not involve a fully participatory process, as with a more thorough MSC process. Rather, SAGE staff considered which stories they felt most strongly conveyed the impact that SAGE had had on the girls' lives.

Attendance and retention study:

The original design of the research study involved a balance of face-to-face and in person data collection. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, most data were collected over the phone, reducing the inclusion of respondents without access to technology who are likely to be amongst the most marginalised. The design involved collecting data from two different types of hubs: those with higher attendance levels and lower attendance levels. Due to a decision on the part of the external consultants, the data were not disaggregated according to this distinction, limiting the conclusions that can be drawn about the factors that might influence attendance at a hub level. The analysis is based on girls' self-reported attendance levels rather than actual attendance which also limits the reliability of the data.

7. FINDINGS

7.1 LEARNING CHAPTER (OUTCOME 1)

7.1.1 INTRODUCTION TO LPA MODEL

The Learning Progress Assessment (LPA) model was introduced earlier in this report (Section 5.1) with an explanation of the theoretical foundation, rationale for the approach, LPA assessment tools and training provided in the LPA methodology. This chapter commences with a further explanation of the respondents featured within the datasets presented here, building upon the information provided in Section 5 (table 5).

Within this chapter, the report will analyse and contextualise the learning scores taken from Initial Progress Assessments (IPA) and Mid Progress Assessments (MPA), two data points within the LPA model. Firstly, the chapter will present the overall mean scores for literacy and numeracy (totals), disaggregated by districts and by subject (numeracy, literacy). Then it will go on to analyse the data by sub-task scores for literacy and numeracy, with examples provided to draw comparisons between sub-tasks taken from SAGE's baseline evaluation (August-September 2019) and the IPA and MPA data gathered and analysed within this reporting period. The report then presents a summary and spotlight of specific findings in learning progress across the SAGE sub-groups and finally will examine datasets through a district lens.

The *'Initial Progress Assessment and Mid Progress Assessment Literacy and Numeracy Scores by District'* (Section 7.1.5), toward the end of this chapter includes an explanation of how LPA findings are already being used at hub level to inform programme implementation and strengthen CEs' ability to differentiate their support to learners. As was outlined in the introduction to the LPA model earlier (Section 5.1), IPA and MPA datasets gathered during the data capture period covered by this report were utilised within LPA training workshops at hub level. Community Educators and NFE mentors provided formal written summaries of their workshop for each hub, identifying areas of shared challenges for their learners, the corresponding continuing professional development needs for hub volunteers, and sharing the adaptations they were making to their pedagogic approaches in response to the progress shown by their learners. This chapter ends with a summary of programme recommendations for teaching and learning, with a more detailed summary of the action plans developed at district level to be found in Annex 12.

Respondents:

The primary purpose of the LPAs was to enable Community Educators (CEs) to assess girls' progress and to tailor their support to them accordingly to build on their strengths and address areas of weakness. The model was then adapted to be used as an evaluation tool, with appropriate emphasis on training of CEs to improve reliability of the assessments themselves and the data captured throughout the process. The LPA model enables the project to produce a statement about girls' learning outcomes and to track their learning progress from initial to mid- and end-line points, which is a measure of progress towards Outcome 1 of the SAGE programme.

The presentation of the data and findings below refer to 756 learners from Cohort 2 who undertook the IPA, and 2,713 learners from Cohort 1 who undertook the MPA. IPAs were administered to newly enrolled girls, to determine their learning levels and inform CEs on effective approaches to support them, while MPAs were administered to girls who had completed module 1c (equivalent to a year of exposure to learning activities), to determine their learning progress from the start of the programme.

It needs noting that the application of the LPA model of learner progress was designed throughout year 1 and applied throughout years 2-3 of the project to date. Therefore, the design of the tools and capacity building required for their application has been cumulative. On this basis, this chapter provides an explanation of the IPA and MPA data, with an articulation of the process and impact of capacity building at a hub level as hub/district teams reflected on and adapted their pedagogic approach in response to their individual datasets.

As shown in table 5 in Section 5, no formal sampling strategy was used for the LPA data presented here, as all SAGE girls are expected to undergo these assessments at some point. Therefore, the data presented here have been determined by the girls who were present at hubs during the assessment period. Unfortunately, lockdown restrictions impacted upon learner attendance and the use of the tools with all enrolled learners at the point of data capture. Restrictions, as detailed in the earlier Section 3.2, have led to multiple periods of no contact with learners. Lockdown restrictions were further compounded by additional absenteeism attributed to girls' additional domestic and employment responsibilities. The programme responded to lockdown restrictions by moving to a multi-learning pathway model including telephone-based and small-group working within communities, but the impact of the pandemic has slowed girls' learning, and the subsequent rollout of the LPA model of assessment and data capture. The consortium considered that conducting the learner assessments via telephone would be inappropriate, exclusionary to groups needing specific support such as girls with disabilities and could lead to inadequate data capture.

The data presented here is a snapshot of two separate cohorts at a particular point in time in their learning. Therefore, the programme is not presenting a comparison of the same girls across the two data points but providing summaries on trends to emerge across sub-tasks, sub-groups and districts at IPA and MPA. While it does not present longitudinal learning data and associated trends, this chapter is intended to support other educators in understanding the pedagogic design of the LPA model.

Status of LPA data collection for each cohort:

The programme has now instigated the rollout of the LPA model across all six enrolled cohorts. The majority of Cohort 1 (2,713 girls, referred to as Cohort 1a), who were enrolled between May and December 2019, had already been in the programme for some time when the LPA model was rolled out, so they did not complete an Initial Progress Assessment but did complete a Mid Progress Assessment (the MPA data for 2,713 girls referred to in this chapter) and will also complete the End Progress Assessment in early 2022. Consequently, the programme will be able to track individual girls' progress from MPA to EPA for Cohort 1a.

The remainder of the girls in Cohort 1 (1,743, referred to as Cohort 1b) completed the IPA but not the MPA. Due to the programme's strategy of rolling enrolment, these girls joined SAGE just after the MPA data had been collected and it was decided that they should join the existing Cohort 1, who were commencing module 2a. LPA data from these girls is not included in this report. These girls will complete the EPA in April enabling longitudinal tracking from IPA to EPA.

Cohort 2 girls were enrolled between January-October 2020 and completed the IPA in November-December 2020 (data from which are referred to in this chapter). They will complete the MPA in early 2022 and the EPA in December 2022 (provided there are no further significant disruptions due to COVID-19 or other external factors) and thus, depending on the timeline of the endline, the programme may be able to track learning across all three data capture points for this cohort.

Cohort 3 girls were enrolled between November 2020 and January 2021 and completed their IPA in December 2020-January 2021. They will complete their MPA in early 2022 and will complete the EPA before the end of the project timeframe, after their completion of module 2c (the final module). However, the EPA assessment results for Cohort 3 may be collated too late for inclusion in the programme's endline report (depending on the evaluation data gathering timeframe agreed with the Fund Manager). SAGE's intention is that they will continue to be supported after the end of the programme at community level in conjunction with MoPSE, as stated in SAGE's revised sustainability plan. At endline, it will therefore be possible to track these girls' learning from IPA to MPA.

Cohorts 4-6 have completed the IPA (with the exception of some girls in Cohort 6 who are completing their IPA in early 2022) and will complete their MPA in December 2022. Similarly, by the time these girls complete module 2c the programme will be drawing to a close, so their EPA data may not be ready for inclusion in the endline due to its period of data gathering. However, the programme will continue to utilise the assessment data after endline data have been gathered, with CEs continuing to support girls learning, utilising individual and district data sets to inform their ongoing provision and adaptation.

Across the six cohorts, there will be variation of datasets at endline; some learners will have longitudinal learner progress data across the three LPA data points, with others having learner progress across only two data points. However, the datasets available at endline will enable the programme to show individual girl-level progress, with additional disaggregation of aggregate datasets as deemed most suitable.

The table below summarises the LPA data currently held and expected to be obtained for each cohort, with approximate timeframes. Please note that future dates are indicative and subject to change depending on school calendars and COVID-19 related disruptions. It should also be noted that the dates at which each cohort took the IPA are approximate as these initial assessments are conducted on a rolling basis.

Table 7: Cohort table

■ Completed ■ Not completed ■ To be completed

Cohort	Total	Date enrolled	Screening	IPA	MPA	EPA
Cohort 1a	2713	May 2019 – Dec 2019			**Nov-Dec 2020**	**Mar-22**
Cohort 1b	1743	Dec 2020-Jan 2021		**Jan-Feb 2021**		**Mar-22**
Cohort 2	2285	Jan 2020 – Oct 2020		**Nov-Dec 2020**	**Feb-Mar 2022**	**Dec-22**
Cohort 3	849	Nov 2020-Jan 2021		**Dec 2020-Jan 2021**	**Apr-May 2022**	**tbc**
Cohort 4	1996	Feb 2021-July 2021		**Feb 2021-Aug 2021**	**Dec-22**	**tbc**
Cohort 5	1324	Aug 2021-Oct 2021		**Aug 2021-Nov 2021**	**Dec-22**	**tbc**
Cohort 6	957	Nov 2021 to January 2022		**Jan 2022-Feb 2022**	**Dec-22**	**tbc**

7.1.2 INITIAL PROGRESS ASSESSMENT AND MID PROGRESS ASSESSMENT TOTAL SCORES FOR LITERACY AND NUMERACY

This section examines the whole IPA and MPA datasets referred to within this chapter, across literacy and numeracy. It provides an explanation of the sub-tasks that have generated the total scores for literacy and numeracy for each girl, and how these scores have generated grade equivalency colour bands within the LPA model.

The section intends to identify what can be asserted about the overall learning levels of Cohort 1 girls (those assessed through the MPA) and Cohort 2 girls (those assessed through the IPA).

LPA scoring protocol: For the IPA and MPA the domains assessed for literacy are as follows:

IPA	Speaking and listening (7); Letter/Sound knowledge (8); Word reading (30); Picture reading (2); Reading (18); Comprehension (5); Writing (11).	Total possible score (81)
MPA	Speaking and listening (7); Letter/Sound knowledge (8); Word reading (30); Picture reading (3); Short passage reading (23); Comprehension (5); Writing (11).	Total possible score (87)

Thus, there are scores for each domain (sub-tasks) and an overall score. The sub-tasks and total scores are assigned a colour band, and this can be used to indicate overall score e.g., for literacy each girl will have seven domain scores and seven domain colour bands, along with a total score and corresponding colour band.

For the IPA and MPA the domains assessed for numeracy are as follows:

IPA	**Number sense:** Counting (3); Number recognition (9); Missing numbers (9); Comparing and ordering numbers (4); Place value (3); **Number operations:** Addition (6); Subtraction (6); Multiplication (6): Division (6).	Total possible score: 52
MPA	**Number sense:** Counting (3); Number recognition (9); Missing numbers (9); Comparing and ordering numbers (4); Place value (3); **Number operations:** Addition (6); Subtraction (6); Multiplication (6); Division (6).	Total possible score: 52

Thus, there are scores for each of the domains and an overall score. The scoring guide indicates that the assessor should give both a numerical score and a colour band (white, blue, pink and yellow; low to high scores) for each domain. The total scores can be assigned a colour band and this used to indicate overall score. Thus, each girl will have nine domain scores and nine domain colour bands, along with a total score and colour band.

As a girl completes the sub-tasks within the assessments (numeracy and literacy), the CE records her progress. Each of the subject areas (numeracy and literacy), gives a girl the opportunity to score in the white level ('no score'), blue level (ECD- Grade 2), the pink level (Grade 2-4) and the yellow level (Grade 5+).

The use of overlapping colour coding allows for a 'best fit' within and across the sub-tasks and also means that girls can be referred to as working within a particular colour-banding, rather than being reduced to a single absolute score.

The table below indicates the four colour bands, their equivalent school grades, and the total score ranges to which they correspond for IPA and MPA in both literacy and numeracy.

Table 8

		Literacy		Numeracy	
Colour band	**Grade equivalent**	**IPA scoring band**	**MPA scoring band**	**IPA scoring band**	**MPA scoring band**
White	No score	0-15	0-15	0-15	0-15
Blue	ECD-Grade 2	16-33	16-34	16-21	16-21
Pink	Grades 2-4	34-60	35-61	22-37	22-36
Yellow	Grade 5+	61-81	62-87	38-52	37-52

Overall scores in literacy and numeracy at IPA and MPA:

The data presented here are initially aggregated to a mean score for both literacy and numeracy for IPA and MPA, as well as a depiction of the distribution of girls across the colour bands. This aligns to the requirements of feedback to the Fund Manager on demonstrating the overall progress of learners across both subject areas. This chapter goes on to disaggregate IPA and MPA data for literacy and numeracy by sub-task, by sub-group and then by district.

Below are the total scores for literacy and numeracy for IPA and MPA. This presents an overview of the data across both subject areas, across the whole of the IPA and MPA cohorts assessed, providing a snapshot of learners' grade levels at the point of data capture.

It is important to note that girls who undertook the IPA (Cohort 2) have a differing profile from girls who undertook the MPA (Cohort 1). Cohort 1 girls were those recruited at the start of the programme (2019) and were screened utilising Wide Range Assessment Test (WRAT) administered by the MoPSE Learner Welfare and Psychological Services (LEPSI) department. It was later decided that this tool was less appropriate to assess the eligibility of girls for participation in SAGE as it enabled girls with higher levels of prior primary schooling to enrol in the programme in Cohort 1. Following subsequent feedback and upon review of the baseline evaluation findings, it was identified that a small number of these girls did not fully meet SAGE's eligibility criteria of never having been to school or not having attained Grade 5-level proficiency in literacy and numeracy. Therefore, SAGE modified its screening tool to ensure girls adequately met its eligibility criteria, which ensures now that only girls who have never been to school or who have dropped out before reaching Grade 5 proficiency in both literacy and numeracy can be enrolled. This means girls from Cohort 2 were recruited using this modified tool. As Cohort 1 girls were screened using a different tool, some of the outcomes may still reflect a small proportion of girls who would be expected to do well given their previous school experience.

Given that the IPA and MPA data are taken from two different cohorts with differing characteristics, it is important to note that this is not a longitudinal study but rather a snapshot of two different cohorts at different stages of their learning. When Cohort 1 girls undertake the EPA, the programme will be able to compare their EPA results with their MPA results; similarly, the programme will be able to track Cohort 2 girls from IPA to MPA.

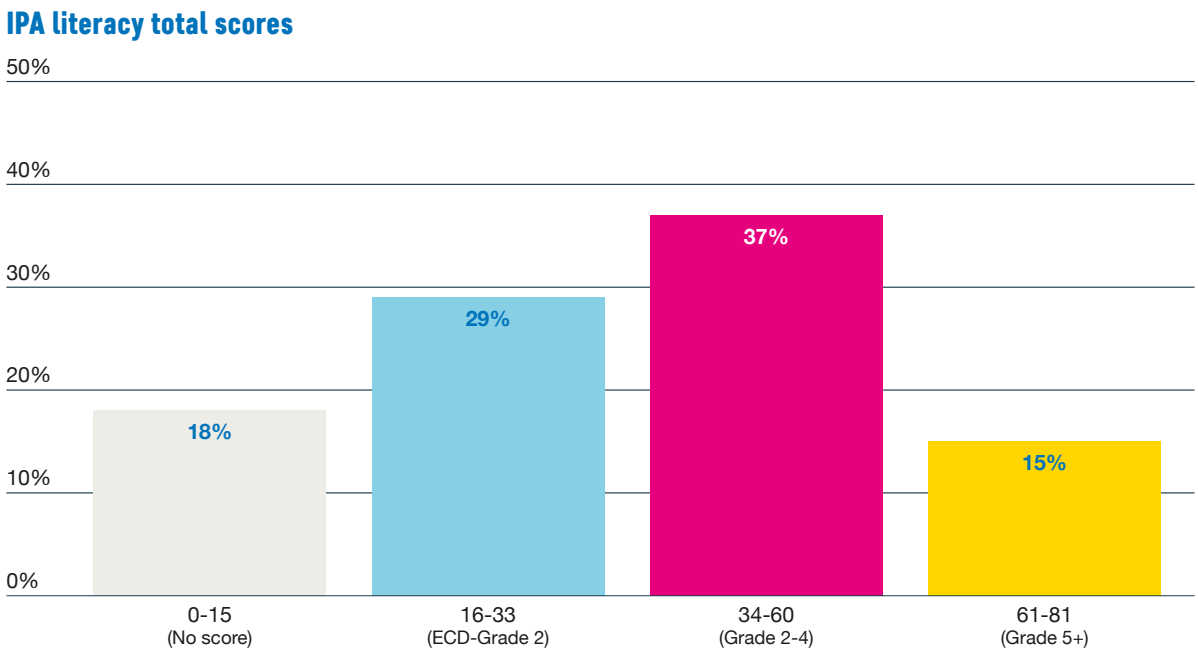
The IPA cohort data here reflects the scores for girls in Cohort 2 after five weeks within the programme. They were assessed at this point to capture their current learner levels, as they relate to the equivalency point within the primary grade levels defined by colour bands.

The MPA data for Cohort 1 girls reflects the scores for girls after completing module 1c, which is equivalent to a year's exposure to the programme. However, it is important to note that these girls' engagement with SAGE has coincided with a period of immense disruption due to COVID-19 which has affected the consistency of their exposure to the programme and means that their experience of SAGE learning interventions has been characterised by multiple interruptions. It is therefore difficult to state with certainty the precise length of these girls' exposure to SAGE learning interventions.

Analysis of overall IPA and MPA literacy and numeracy results:

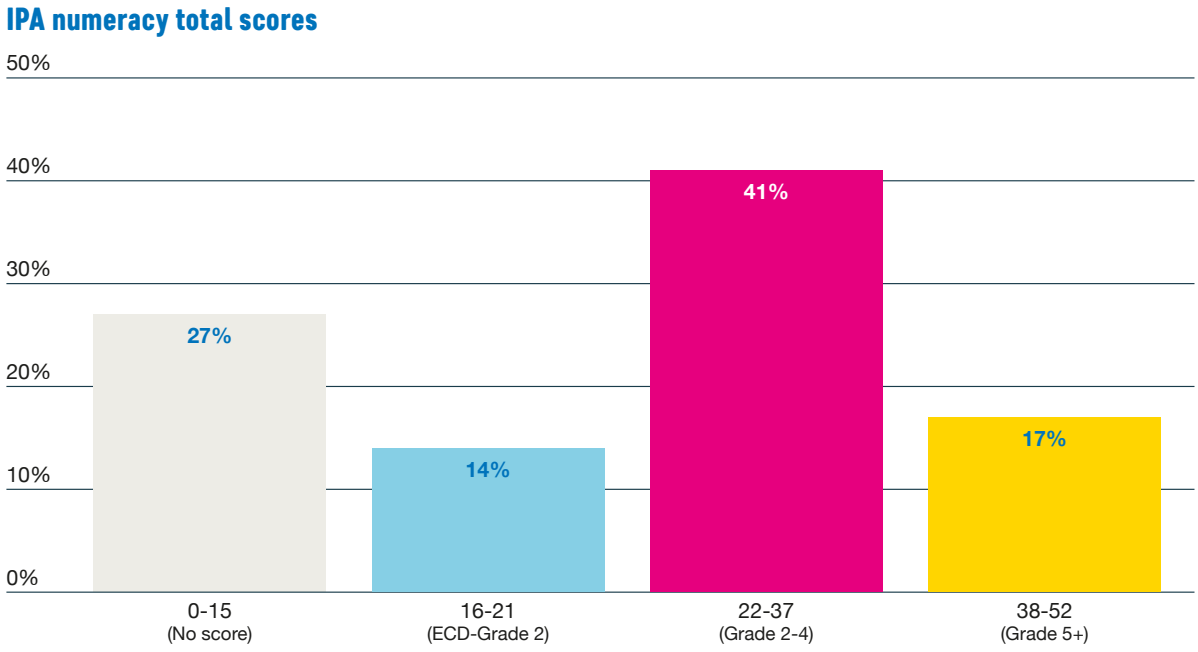
The graph below shows the total proportion of Cohort 2 girls scoring within each colour band for literacy at IPA.

Figure 2: Initial Progress Assessment total scores for literacy



The graph below shows the total proportion of Cohort 2 girls scoring within each colour band for numeracy at IPA.

Figure 3: Initial Progress Assessment total scores for numeracy



Girls who completed the IPA are Cohort 2 girls who fully met the criteria of SAGE participation of having never been to school or having left before attaining Grade 5 proficiency. Therefore, the IPA results are in line with the expectations of girls' previous experiences, and what is expected in terms of specific literacy and numeracy performance at the lower end.

The distribution between literacy and numeracy scores is broadly similar. In literacy, 37% of girls scored in the pink colour band – equivalent to Grades 2-4 – and 15% scored in the highest yellow colour band – equivalent to Grade 5+ – while in numeracy, 41% of girls achieved the pink band and 17% yellow. At IPA, this indicates that there are a similar proportion of higher attaining girls in both literacy and numeracy.

There is, however, a difference between girls attaining in the white (equivalent to 'no score') and blue (equivalent to ECD-Grade 2) scoring bands. In IPA for numeracy, there are almost twice as many 'white' girls as 'blue' (white 27%: blue 14%). In IPA literacy the ratio is almost reversed, with just over half as many 'white' girls than 'blue' girls (white 18%: blue 28%).

Summary:

The above findings suggest that at IPA, when girls have been attending the programme for 5 weeks, a higher proportion of girls displayed weaker scores in numeracy than literacy, with more girls attaining at a 'no score' level. Explanations for this may include that those girls who have been unable to access schooling are less likely to have developed number skills, including number sense. This compares with how girls have been using and accessing literacy as part of their everyday lives, for example through speaking and listening.

The Accelerated Teaching and Learning (ATL) team, comprised of staff members from Plan UK, PIZ and the OU, have responded to the findings from the first wave of IPA data analysis and adapted the approach. Corresponding programme adaptations, Community Educator professional development, and curriculum and resource development are outlined at the end of the chapter, and workshop reports outlining how volunteers in each district responded to the results can be found at Annex 12.

Mid-Progress Assessment total scores for Literacy and Numeracy:

The girls who took the Mid Progress Assessment (Cohort 1) have completed the ATL curriculum up to module 1c, the equivalent to one year's exposure to the programme (noting that disruptions due to COVID-19 have interrupted girls' experience of learning interventions). The below presents a visual representation of their MPA total scores for literacy and numeracy.

Figure 4: Mid-Progress Assessment total scores for Literacy

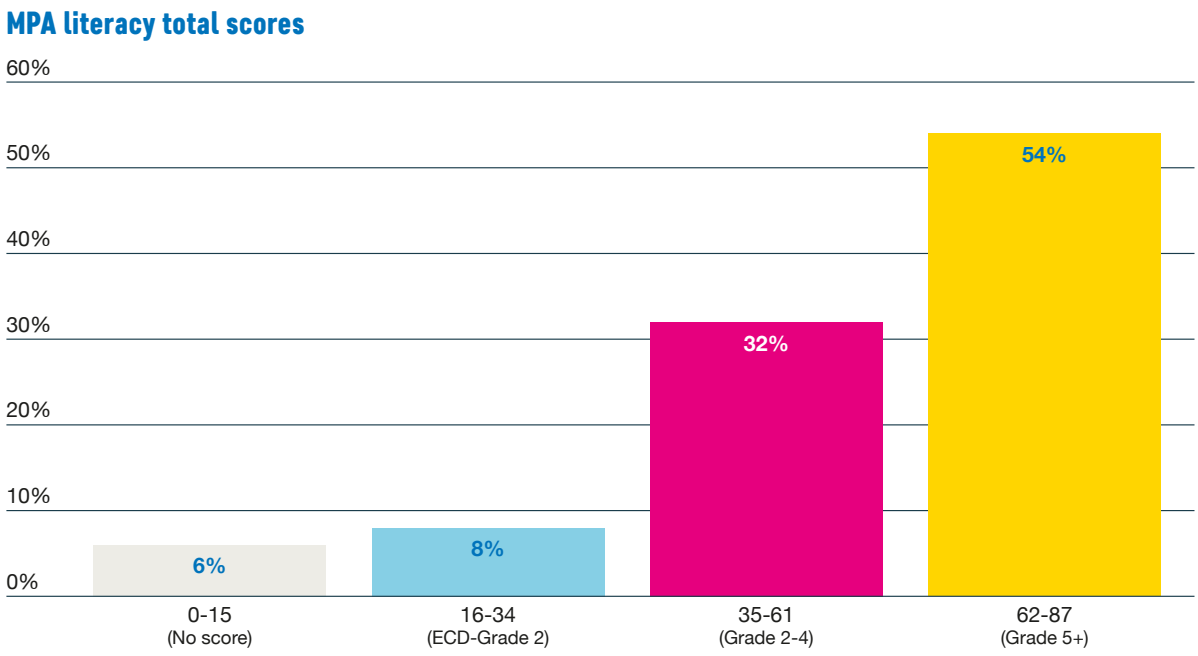
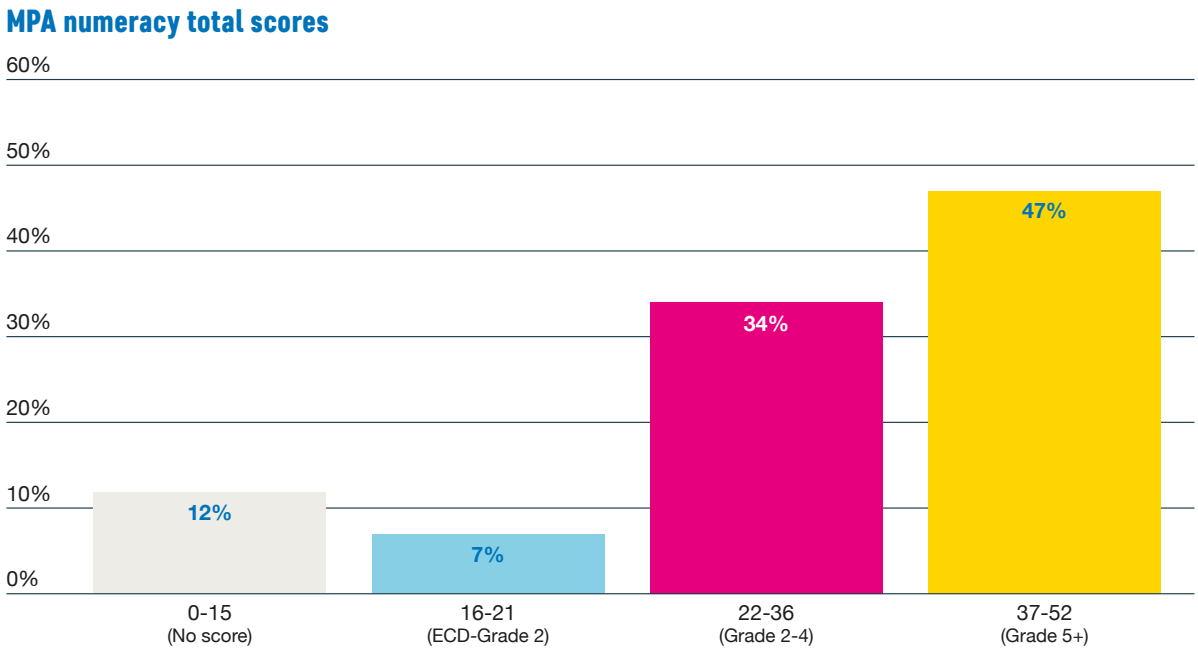


Figure 5: Mid-Progress Assessment total scores for Numeracy



At IPA stage, just over half of girls scored within the two highest bands (pink and yellow) for both literacy and numeracy. In the MPA, the proportion of girls scoring within these bands is over 80%. In literacy, the percentage of girls scoring in the lower white and blue bands at MPA has been reduced by around 70% compared to IPA (white from 18% to 6%, blue from 29% to 8%). In numeracy, each group has reduced by at least 50% (white from 27% to 12% and blue from 14% to 7%). In numeracy, the ratio of white to blue girls remains broadly the same, with around twice as many girls scoring in the white 'no score' band as the blue band (Grades 2-4). This suggests that there remains a core group of girls who struggle with basic literacy skills acquisition after a year's exposure to the programme.

Summary:

After a year's exposure to the programme (equivalent to completing module 1c), girls achieved considerably higher learning scores across both literacy and numeracy than girls who have just enrolled in SAGE. What the findings demonstrate is that girls who have only attended for 5 weeks (when they complete the IPA) are achieving at lower levels, as expected, when compared with girls who have had a year of exposure to the interventions.

Of girls who undertook the IPA (Cohort 2), 18% attained a 'no score' in literacy and 27% in numeracy. At MPA, however, only 6% attained a 'no score' in literacy and 12% in numeracy. Conversely, at IPA 15% of girls achieved the highest scoring band (equivalent to Grade 5+) in literacy and 17% in numeracy, whereas amongst the girls who undertook the MPA after a year's exposure to the programme, 54% achieved the highest scoring band in literacy and 47% in numeracy.

While the cohorts for IPA and MPA potentially differ in terms of the literacy and numeracy skills they had acquired from prior school attendance, the results suggest that after a year's exposure to the programme girls are predominantly performing in the higher-grade equivalency colour bands, with a much smaller proportion of girls attaining 'no score' or a score equivalent to Grade 2 and below. This strongly suggests that after a year's exposure to the programme girls display knowledge and skills acquisition across both subjects.

This comes with the caveat that the girls who undertook the IPA (Cohort 2) and the girls who undertook the MPA (Cohort 1) are two distinct cohorts with different characteristics, as Cohort 2 girls were subject to more rigorous screening to ensure that they met eligibility criteria for participation in the programme (of never having been to school or having left before Grade 5). This snapshot of 'progress' reinforces prior knowledge that it was expected that a higher proportion of Cohort 2 girls would score in the lower bands due to the change in screening tool methodology and their lower exposure to learning interventions. However, it nevertheless suggests that exposure to learning through participation in SAGE has a positive effect on girls' knowledge and skills in both literacy and numeracy in a severely disrupted context.

7.1.3 SUB-TASK ANALYSIS

The following section depicts the total mean scores for individual literacy and numeracy sub-tasks for Cohort 1 girls at MPA and Cohort 2 girls at IPA. These data provide the ATL and hub teams with an opportunity to examine each sub-task in relation to the modular curriculum developed, addressing specific pedagogic adaptations required for numeracy and literacy modules and to support CEs' ongoing professional development.

IPA Literacy scores by sub-task:

Table 9 below shows the number of girls assessed at IPA by sub-task, the means scores for each sub-task and the colour band to which they correspond. The literacy sub-tasks are: speaking and listening, letter sound, word reading, picture reading, short passage reading, comprehension and writing.

Although mean scores are spread across blue and pink bands, inspection of the colour band distributions at IPA indicate that a significant minority of girls are attaining the equivalent of 'no score' for foundational literacy tasks: for Short Passage Reading, 29% of girls scored in the white band (equivalent to 'no score'), 25% of girls attained a 'no score' for Writing and 19% for both the Comprehension and Word Reading sub-tasks. In four of the seven sub-tasks, around 50% of girls scored in the lower white and blue bands, although approximately one fifth of girls also achieved the highest yellow band (equivalent to Grade 5+).

Table 9

Sub-task	Number of Girls Assessed	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Band equivalent
Speak Listen	756	0	7	4.71	Pink
Letter Sound	756	0	8	4.31	Blue
Word Read	756	0	30	11.42	Pink
Picture Read[27]	756	0	2	1.63	Blue
Short Passage	756	0	18	7.82	Blue
Comprehension	756	0	5	2.23	Pink
Writing	756	0	11	5.05	Blue

Table 10 shows the proportion of girls who scored in each band for each sub-task at IPA, illustrating the distribution of girls performing at each level.

Table 10

Sub-task	White (no score)	Blue (ECD-Grade 2)	Pink (Grades 2-4)	Yellow (Grade 5+)
Speak Listen	3%	8%	54%	35%
Letter Sound	16%	37%	25%	22%
Word Read	19%	32%	30%	19%
Picture Read[28]	6%	94%	n/a	n/a
Short Passage	29%	19%	34%	18%
Comprehension	19%	11%	48%	21%
Writing	25%	31%	24%	20%

IPA Numeracy Scores by sub-task:

Table 11 below shows the number of girls assessed at IPA by sub-task, the means scores for each sub-task and the colour band to which they correspond. The numeracy sub-tasks are split between Number Sense and Number operations, with five and four sub-tasks in these categories respectively.

IPA numeracy scores are shown by sub-task, the mean scores for each sub-task and the corresponding colour band.

27 The maximum score a girl could achieve in this sub-task was capped at the blue band as it is a basic task.
28 The maximum score a girl could achieve in this sub-task was capped at the blue band as it is a basic task.

Table 11

	Sub-task	Number of girls assessed	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Band equivalent
Number sense	Counting[29]	756	0	3	2.4	Blue
	Number Recognition	756	0	9	4.38	Pink
	Missing Number	756	0	9	4.05	Pink
	Comparing Ordering	756	0	4	2.09	Blue
	Place Value	756	0	3	1.15	Pink
Number Operations	Operation Addition	756	0	6	3.08	Pink
	Operation Subtraction	756	0	6	2.79	Pink
	Operation Multiplication	756	0	6	1.97	Blue
	Operation Division	756	0	6	1.73	Blue

Table 12 indicates the distribution of girls across the different colour bands in numeracy at IPA.

29 The maximum score a girl could achieve in this sub-task was capped at the blue band as it is a basic task.

Table 12

	Sub-task	White (no score)	Blue (ECD-Grade 2)	Pink (Grades 2-4)	Yellow (Grade 5+)
Number sense	Counting[30]	17%	83%	n/a	n/a
	Number Recognition	21%	19%	34%	26%
	Missing Number	21%	25%	37%	17%
	Comparing Ordering	28%	30%	25%	16%
	Place Value[31]	40%	n/a	18%	42%
Number Operations	Operation Addition	12%	18%	36%	25%
	Operation Subtraction	25%	19%	38%	19%
	Operation Multiplication	42%	22%	26%	10%
	Operation Division	49%	21%	19%	10%

The IPA numeracy sub-task scores indicate that, although the higher-level number operations understandably show heavily skewed distributions towards the lower colour bands (particularly Multiplication and Division), some number sense sub-tasks are also weighted towards the lower bands, particularly 'Comparing and Ordering', with 28% of girls in the white 'no score' band, and 'Place Value' (although for 'Place Value' girls could either receive 'no score' or achieve the yellow band in this sub-task).

For the 'Counting' sub-task, 83% of Cohort 2 girls at IPA were in the highest colour band they could achieve for this foundational sub-task (the blue band). This is to be expected given that even girls who have just joined SAGE are likely to have some ability to count.

MPA Literacy scores by sub-task:

The MPA literacy scores for the various sub-tasks are shown in Table 13, along with the mean scores and corresponding colour bands. As might be expected with those girls who were assessed through MPA (after a year's exposure to the programme), the sub-task distributions are skewed to the top end. The exception is the Letter Sound sub-task, in which girls achieved lower scores. Although the mean is in the pink colour band (equivalent to Grades 2-4), 30% of girls scored in the lower blue band (equivalent to ECD-Grade 2). In the Short Passage Reading sub-task, on the other hand, 70% of girls achieved the highest yellow band, compared to 29% at IPA.

30 The maximum score a girl could achieve in this sub-task was capped at the blue band as it is a basic task.
31 This sub-task is limited to the pink or yellow bands.

In the Comprehension sub-task, 45% of girls scored in the highest yellow band and 44% in the pink band (equivalent to Grades 2-4). At MPA, the Writing sub-task has a more even distribution (though still skewed to the yellow band), with over 30% in the lower white and blue bands.

With the exception of Letter Sound and Writing, at MPA, the proportion of girls scoring in the lower white and blue bands is approximately 10-15%, compared to around 50% for most sub-tasks at IPA, indicating that girls are achieving at a considerably higher level after a year's exposure to the programme.

Table 13

Sub-task	Number assessed	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Band equivalent
Speak Listen	2713	0	7	4.82	Pink
Letter Sound	2713	0	8	5.08	Pink
Word Read	2713	0	30	19.74	Pink
Picture Read[32]	2713	0	3	2.26	Pink
Short Passage	2713	0	23	16.58	Yellow
Comprehension	2713	0	5	3.21	Yellow
Writing	2713	0	11	6.80	Pink

Table 14 indicates the proportions of girls achieving each colour band for MPA literacy sub-tasks.

Table 14

Sub-task	White (no score)	Blue (ECD-Grade 2)	Pink (Grades 2-4)	Yellow (Grade 5+)
Speak Listen	4%	5%	52%	38%
Letter Sound	6%	30%	37%	27%
Word Read	6%	10%	29%	55%
Picture Read[33]	12%	88%	n/a	n/a
Short Passage	8%	5%	16%	70%
Comprehension	6%	5%	44%	45%
Writing	11%	23%	28%	38%

32 The maximum score a girl could achieve in this sub-task was capped at the blue band as it is a basic task.
33 The maximum score a girl could achieve in this sub-task was capped at the blue band as it is a basic task.

MPA Numeracy by sub-task:

Table 15 shows the MPA numeracy scores for each sub-task, along with the mean scores and corresponding colour bands.

Table 15

	Sub-task	Number assessed	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Band equivalent
Number sense	Counting[34]	2713	0	3	2.66	Blue
	Number Recognition	2713	0	9	5.87	Pink
	Missing Number	2713	0	9	5.50	Pink
	Comparing Ordering	2713	0	4	2.86	Pink
	Place Value[35]	2713	0	3	1.99	Pink
Number Operations	Operation Addition	2713	0	6	3.96	Pink
	Operation Subtraction	2713	0	6	3.77	Pink
	Operation Multiplication	2713	0	6	3.32	Pink
	Operation Division	2713	0	6	3.32	Pink

34 The maximum score a girl could achieve in this sub-task was capped at the blue band as it is a basic task.
35 A girl could attain either a no score or the highest scoring band in this sub-task as understanding of Place Value is binary.

Table 16 indicates the proportions of girls achieving each colour band for MPA numeracy sub-tasks.

Table 16

	Sub-task	White (no score)	Blue (ECD-Grade 2)	Pink (Grades 2-4)	Yellow (Grade 5+)
Number sense	Counting[36]	9%	91%	n/a	n/a
	Number Recognition	9%	13%	32%	46%
	Missing Number	11%	20%	26%	43%
	Comparing Ordering	15%	18%	25%	43%
	Place Value[37]	28%	n/a	n/a	72%
Number Operations	Operation Addition	16%	9%	24%	51%
	Operation Subtraction	17%	10%	27%	46%
	Operation Multiplication	22%	13%	30%	35%
	Operation Division	49%	21%	19%	10%

As in the baseline evaluation (see Annex 11), learners at MPA performed best in number recognition, which is to be expected. Again, the MPA shows skewed colour band distributions towards the higher bands, with the exceptions being the Multiplication and Division number operations, where there are 22% and 24% of girls respectively scoring in the lowest white band. This is not surprising, as girls are less likely to have experienced higher order number operations such as Multiplication and Division before entering the programme. (Addition and Subtraction operations show less pronounced percentages at the lower two bands, although Subtraction is weaker than Addition).

The distributions for the Multiplication and Division sub-tasks are almost bi-modal and hence the mean is not a good indicator of the performance of the group assessed. Most of the number sense sub-tasks have 40%-50% of girls scoring in the yellow colour band (equivalent to Grade 5+), though the means are in the pink band.

36 The maximum score a girl could achieve in this sub-task was capped at the blue band as it is a basic task.
37 A girl could attain either a no score or the highest scoring band in this sub-task as understanding of Place Value is binary.

Summary:

The analysis of IPA and MPA data by sub-task has provided the programming and district teams with insight into the areas within literacy and numeracy where girls require additional support. At IPA, Short Passage Reading, Word Reading, Writing and Comprehension for literacy, and Comparing and Ordering and Place Value within numeracy, are areas that needed to be considered as key target areas for learning for the first year of the programme.

At IPA for literacy, a significant proportion of girls attained a 'no score' in Short Passage Reading (29%), Writing (25%), Word Reading (19%) and Comprehension (19%), indicating that these are areas where girls require targeted support in the first year of the programme. Of the girls who undertook the MPA, however, 70% scored in the highest colour band (equivalent to Grade 5+) for Short Passage Reading and 45% for Comprehension, with approximately 10% or under in the white 'no score' band in these sub-tasks. While these results pertain to two different cohorts, they suggest that the SAGE ATL curriculum is supporting girls to develop reading and comprehension skills in the context of severe disruption resulting from COVID-19.

From IPA to MPA there is a considerable reduction in the proportion of girls in the 'no score' band in the number sense sub-tasks, with the exception of the sub-task of Place Value. Place Value requires an ability to move from a concrete to an abstract understanding of numerical value, and is a prerequisite for progressing to higher order Number Operations skills such as Multiplication and Division. Once girls develop a basic sense of numbers up to ten, they need to develop a strong 'sense of ten' as a foundation for both Place Value and mental calculation. This highlights the importance of identifying girls at MPA who have not grasped Place Value and supporting them accordingly so they can progress to Multiplication and Division.

Within the MPA findings, after a year's exposure to the programme, the sub-task mean scores for literacy and numeracy are generally within the higher colour bands, which is what the programme would be expecting to display. However, areas for enhanced attention in the latter half of the programme for MPA girls include Letter Sound and Writing for literacy, and higher order number operations (Multiplication and Division) in numeracy.

While the proportions of girls scoring in the lower two bands (white and blue) at MPA is lower for both literacy and numeracy than at IPA, the distribution of girls is more heavily weighted towards the upper two bands in literacy than in numeracy. This suggests that numeracy skills acquisition remains more of a challenge than literacy for SAGE girls after the equivalent of a year's exposure to the programme.

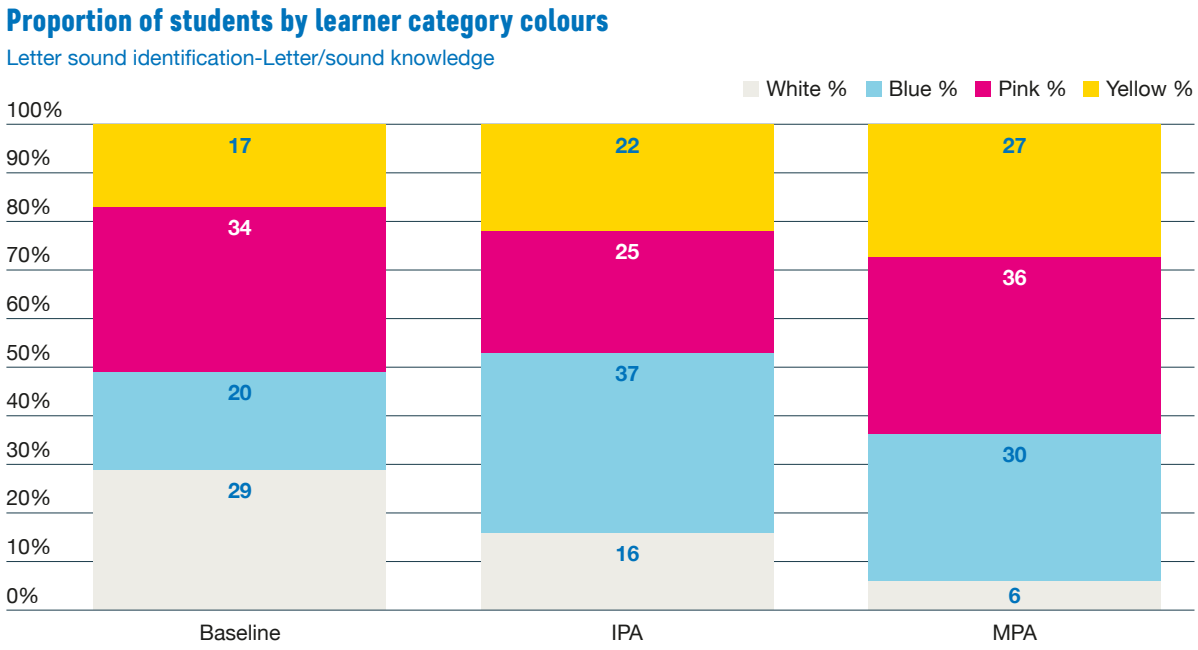
The ATL team have responded to the findings and adapted the programme, curriculum and CE training accordingly. These adaptations are outlined at the end of the chapter.

7.1.4 MAPPING OF BASELINE, IPA AND MPA SUB-TASKS

Included in the data presented below are examples of where the programme has undertaken mapping of the original baseline findings that used EGRA and EGMA assessments and identified sub-tasks which are comparable to sub-tasks within the LPA model. While the sub-tasks at IPA and MPA are not identical to those used within the EGRA and EGMA assessments at baseline, there are some sub-tasks which broadly reflect the same area of subject knowledge or skill development within literacy and numeracy (see Annex 4). This data is a snapshot of the girls in each learner category for four specific sub-tasks at baseline, IPA and MPA. It does not track the progress of a specific cohort but provides an example of the ways in which the programme has and will undertake the mapping of SAGE learners as it amasses data through ongoing IPA, MPA and EPA assessments.

This illustrative mapping of results from baseline to IPA and MPA confirms the picture of overall progress outlined in Section 7.1.3, with girls scoring more highly at MPA than IPA and baseline.

Figure 6: Letter/sound identification (baseline EGRA task 1) – letter/sound knowledge (LPA sub-task 2)

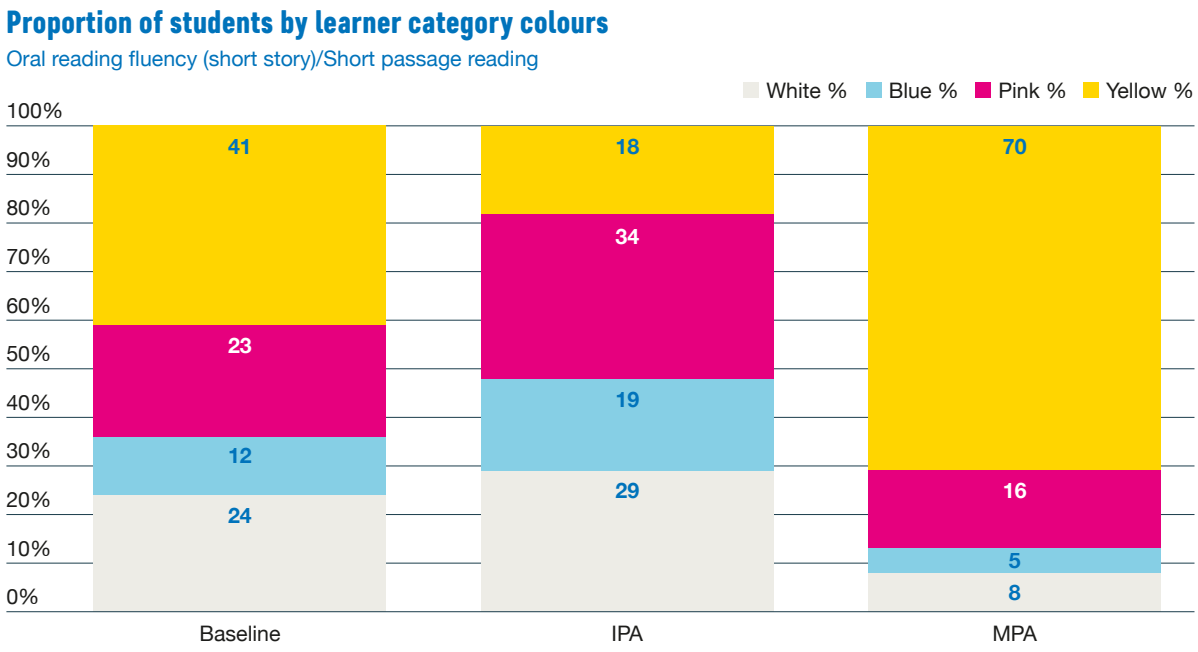


This sub-task was chosen as an illustrative example as it is the underpinning for learning to read and spell in English. Other sub-tasks (Speaking and Listening/Writing) can be completed in home language.

The baseline girls were from rural communities and therefore their access to written text/ environmental print in English may have been more limited. At IPA, a larger proportion of Cohort 2 girls were drawn from peri-urban areas. Therefore, the girls may have been exposed to more print in the environment and therefore have a better knowledge of concepts about print (Marie Clay, 2005), and an understanding that print carries meaning.

Across all three assessments, all girls have made steady 'progress' in this literacy sub-task. Compared to the baseline, far fewer girls are in white (baseline – 29%, IPA – 16% and MPA – 6%) and the exposure to vernacular in English is making a positive difference.

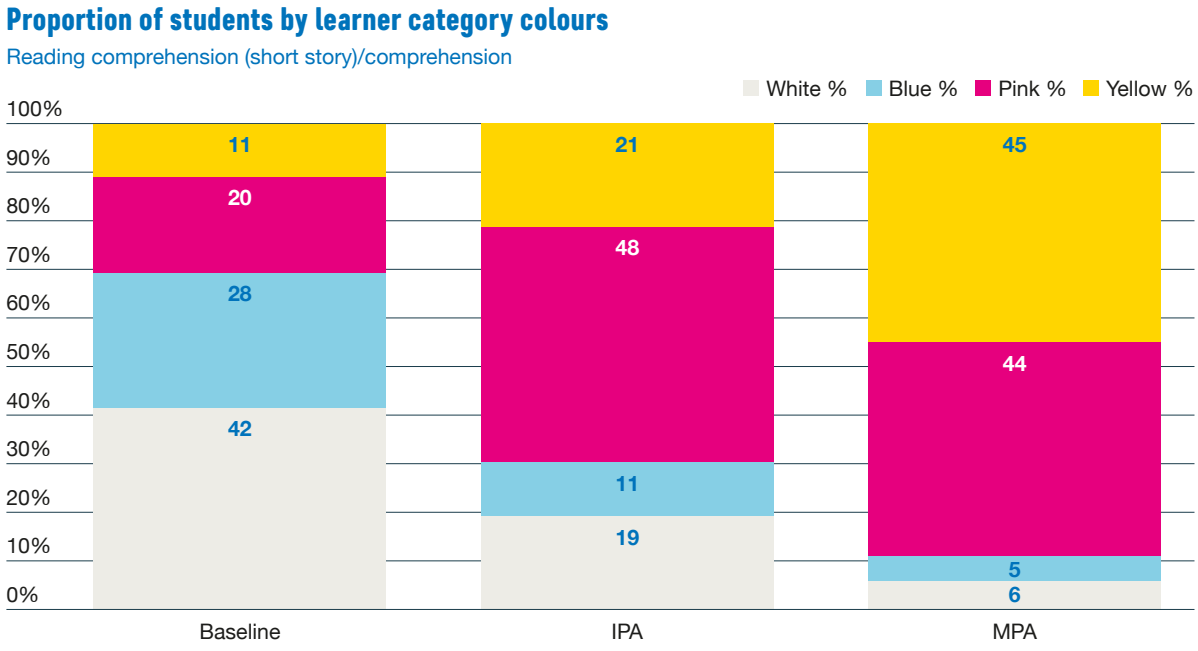
Figure 7: Oral reading and fluency (short story) (baseline EGRA task 3a) – short passage reading (LPA sub-task 5)



Here there is an increase in girls scoring in the higher pink/yellow bands between baseline and MPA (64% compared to 86%). The increase in pink/yellow girls is much more marked between IPA and MPA, rising from 52% to 86%. The proportion of girls attaining a 'no score' is just 8% at MPA (compared to 24% at baseline and 29% at IPA).

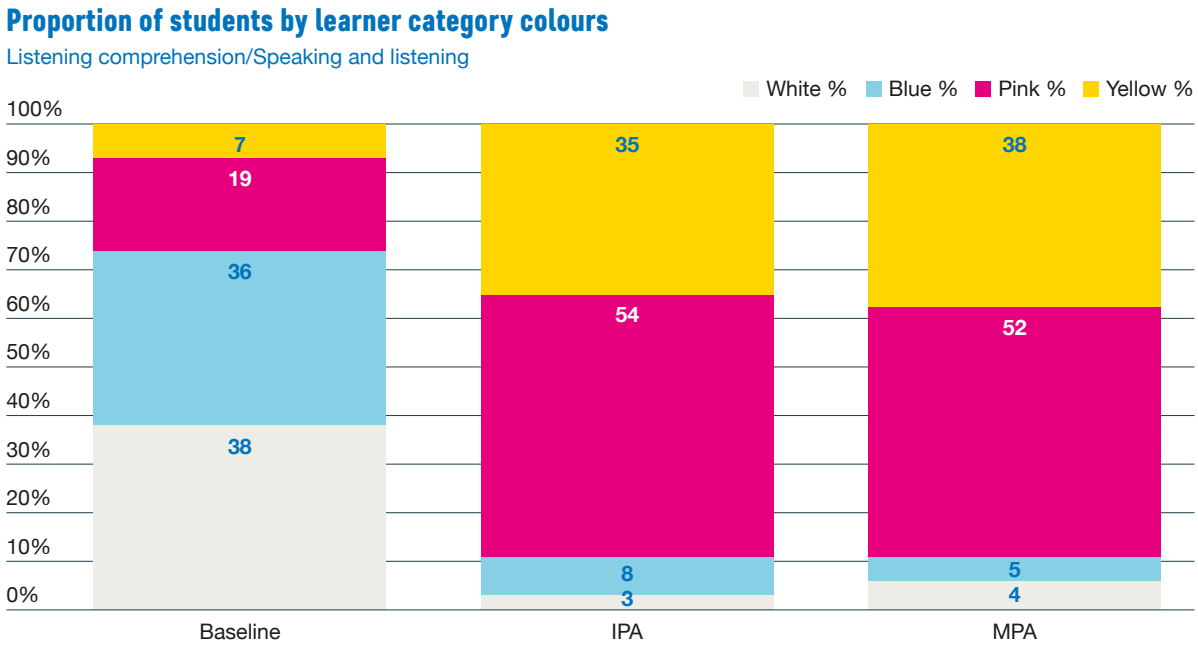
While this is not a direct tracking of the exact cohort of girls from baseline to IPA and MPA, the mapping of sub-task data indicates that after a year's exposure to the programme there are far fewer girls achieving a 'no score' in this sub-task than at either baseline or IPA.

Figure 8: Reading comprehension (short story) (baseline EGRA task 3b) – comprehension (LPA sub-task 5)



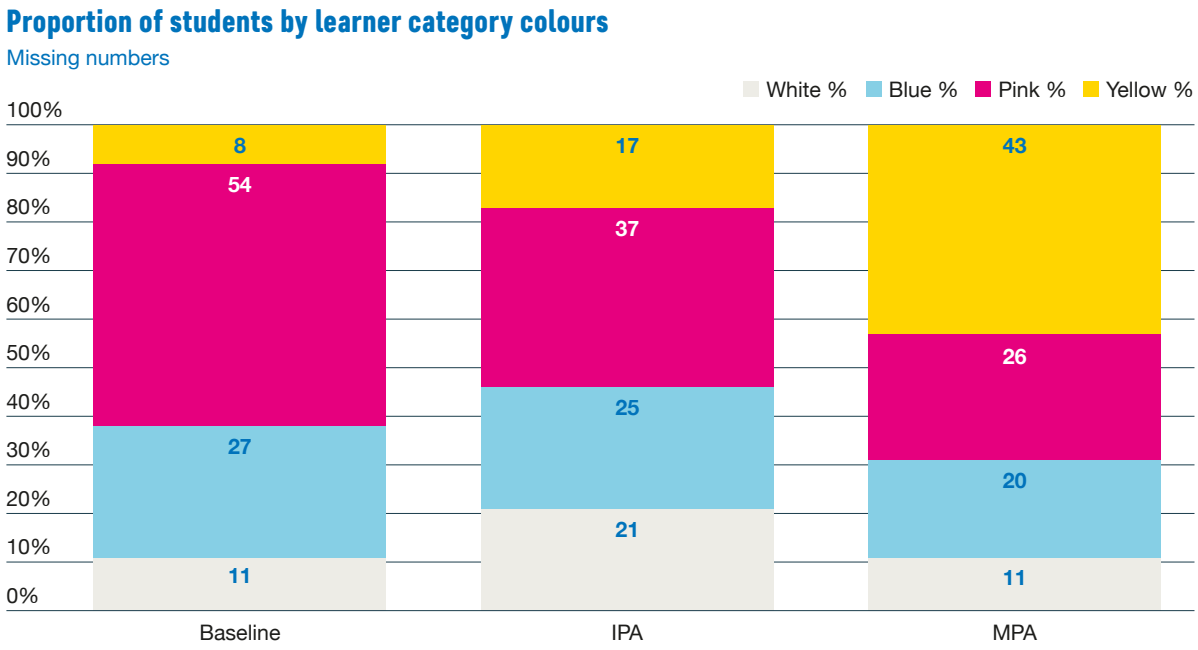
At baseline just 31% of girls achieved scores corresponding to the higher pink/yellow bands, rising to 69% at IPA and 89% at MPA.

Figure 9: Listening comprehension (baseline EGRA task 5) – (LPA model sub-task 1) Speaking and listening



At baseline 38% are classed at 'no score', whereas at IPA/MPA this is down at under 5%. Just 26% of girls had scores equivalent to the higher pink/yellow colour bands at baseline. At the IPA stage this has increased to 89%, increasing marginally to 90% at MPA. This would suggest that girls' speaking and listening skills have become relatively secure from IPA onwards, though the number of girls working at Grade 5+ has not increased by MPA.

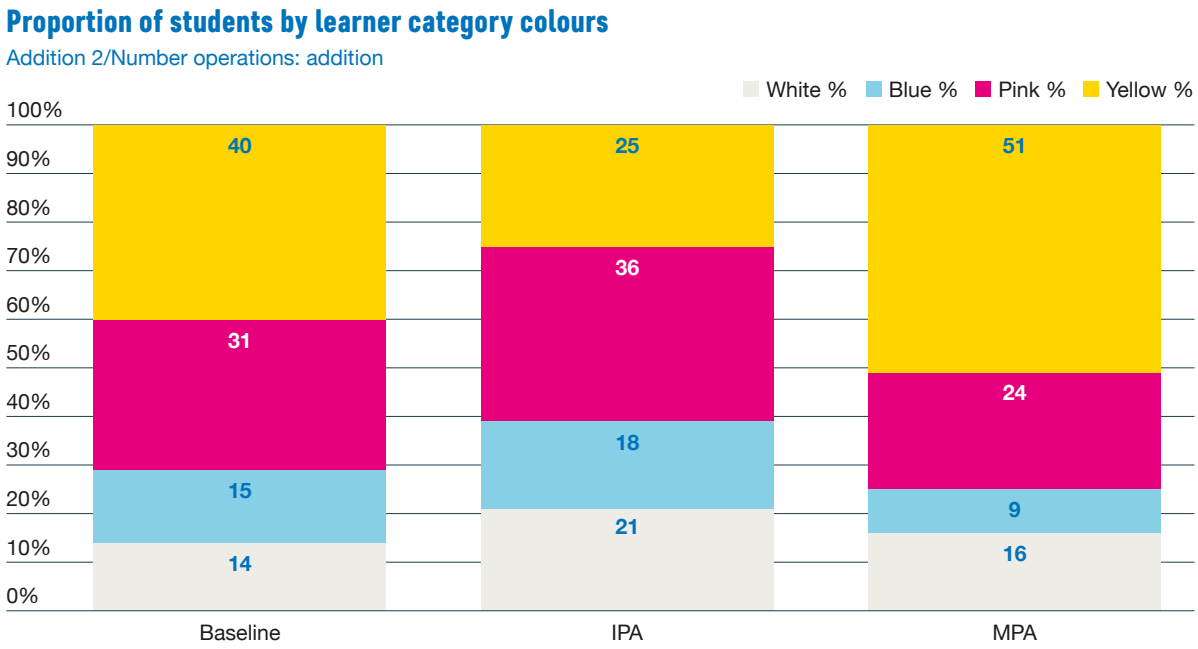
Figure 10: Missing numbers (baseline EGMA task 3)- (LPA sub-task 3) Number sense: missing numbers



This sub-task is one of four number sense activities and was chosen as it is a strong indicator of girls' numeracy knowledge. In missing number sub-tasks, to perform well, girls need to have progressed beyond rote learning and gained an understanding of ordinality, sequencing and magnitude, as it is not possible to memorise the likelihood of a particular number in a sequence.

Baseline girls were more similar in prior knowledge to the Cohort 1 girls (MPA) in that they have had more exposure to schooling and therefore may have been expected to perform better. What the baseline to MPA scores do highlight is that if girls entered SAGE with some prior maths knowledge, the programme has done more to support girls move into higher banding (yellow – 8% to 43%) and pink/yellow (62% to 69%).

Figure 11: Addition (level 2) (baseline EGMA task 4.2) – (LPA sub-task 6) Number operations:

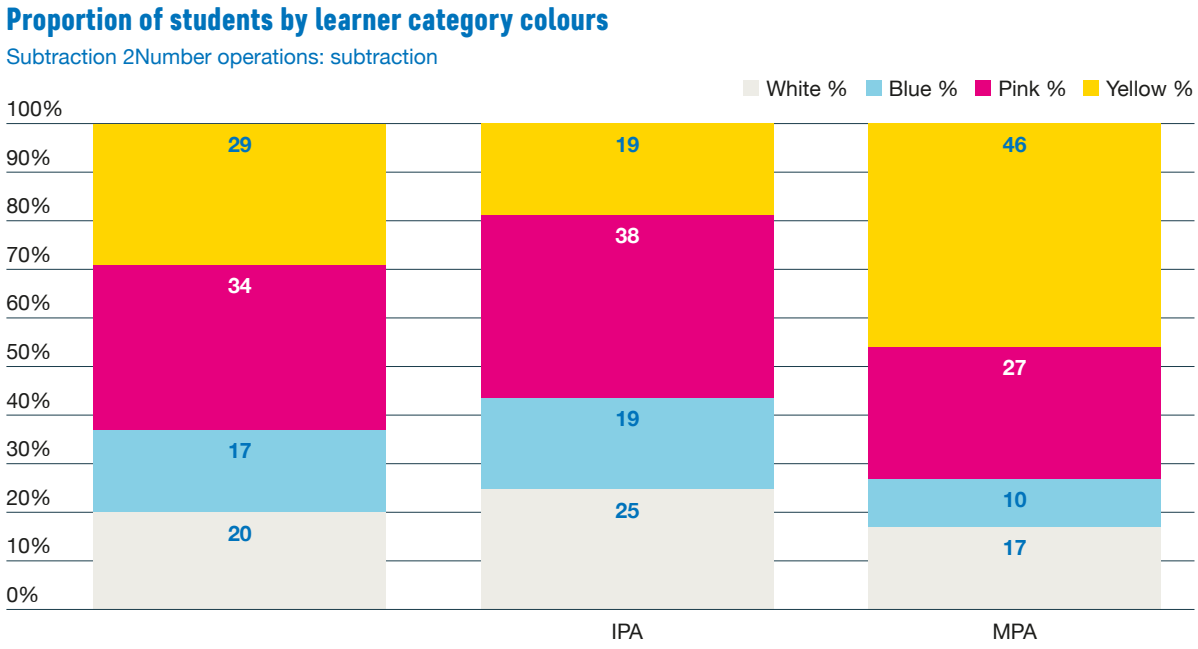


addition

At the baseline, 71% of girls gained scores equivalent to the higher pink/yellow LPA bands. This compares to 61% pink/yellow girls at IPA.

The IPA/MPA premise highlighted above for the missing number sub-task mapping – that that if girls entered SAGE with some prior maths knowledge, the programme has done more to support girls move into higher banding – remains the same here, with girls displaying a small increase in accumulated pink and yellow band scoring at MPA compared to baseline.

Figure 12: Subtraction (level 2) (baseline EGMA task 5.2) – (LPA sub-task 7) Number operations: subtraction



At the baseline, the proportion of girls who scored the equivalent of the higher pink and yellow bands is high at 63%. As with the two previous examples of numeracy mapping, baseline girls were more similar in prior knowledge to the Cohort 1 girls (MPA) with more exposure to schooling, therefore may have been expected to perform better. What the baseline to MPA scores highlight is that for SAGE girls with some prior maths knowledge, the programme has done more to support girls to move into higher banding (yellow – 29% to 46%) and pink/yellow (63% to 73%).

Summary of data mapping for baseline, LPA and MPA datasets:

The significant increase in literacy performance of girls from baseline to IPA and MPA shows that the programmatic approach is working well, with CEs revisiting what works to galvanise pedagogic approaches and activities. The impact of one year of programme interventions on learners can be seen in the reduction of white 'no score' banding across all literacy sub-tasks and the consistent increases in the pink and yellow colour banding.

From baseline to MPA there is a core group of 11% ('no score') who appear to have made no progress in missing numbers. More focus will therefore be given in CE training on supporting girls at the lower end and planning for differentiation. As with the data mapping presented for literacy, there is an overall decrease in girls attaining the white colour band (equivalent to 'no score') for numeracy sub-tasks from baseline to MPA, along with an increase in girls achieving the higher pink and yellow colour bands from baseline to MPA.

Cohort 1, who undertook the MPA, share similar characteristics in terms of exposure to prior schooling with those girls assessed within the treatment group at baseline. Therefore, a reasonable assertion would be that after a year's programme exposure across literacy and numeracy, if girls entered SAGE with some prior literacy and numeracy knowledge, the programme has done more to support girls to move into higher bandings.

This indicative tracking across data capture points, while involving different groups of girls, has enabled the programme to assert initial findings indicating what the LPA data can tell us to date, by mapping what we know about varying cohorts' sub-task scoring at baseline, to IPA and MPA. At endline the project will be able to depict longitudinal data tracking individual girls across sub-task development. Therefore, at endline, the programme will be able to see the impact of individual aspects of teaching and learning across literacy and numeracy core competencies, enabling identification of strengths and areas for development within the overall accelerated learning curriculum model.

The mapping of baseline EGRA and EGMA tasks, to IPA and MPA sub-tasks for literacy and numeracy, has enabled the ATL team to consider the trends in attainment and development for literacy and numeracy. The subsequent programme adaptations, CE training and curriculum development feature at the end of the chapter.

7.1.5 SUB-GROUP ANALYSIS

As detailed in Section 3.1, SAGE learners hold characteristics that contribute and intersect to compound their educational marginalisation. These originate from learners' gender, age, marital status, school experience, ability, religion, ethnicity and level of poverty/socio-economic status. SAGE has defined seven sub-groups, namely: married girls, young mothers, girls from Apostolic communities, girls with disabilities, girls from ethnic minorities, girls who have never been to school and those engaged in labour. Given girls' intersecting identities, girls may present across multiple sub-groups within the IPA or MPA datasets; a married girl may also be from the Apostolic community, for example.

The SAGE programme is interested to understand how these characteristics may affect girls' learning journeys and hence how educators' pedagogic practices should be tailored to provide appropriate support.

Table 17 below summarises trends across the sub-groups based on IPA and MPA data and re-presents baseline findings. Please note, baseline data have not been mapped to IPA and MPA findings so do not offer a direct comparison but help to build a deeper picture of emerging themes as they relate to sub-group categories across the three datasets. SAGE recognises the need to accumulate more qualitative data relating to the experiences of girls with specific demographic characteristics in order to more fully contextualise and triangulate the LPA scores for different sub-groups.

A number of 'spotlights' have been selected to profile sub-groups which present particularly unique learning journeys and hence challenge the SAGE programme to adapt accordingly. (See Annex 10 for charts displaying the sub-group data analysis). As highlighted previously, when reviewing mean scores across sub-groups the same girls can be represented several times across subgroup categories. However, considering the sub-group learner attainment through the lens of defining characteristics provides additional insight into the impact of learner identity on educational attainment.

At IPA, girls with disabilities had the lowest mean scores of any sub-group across both literacy and numeracy, and the highest proportion attaining 'no scores' (70% for literacy and 67% for numeracy). At MPA, however, and noting these are not the same girls as those assessed at IPA, girls with disabilities had higher mean scores than girls who had never been to school and a significantly lower proportion in the 'no score' colour band than at IPA. At MPA, 41% of girls with disabilities achieved the highest yellow colour band in literacy (equivalent to Grade 5+) and 33% in numeracy. This suggests that after a year's exposure to the programme, SAGE is supporting girls with disabilities to build literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge.

At MPA, girls who had never been to school displayed the lowest learning levels of any SAGE sub-group. While not surprising, this indicates the need for these girls to receive targeted support to build foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

Young mothers were the highest scorers at IPA in both literacy and numeracy. At MPA stage this group also performed highly, achieving the second highest mean score (behind girls from ethnic minorities) and with a high proportion scoring in the yellow colour band (equivalent to Grade 5+), particularly in literacy. The highest mean score at MPA was achieved by girls from ethnic minorities, although it should be noted that this group constituted a much smaller portion of the overall MPA sample than young mothers.

In terms of sub-groups with unique learning journeys, results for young mothers and girls with disabilities prompt a closer review.

SPOTLIGHT ON LEARNING PROGRESS: YOUNG MOTHERS

As the highest scorers at IPA for both numeracy and literacy, as well as the high proportion scoring within the yellow band at MPA stage for literacy (60%), these girls constitute a unique group with interesting potential. Given the yellow band is equivalent to Grade 5+, it represents a sizeable number of girls who have attained SAGE's learning goal by the mid-way point of the programme. This group can be provided with extension support and also be utilised to support their lower-attaining peers. Interestingly, within one group, ability is not homogenous and can be starkly varied. This is demonstrated by how 2% of girls are still in the white band/no score range at MPA stage. This highlights the continued need for differentiated learning and for adaptations to assist capacity development of CEs to enable them to use data across subjects to set individual targets for girls within their next modules, and the application of individual differentiated activities.

SPOTLIGHT ON LEARNING PROGRESS: GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

Consistent with baseline findings, this group remains the group which enters the programme with the lowest literacy and numeracy attainment levels as demonstrated in IPA results and the reduction in the proportion of girls scoring no score in literacy and numeracy (70% and 67% respectively). This illustrates how they have the furthest to travel in their learning to attain SAGE's aim of Grade 5 equivalent proficiency. Encouragingly, when assessed within the MPA, this cohort made significant gains in literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge acquisition.

Adaptions planned to further advance this support include scaling up the capacity of CEs in managing the needs of girls with disabilities through reinforcing the use of the SAGE 'Disability Directory' which is a practical guide developed by the OU in Year 2 of the programme that details practical recommendations to support learners with a range of impairments and adjust teaching strategies accordingly when delivering numeracy and literacy concepts. This intervention can be facilitated virtually through the assistance of Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) with whom a pre-existing partnership was established with the support of CBM. The programme will continue in the provision of adapted materials, braille books, audios and radios, large prints and fonts to enable learners to access content and continue practising learning both at school and home. The consortium is also keen to pilot the use of TTCs in assessing learners with disabilities as part of existing screening processes and the LPAs. This would strengthen the ability to obtain solid and reliable results to reflect the true picture of the learners' performance level. Further targeted hub-specific CPD on how to support learners with disabilities would enable follow-up to centralised trainings based on the particular context of each hub.

The table below maps the attainment of each of the SAGE sub-groups at baseline, IPA and MPA (noting that these are different cohorts).

Table 17: Summary of sub-group learning journeys

Subgroup	Baseline findings	IPA data	MPA data
Married girls	Highest mean of aggregated reading scores of all groups surveyed (52.86%). Highest mean of aggregated maths scores of all groups surveyed (74.86%)	**Literacy:** Second highest average mean score (54.9). Higher scoring in the pink and yellow colour bands at 44% and 41% respectively, with no married girls presenting within the while colour band of 0-15 ('no score'). **Numeracy:** Mean average score in line with average of all girls (24.3 vs 23.6 for all girls). 38% of girls in this group scoring with the 'no score' range (0-15 range), 0% in blue with the remainder spread across the pink and yellow colour bands, at 18% and 44% respectively.	**Literacy:** Mean average score higher than average score for all girls (62.2 vs. 58.5 for all girls). High proportion of girls presenting within the yellow band (59%) equivalent to Grade 5+ and significantly higher than at IPA (41% of girls). Lower proportion scoring in the blue and pink colour bands at 4% and 35% respectively, than at IPA stage which was 15% and 44% respectively. **Numeracy:** Mean average score in line with average of all girls (32.8 vs 33.2 for all girls). Reduction in proportion of girls achieving scores less than Grade 2 equivalent (white and blue bands) – 18% compared to 38% at IPA. Increased proportion of girls scoring in pink band (37% now in pink). Same proportion of girls at MPA stage attaining in the yellow colour band as IPA (44%).
Young mothers	Significantly higher reading and maths scores of girls who met the criteria vs girls who did not meet criteria.	**Literacy:** Highest average mean score amongst all sub-groups (57.1). Girls in this group score with a high proportion across the pink band (Grade 2-4) at 35% and yellow bands at 52% for literacy and 2% of girls score in the white no band score. **Numeracy:** Highest average mean score amongst all sub-groups (30.1). 54% of girls score in the yellow band (Grade 5+). 30% of girls also attained the white colour band ('no score') and no girls scored in the blue band.	**Literacy:** Mean average score higher than average score for all girls (62.4 vs. 58.5 for all girls). At MPA, there is a lower proportion of girls scoring in the blue (ECD-Grade 2) and pink bands (Grade 2-4) compared to IPA. For blue this is 5% vs 11% and for pink, this is 33% vs 35%. The proportion of girls scoring in the yellow (grade 5+) colour bands at MPA is at 60% versus 52% at IPA. At this stage, 2% of girls score in the white band/'no score' range. **Numeracy:** Mean average score in line with average of all girls (33.7 vs 33.2 for all girls). 48% of those assessed for numeracy are within the yellow band (grade5+) – which is a lower proportion than at IPA stage. Smaller proportion of girls in this group at MPA stage in the white band (9% of learners versus 30% at IPA stage).

Subgroup	Baseline findings	IPA data	MPA data
Girls from Apostolic Communities	Girls from this group recorded higher mean of aggregated maths scores than reading scores (62.65% vs 41.16% respectively).	**Literacy:** Mean average score in line with average of all girls (39.8 vs 37.82 for all girls). **Numeracy:** Second highest average mean score (25.3). Across literacy and numeracy, girls present with similar weightings across the four colour bands for literacy and numeracy, with the highest scores for both within the pink colour band (Grade 2-4). 15% and 24% of Apostolic girls gain a 0-15 ('no score') across literacy and numeracy respectively.	**Literacy:** Mean average score slightly lower than average score for all girls (57.8 vs. 58.5 for all girls). **Numeracy:** Mean average score in line with average of all girls (33.1 vs 33.2 for all girls). High proportion of girls within the pink and yellow colour bands (52% and 45% across literacy and numeracy respectively) and the weighting of the girls in the pink colour band (Grade 2-4) is significantly higher at MPA than at IPA, along with a far higher proportion of girls at MPA presenting within the yellow colour band (Grade 5+) from 16% to 52% for literacy and from 22% to 45% for numeracy. At this stage, over half (52%) of the Apostolic girls assessed demonstrated Grade 5+ equivalency in literacy with a smaller proportion just under half (45%) demonstrating the Grade 5+ equivalency in numeracy.
Girls with disabilities	Lowest mean of aggregated reading scores of all groups surveyed (29.75%). Lowest mean of aggregated maths scores of all groups surveyed (52.77%)	**Literacy:** lowest average mean score (15.3) of all sub-groups. Numeracy: lowest average mean score (11.1) of all sub-groups. Girls with disabilities had the highest proportion within the white ('no score') colour bands, with 70% for literacy and 67% for numeracy, with an even spread of the remaining girls across the other colour band grade equivalencies.	**Literacy:** Mean average score lower than average score for all girls (45.7 vs. 58.5 for all girls). **Numeracy:** Second lowest average mean score (26.4). Scores are significantly better than those girls who undertook the IPA highlighting the benefits of one year's exposure to learning. Literacy scores show a reduction in girls scoring in the 'no score' band from 70% at IPA to 24% at MPA. Scores show increase of proportion of girls in the pink and yellow bands, from 12% to 30% for pink (Grade 2-4) and from 9% to 41% for yellow (Grade 5+). Scoring for numeracy shows similar improvements to those for literacy. The white ('no score') colour band girls have decreased within this subgroup from 67% to 30%, with the pink colour band (grade 2-4) increasing from 18% to 30% and the yellow colour band (Grade 5+) increasing from 9% to 33%.

Subgroup	Baseline findings	IPA data	MPA data
Ethnic minority	Girls from this group recorded higher mean of aggregated maths scores than reading scores (66.5% vs 48.61% respectively).	Not included	**Literacy:** Highest average mean score amongst all sub-groups (63.7). **Numeracy:** Highest average mean score amongst all sub-groups (39.2). The MPA dataset for girls from the ethnic minorities' subgroup includes 171 girls assessed at MPA only. However, the findings display that a very high proportion of girls (65% for literacy and 71% for numeracy) demonstrate that they are scoring within the yellow colour banding (Grade 5+), the highest score of any sub-group for literacy across both subject areas.
Never been to school	Not included in baseline sub-group analysis	**Literacy:** Second lowest average mean score (28.8). **Numeracy:** Mean average score of 20.4 vs 23.6 for all girls. This is the second lowest mean score but considerably higher than girls with disabilities. Girls who had never been to school showed higher white colour band ('no scores') than other sub-groups, with the exception of girls with disabilities. Although the 'no scores' were low, there was still a relatively high proportion of girls who could demonstrate transferable knowledge and skills even without any prior schooling. Literacy: 23% of girls scored within the blue bands (ECD-grade2). 38% of girls scored within the pink colour band (Grade 2-4). Few scored in the yellow band (Grade 5+) with 5% for literacy Numeracy: 14% of girls scored within the blue bands (ECD-Grade 2). 37% of girls scored within the pink colour band (Grade 2-4), 14% of girls scored in the yellow band.	**Literacy:** Lowest average mean score amongst all sub-groups (31). **Numeracy:** Lowest average mean score amongst all sub-groups (23.3). A small number of girls moved across the colour bands for literacy and numeracy, with an increase from 5% at IPA to 15% at MPA in the yellow band for literacy and 14% at IPA to 21% at MPA for numeracy. The proportion of girls presenting as having 'no score' remained predominantly similar at IPA and MPA stage. At IPA for literacy, 33% of girls who had never been to school attained a 'no score', and at MPA it was 37%. For numeracy this was recorded as 36% attaining a 'no score' at IPA and 35% MPA. Girls who have never been to school show limited improvement and have the lowest MPA scores of all sub-groups.

Subgroup	Baseline findings	IPA data	MPA data
Engaged in labour	Significantly higher reading and maths scores of girls who met the criteria vs girls who did not meet criteria.	**Literacy:** Mean score in line with average of all girls (37.9 vs 37.82 for all girls). **Numeracy:** Mean score in line with average of all girls (24 vs 23.86 for all girls). At IPA, just under half of all girls presented as equivalent to Grade 2-4; the pink band for numeracy was reported at 42% with a slightly lower result for numeracy. The white colour band scoring girls amounted to 26% for numeracy and 18% for literacy.	**Literacy:** Mean score in line with average of all girls (58.4 vs 58.5 for all girls). **Numeracy:** Mean score in line with average of all girls (33.1 vs 33.2 for all girls). At MPA, girls engaged in labour (the largest dataset analysed across the sub-group categories) demonstrated that, after a year's exposure to the programme (up to module 1c), 54% of girls scored in the yellow band (Grade 5+) for literacy, compared to 16% of those girls assessed at IPA. For numeracy, the yellow band scoring was 47%, compared to 18% of those girls assessed at IPA. Increases can also be seen across IPA to MPA in literacy and numeracy, across both the blue (ECD- Grade 2) and the pink (Grade 2-4) bands.

7.1.6 DISTRICT-LEVEL ANALYSIS

This section provides an insight into the key emerging themes for literacy and numeracy attainment across districts, sharing how district teams have identified target areas for development within girls' attainment levels for literacy and numeracy at both aggregate and sub-task level. Where possible, the section aligns this to the programme's understanding of relative literacy and numeracy performance across sub-groups. The section also outlines how district and hub teams have reflected on the IPA and MPA data and responded to the findings through a series of workshops, to better understand girls' educational attainment at entry (IPA) and after a year's exposure to the programme at a district level. This district-level analysis is designed for use by external stakeholders in Zimbabwe, including MoPSE, to support and inform conversations relating to strengthening educational outcomes for out-of-school girls.

Using the current datasets, the programme has been able to identify particular pedagogic challenges within each district which has supported CEs to identify issues at particular hubs and develop action plans accordingly. However, it should be noted that the datasets are limited in scope and of varying sample sizes, some of which are very small. At midline, the programme had conducted both IPA and MPA data collection in two districts; for the other districts discussed in this section, either IPA or MPA data were available for the midline analysis, as shown in Table 18 below.

The data presented here therefore does not allow the programme to identify consistent commonalities or trends between rural and urban districts or make assertions about why some districts are performing better than others. As the programme accumulates a greater volume of LPA data towards the endline phase it will be better placed to analyse trends within and between districts and make more robust assertions about differences between rural and urban contexts.

The following section introduces the IPA and MPA literacy and numeracy scores by district, firstly as mean (totals) within the tables below. The data is then presented by district as colour band graphs showing primary school grade equivalency, presenting datasets for literacy and numeracy at IPA and MPA in districts where the data were collected.

The IPA data presented in this report were collected in six of the SAGE districts and the MPA data in seven districts, as shown in Table 18 below.

Table 18

IPA	MPA
Hatcliffe	Bulilima
Harare South	Chimanimani
Epworth	Epworth
Khami	Imbizo
Mutoko	Mutoko
Reigate	Mutasa
	Mutare Rural

SAGE operates across both rural and urban districts, as listed in Table 19. Rural areas are broadly defined as being characterised by an agrarian economy, retaining strong traditional practices and having limited access to services and infrastructure compared with urban districts.

Table 19

Rural	Urban
Chimanimani	Hatcliffe
Mutasa	Epworth
Mutoko	Imbizo
Mutare Rural	Reigate
Bulilima	Harare South
	Khami

The data presented are contextualised at a district level drawing from written summaries provided by NFE mentors from LPA capacity building workshops. The workshops provided an opportunity to analyse and respond to learner assessment datasets at a hub and district level, enabling districts and their related hub teams to analyse individual learners' progress and supporting them to adapt their approach and identify professional development needs for hub-based CEs. Each hub team within the district workshops was tasked with developing an action plan in response to their hub/district data analysis. A summary of the action plans developed at these workshops can be found at Annex 12.

Workshops were led by the PIZ team with the support of Open University academic partners. Community Educators who attended the training session were predominantly MoPSE qualified and practising teachers.

IPA mean literacy scores by district:

The table below presents the IPA mean literacy scores by district. The minimum score for all districts is 0 and the maximum is 81 (as achieved in Harare South and Mutoko districts). The highest mean literacy score was in Mutoko district (49.03), a rural district. The lowest mean literacy was recorded in the urban district of Epworth (31.41).

Table 20: IPA literacy mean scores by district

District	Number of girls assessed	Minimum	Maximum	Mean score
Epworth	83	0	74	31.41
Harare South	287	0	81	35.68
Hatcliffe	164	0	72	38.62
Khami	77	0	80	31.95
Mutoko	98	1	81	49.03
Reigate	47	0	80	35.13
Total	**756**			**36.97**

The following district-level analysis is presented with the caveat that the total samples of girls within each sub-group assessed in each district varied significantly and in some cases were relatively small, limiting the strength of the assertions that can be made.

The overall mean IPA literacy score is 36.97. Epworth, Harare South, Hatcliffe, Reigate and Khami are all urban districts whereas Mutoko is a rural district. The IPA literacy mean scores for urban districts range from 31.41 to 38.62, whereas the mean score for literacy for Mutoko, the only rural district in this dataset, is significantly higher at 49.03. One explanation for this could be that the sample of girls in Mutoko who undertook the IPA include a higher proportion of married girls (34 of the 98 assessed) and Apostolic girls (54 of the 98 assessed) than the urban districts.

As highlighted in the sub-group section earlier, married girls sampled at baseline demonstrated the highest aggregate reading scores (52.86%) and married girls had the second highest mean literacy score of all sub-groups across the total IPA dataset. Mutoko also has a higher proportion of girls from the Apostolic community (54 of 98) whose mean IPA literacy score was just above the total (39.8 vs 37.82 for all girls). Therefore, scores for this district may reflect the wider trend within the IPA dataset of married girls and girls from the Apostolic community having prior knowledge of literacy upon entering the programme.

IPA numeracy mean scores by district:

The table below highlights the numeracy scores by district. The minimum score for all districts was 0 and the maximum score was 52. Hatcliffe (urban) and Mutoko (rural) had the highest mean scores of 27.73 and 26.58 respectively.

Table 21: IPA Numeracy mean scores by district

District	Number assessed	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Epworth	83	0	51	22.29
Harare South	287	0	49	21.44
Hatcliffe	164	0	49	27.34
Khami	77	0	50	22.73
Mutoko	98	0	52	26.58
Reigate	47	0	51	22.09
Total	**756**			**23.7**

After five weeks within the programme, IPA mean scores for numeracy are generally similar across districts with Hatcliffe and Mutoko scoring slightly higher. One common characteristic of the two districts is that they both have high proportions of girls from the Apostolic community.

In Hatcliffe, 123 of the 164 girls assessed were from the Apostolic community and in Mutoko, 54 of the 98 girls assessed were from this sub-group. Girls from the Apostolic community scored well in the baseline numeracy tasks and score consistently well within IPA numeracy scores overall, with the second highest average mean score (25.3).

MPA mean literacy scores by district:

The table below highlights the mean literacy scores by district at MPA. The range for MPA literacy scores was from 0-87; Chimanimani had the highest mean score of 68.54.

Table 22: MPA literacy mean scores by district

District	Number assessed	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Bulilima	338	0	87	61.87
Chimanimani	438	1	87	68.54
Epworth	153	0	87	40.35
Imbizo	75	1	87	63.07
Mutare Rural	488	9	83	57.54
Mutasa	855	0	87	60.56
Mutoko	366	0	87	46.51
Total	**2713**			**56.92**

The overall mean MPA literacy score was 56.92. For MPA literacy data disaggregated by district, Epworth (40.54) has a lower mean score for literacy than the other districts. Epworth has previously been identified as a lower-performing district, as reflected in the midline findings. Additionally, of the 153 girls who undertook the MPA in Epworth, 38 had never been to school (25%), a higher proportion than in any other district. The sample in Epworth who undertook the MPA also included a low number of married girls and young mothers who scored relatively highly at MPA compared to other sub-groups.

MPA mean numeracy scores by district:

The table below presents the MPA mean numeracy scores by district. MPA numeracy scores ranged from 0-52. Chimanimani had the highest mean score (40.5) whereas Mutare Rural had the lowest mean score (25.6) at MPA (both rural districts).

Table 23: MPA mean numeracy scores by district

District	Number assessed	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Bulilima	338	0	52	38.41
Chimanimani	438	0	52	40.53
Epworth	153	0	52	27.61
Imbizo	75	0	52	38.39
Mutare Rural	488	0	43	25.62
Mutasa	855	0	52	32.39
Mutoko	366	0	52	33.19
Total	**2713**			**33.73**

As shown in Table 23, Epworth and Mutare have lower numeracy mean scores than the other districts. Again, for Epworth, as with the literacy scores above, the higher proportion of girls who have never been to school than other districts will likely have lowered the mean score. Even after a year of exposure to the programme, this sub-group started the programme with less formally acquired numeracy knowledge and skills than their peers.

District data for IPA and MPA by colour band:

Included in this section are the IPA and MPA datasets for literacy and numeracy across grade-level equivalency colour bands for each of the eleven districts, with additional information provided specific to the district's contexts and demographic characteristics of the learners sampled. For each district, the report will summarise the outcomes of district-level workshops at which the LPA datasets were reviewed and analysed, and outline actions agreed at hub and district-level to address challenges that were identified in terms of girls' learning.

The analysis compares the proportions of girls scoring within each colour band in each district with the colour band distributions across the overall MPA and IPA cohorts to assess the relative performance at district-level. Where possible, the section also presents hypotheses to explain the learning results in each district, supported by information provided by the PIZ team summarising the outcomes of the district-level workshops. However, as previously outlined, the limitations of the dataset restrict the programme's ability to draw robust conclusions about the factors underlying LPA performance within different districts.

The workshops conducted within each district provided guidance to support the CEs in analysing the IPA and MPA dataset. Each district team was set the task of the development of hub-specific action plans to respond to the findings of their hub learning assessments. Data was provided for each hub including breakdowns of individual girls' sub-task scores to support the identification of key areas of curriculum and activity focus. Workshops were attended by hub CEs and NFE mentors. More detail on the action plans developed at these workshops can be found in Annex 12.

A table of district-level breakdowns of numbers of girls by sub-groups is provided to annotate some of the district-level hypotheses about the relevance of the composition of the sample within each district to the IPA and MPA results. Please note that girls can be represented within multiple sub-group categories.

However, the breakdown of numbers of girls within sub-groups at a district level supports the programme's understanding of the interpretation of colour band scoring for literacy and numeracy scores at both IPA and MPA for each district below.

Table 24

Key:
YM – Young mothers; AC -Girls from the Apostolic community
EM -Ethnic minority girls; NBTS – Never been to school;
EIL – Girls engaged in labour

IPA

District	Married	YM	AC	Disabled	EM	NBTS	EIL	Total
Epworth	0	1	37	3	0	2	83	83
Harare South	5	6	158	10	0	14	287	287
Hatcliffe	0	0	123	4	0	38	164	164
Khami	0	1	24	10	0	17	20	77
Mutoko	34	37	54	1	0	1	98	98
Reigate	0	1	17	5	0	9	24	47
Total	**39**	**46**	**413**	**33**	**0**	**81**	**676**	**756**

Table 25

MPS

District	Married	YM	AC	Disabled	EM	NBTS	EIL	Total
Bulilima	1	77	82	17	165	14	277	338
Chimanimani	195	223	266	32	2	1	438	438
Epworth	3	3	52	1	0	38	147	153
Imbizo	17	24	13	9	3	4	52	75
Mutare Rural	325	337	358	27	1	13	488	488
Mutasa	539	640	458	50	0	40	854	855
Mutoko	90	111	263	22	0	22	362	366
Total	**1170**	**1415**	**1492**	**158**	**171**	**132**	**2618**	**2713**

BULILIMA

This district is in Matabeleland South Province and is bordered by Botswana, Tsholotsho and Mangwe. As enrolment of SAGE girls has grown the number of hubs within the district has increased from 12 to 15. Bulilima was one of the first seven districts in which learners were enrolled, and the girls participating in SAGE in this district are in Cohort 1. Girls in this district therefore undertook the MPA, data from which is presented below.

Figure 13: Bulilima MPA literacy scores

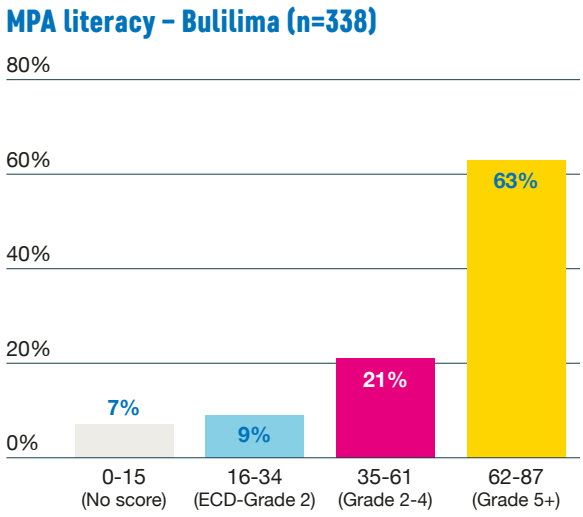
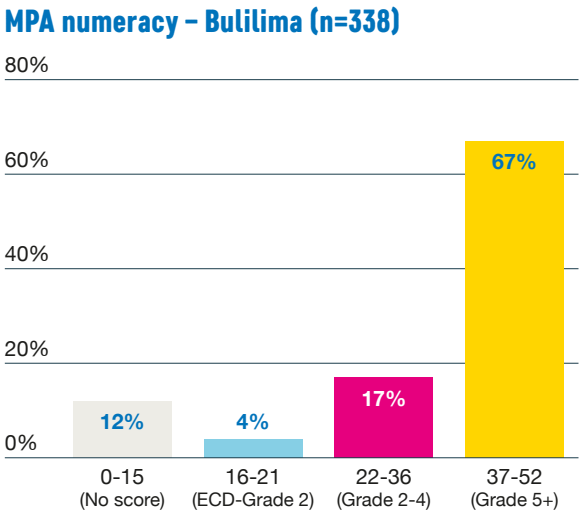


Figure 14: Bulilima MPA numeracy scores



District-level findings identified a high proportion of learners performing within the yellow colour band at MPA (equivalent to Grade 5+), with 63% of girls achieving this band for literacy and 67% for numeracy. This compares favourably to 54% and 47% respectively of all girls at MPA who scored in the highest yellow band. All sub-groups are represented within the district and include a high proportion of girls from ethnic minorities (165 of 338 assessed), while just under a quarter of girls were from the Apostolic community (82 of 338). The strong performance of girls in Bulilima may be partially explained by the high representation of girls from ethnic minorities in the district who demonstrated the strongest results at MPA of the seven SAGE sub-groups.

The district workshop focused on identifying the challenges faced by learners scoring within the white ('no score') band at 7% for literacy and 12% numeracy, and the blue colour band (equivalent to Grades 2-4) at 9% for literacy and 4% for numeracy. Addressing these scores was a key concern to the district team as the girls had already attended for a year. The district team identified that lower outcomes may be linked to sporadic attendance, which was identified as an issue in some hubs.

The district team shared that the learners in lower colour bands were feeling disheartened, voicing concerns about a lack of progress and skills acquisition.

In response, the team discussed the link between poor attendance and individual girls' scores, developing strategies to encourage improved attendance for learners who faced additional barriers.

Through examining their data sets by sub-task, CEs across the district team were able to identify subject areas of concern including topics where the learners had consistently scored at a low level.

CHIMANIMANI

Chimanimani has nine hubs all located in the west of the district. Learners in the hubs are dominated by girls in the 15-19 age category, with a smaller number of girls within the 10-14 age group. There was representation across the SAGE sub-groups including girls from the Apostolic community (266 of 438), married girls (195 of 438), young mothers (233 of 438) and a small number of girls with disabilities (32 of 438). The girls within Chimanimani district are from Cohort 1 and undertook the MPA.

Figure 15: Chimanimani MPA literacy scores

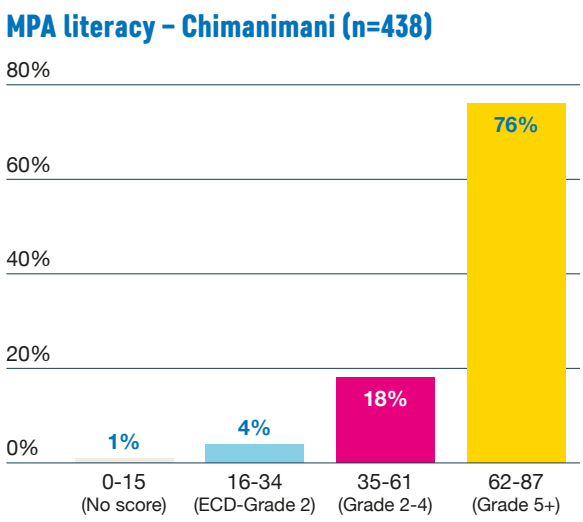
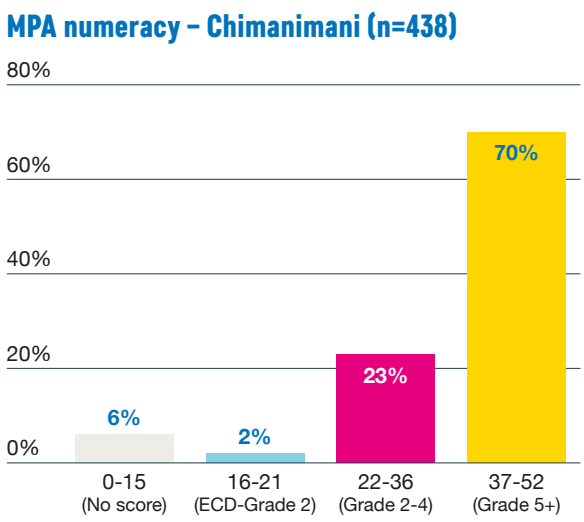


Figure 16: Chimanimani MPA numeracy scores



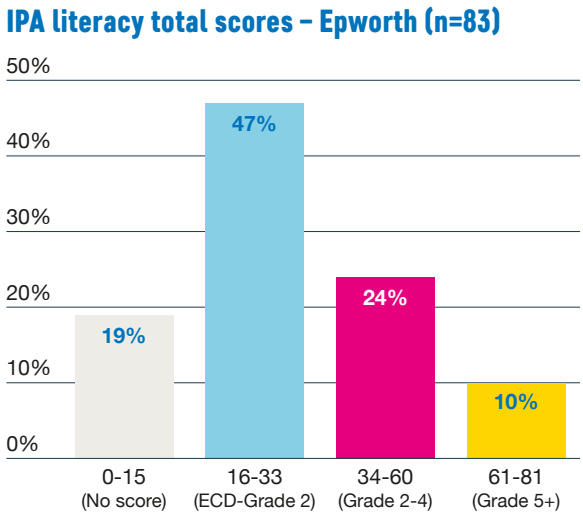
MPA learner scores within Chimanimani district show a high proportion of girls scoring within the yellow colour band (Grade 5+) at 76% in literacy and 70% for numeracy. This could be partly attributable to the fact that a high proportion of girls within the district had had some form of pre-Grade 5 schooling prior to leaving their studies and represented the older age categories, with only 1 of the 438 girls assessed having never been to school.

District level sub-task results showed that some learners had difficulties in both literacy and numeracy, specifically letter sounds within literacy, but that those scoring in the white ('no score') band and blue (equivalent to Grades 2-4) found sub-tasks across numeracy assessment problematic. Hub teams highlighted that consistent challenges within a small number of numeracy results were of particular concern. CEs additionally highlighted concerns relating to their sign language skills when communicating with hearing impaired learners.

EPWORTH

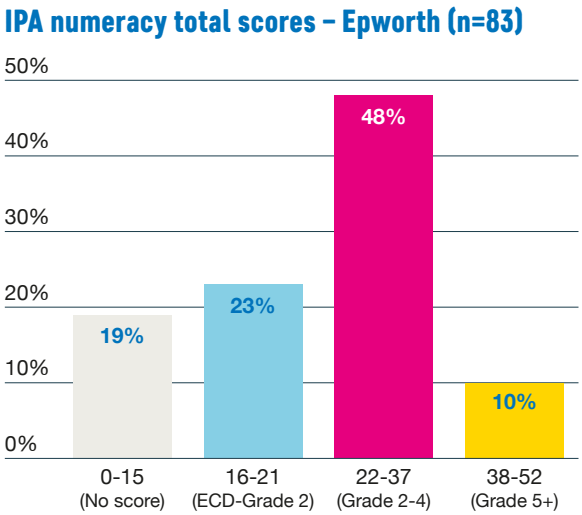
Epworth is an urban resettlement in the south-eastern metropolitan area of Harare. The district has four Hubs. 37 of 83 girls who took the IPA in this district were from the Apostolic community, with all girls engaged in labour and very low numbers of other sub-groups.

Figure 17: Epworth IPA literacy scores



The scores from Cohort 2 IPA assessments within Epworth display a lower proportion of girls attaining the yellow colour band (equivalent to Grade 5+), at 10% for both literacy and numeracy, than across all girls.

Figure 18: Epworth IPA numeracy scores



This compares to 15% and 17% of the total girls assessed at IPA achieving the yellow colour band for literacy and numeracy respectively. Girls in Epworth assessed at IPA performed considerably better at numeracy than literacy, with double the number of girls achieving the second highest pink band in numeracy (48%) than literacy (24%).

Figure 19: Epworth MPA literacy scores

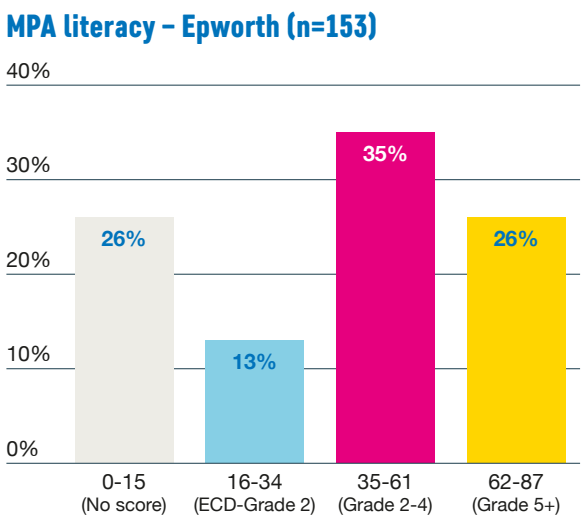
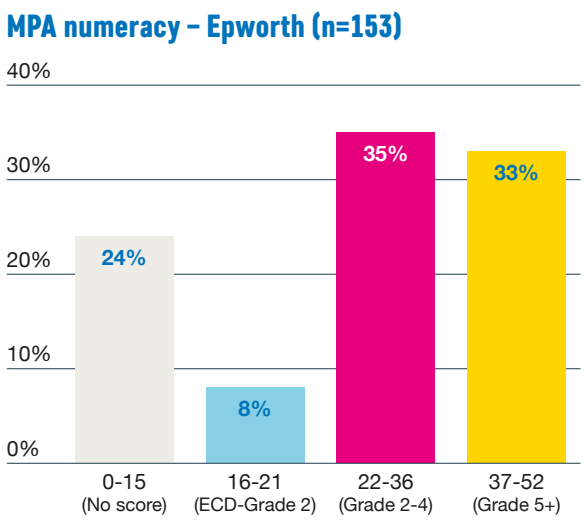


Figure 20: Epworth MPA numeracy scores



Epworth's MPA data from Cohort 1 shows that the proportion of girls achieving the yellow band in both literacy and numeracy (26% and 33% respectively) is significantly lower than the total MPA cohort, of whom 54% and 47% respectively scored in the yellow band in literacy and numeracy. The distribution across the blue and pink bands is relatively similar to the overall dataset, but the proportions attaining 'no score' were significantly higher than the total MPA cohort. 26% of girls assessed in Epworth scored in the white colour band for literacy after completing module 1c, compared to 6% overall, and 24% did so for numeracy, compared to 12% overall.

Explanations for this discussed at the district-level workshop include sporadic attendance for a proportion of the district's learners and a relatively high proportion of girls who have never been to school (38 of 153 girls assessed).

It is also striking that a higher proportion of girls in Epworth scored in the 'no score' band at MPA, after a year's exposure to the programme, than at IPA in both literacy and numeracy (although a much higher proportion also achieved the top two pink and yellow bands at MPA than at IPA, as expected). Epworth has previously been identified as a lower performing district and these data suggest that a significant proportion of girls in these hubs have struggled to grasp foundational skills in the first year of the programme. The data available at midline are not sufficient to explain the higher proportion of girls scoring in the white 'no score' colour band at MPA, but the programme will continue to review sub-task data from Epworth hubs to attempt to ascertain issues affecting learner scores in this district.

IMBIZO

Imbizo is a district in Bulawayo province. The SAGE programme has five hubs linked to three schools in the outskirts of Bulawayo. This district has a high prevalence of illegal mines and levels of deprivation are severe, with many SAGE girls living in squatter camps and engaging in mining activities.

The girls assessed at MPA in Imbizo included a high proportion of girls engaged in labour at just under three quarters of girls (52 of 75 assessed). Just under a third of the girls assessed were young mothers (24 of 75) with lower representation across other sub-groups.

Figure 21: Imbizo MPA literacy scores

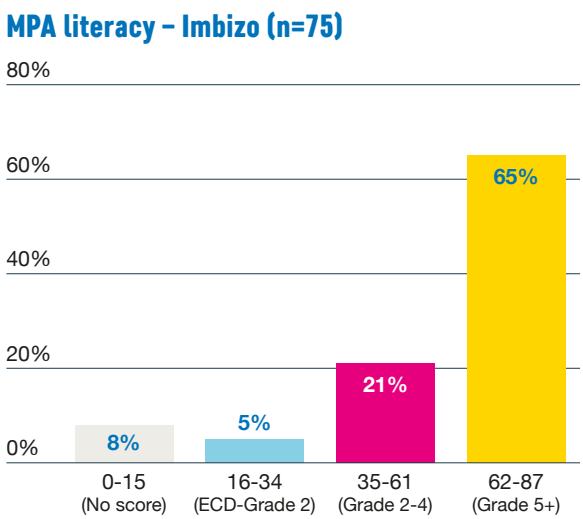
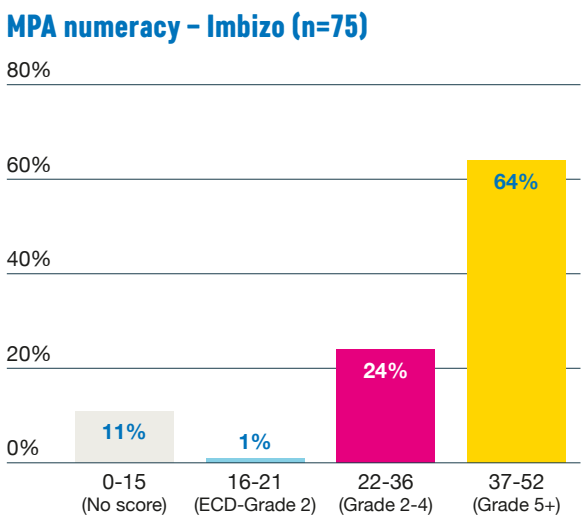


Figure 22: Imbizo MPA numeracy scores



The MPA results indicate that, after completing module 1c (equivalent to a year of exposure to the programme), 65% of girls in Imbizo achieved the yellow colour band (Grade 5+) for literacy and 64% for numeracy, significantly higher than the total MPA cohort. The high numbers of girls achieving the higher grade level colour bands suggests that girls are showing strong levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy at MPA.

The proportion of girls in the white colour band ('no score'), while similar to the overall MPA cohort, was a key concern for CEs within the LPA workshops as this group demonstrated limited knowledge and skills acquisition after a year of exposure to the programme. While some work was required across the district to address the differentiation and additional attention required for girls who had achieved 'no score', the workshop was also an opportunity to look across the higher scoring colour bands. Analysis of hub and district sub-task data identified that girls were performing well in speaking and listening, letter sound/knowledge, comprehension and writing. The team identified successful strategies to achieve higher sub-task scores across literacy to share with other district teams.

MUTARE RURAL

Mutare rural is bounded on the east by Mozambique. The district has 10 hubs, two of which are in resettlement areas.

Sub-groups included within Cohort 1 who completed the MPA in this district included girls from the Apostolic community (358 of 488); a high proportion of the cohort were also young mothers (337 of 488) and were married (325 of 488), with a small proportion of girls with disabilities (27 of 488). Only 14 of 488 had never been to school.

Figure 23: Mutare Rural MPA literacy scores

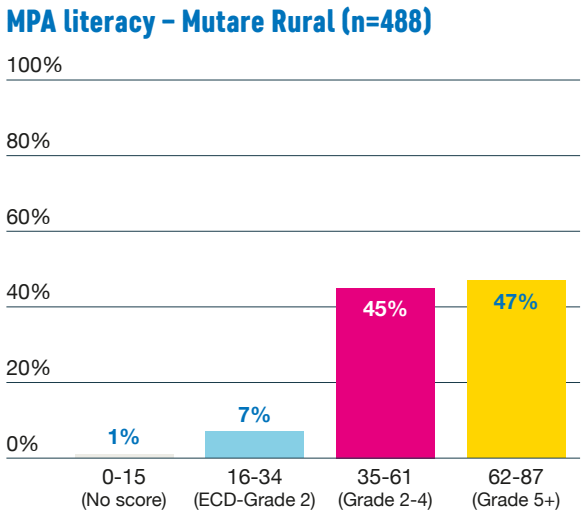
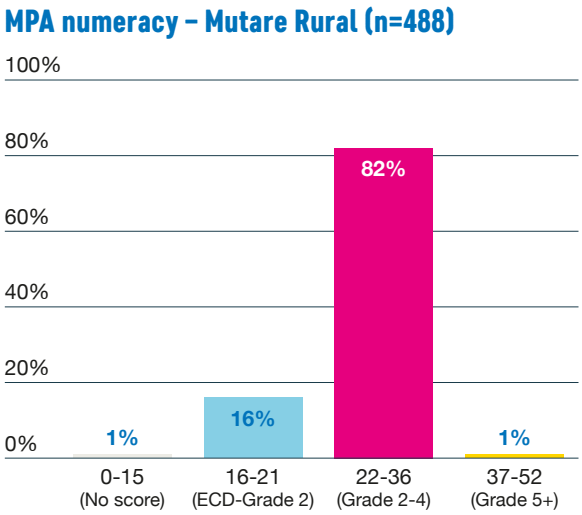


Figure 24: Mutare Rural MPA numeracy scores



MPA findings for Mutare Rural show an interesting distribution across bands. While for literacy, the proportion of girls in the highest yellow colour band is lower than the overall MPA cohort at 47% (compared to 54%), the proportions in the two highest pink and yellow bands are actually higher than the total MPA cohort, at 92% compared to 86%. In numeracy, only 1% of girls achieved the yellow colour band but again the proportion across the two higher pink and yellow bands is on a par (or slightly higher) than across the overall cohort, at 83% compared to 81% of all girls.

In numeracy, 16% of girls scored in the blue colour band (equivalent to Grades 2-4), which is considerably higher than all girls at 7%. For literacy, the girls scoring in the blue colour band was on a par with the total. In both literacy and numeracy, only 1% of girls scored in the white 'no score' band, lower than the 6% and 12% respectively across all girls assessed.

This indicates that, after a year of exposure to the programme, girls in this district are performing at a mid to high level with very few girls performing at a low level, but equally fewer girls achieving at a very high level compared to all girls. The sample of girls assessed at MPA in Mutare Rural consisted of very low numbers of girls who have never been to school, along with high numbers of girls from the Apostolic community and married girls, both groups who performed in line with all girls in terms of colour band distribution in both literacy and numeracy at MPA.

During the workshop, hub teams highlighted that some learners who were scoring in the blue band were struggling in both literacy and numeracy. District and hub level sub-task analysis found that learners were doing better in addition and subtraction than multiplication and division. Another feature of sub-task analysis at a hub level was that even the girls scoring within the yellow colour band in numeracy MPA were still struggling with division. This was identified as an area of focus for professional development for CEs. As with other teams, CEs reported concerns with their use of sign language for hearing impaired learners.

MUTASA

Mutasa District is a rural district in Manicaland Province, and includes 11 SAGE hubs. Mutasa's economy is agriculture-based with villagers practicing semi-commercial agriculture. The district has several plantations and smaller holdings growing coffee, tea and bananas. Large scale commercial plantations produce timber and coffee. Girls in the valley cross the border seasonally in search of employment opportunities in Mozambique, with some girls working in the tea estates.

The girls assessed in Mutasa were Cohort 1 girls who undertook the MPA, with representation across all seven sub-groups. All but one of the girls assessed were engaged in labour (854 of 855). A high proportion of the girls assessed were young mothers (640 of 855), married girls (539 of 855) and girls from the Apostolic community (458 of 855). Girls with a disability constituted a smaller portion of the girls assessed (50 of 855) and 40 girls had never been to school.

Figure 25: Mutasa MPA literacy scores

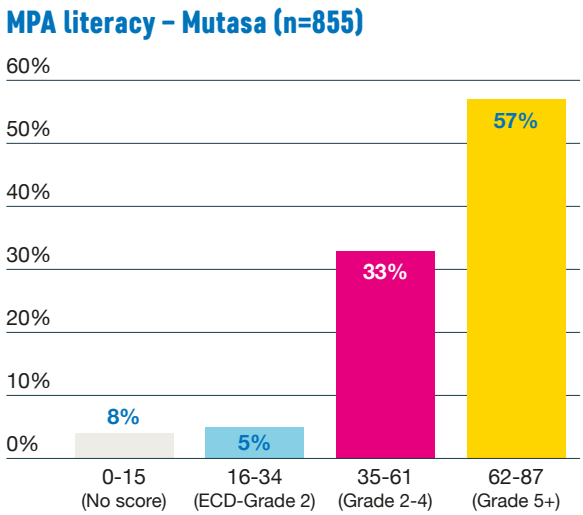
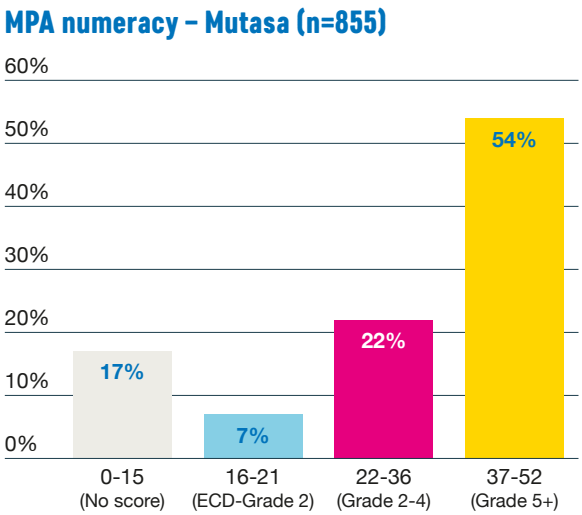


Figure 26: Mutasa MPA numeracy scores



After completion of module 1c (equivalent to a year of exposure to the programme) over 50% of girls scored within the yellow band (equivalent to Grade 5+) for literacy and numeracy, with limited variation across the subject areas. The distribution across the colour bands was very similar to the total across all girls in literacy. While 54% of girls achieved the yellow colour band in numeracy, compared to 47% across the whole MPA cohort, there was also a relatively high proportion of girls scoring in the white band ('no score') after completing module 1c (17%), indicating some gaps in foundational numeracy skills.

The district-level workshop focused on the need to identify any consistent sub-task or areas of the curriculum which were challenging for both lower and higher performing girls. CEs within the workshop indicated that girls achieving higher scores cited their recognition of the positive impact their newly acquired skills were having within their lives. The lower scores (in the white and blue colour bands) for numeracy aligned to the feedback CEs had received from learners relating to difficulties progressing in numeracy.

MUTOKO

Mutoko district lies within an agro-ecological region characterised by high temperatures, erratic rains and dry spells which result in high levels of food insecurity. The district has 11 hubs plus 4 satellite hubs.

Girls in Mutoko include both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2, with the following data pertaining to both the IPA and MPA. Of the girls who undertook the IPA, all were engaged in labour, while over half were from the Apostolic community. Of the 98 girls assessed, 34 were married and 37 were young mothers.

Figure 27: Mutoko IPA literacy scores

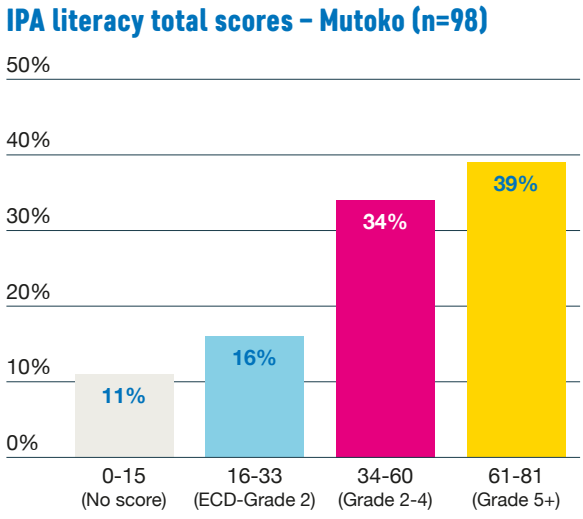
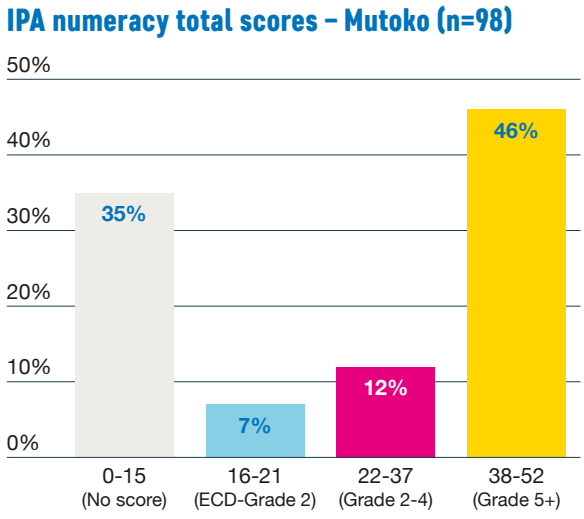


Figure 28: Mutoko IPA numeracy scores



In literacy, girls in Mutoko performed well above the totals across all girls at IPA. In numeracy, the distribution across colour bands was almost bi-modal with the highest proportion scoring in the yellow band (equivalent to Grade 5+) but a high proportion also scoring in the 'no score' category.

Providing sufficient support to learners with very low foundational skill levels in numeracy was a feature of the district's work and their ongoing focus on numeracy was addressed as a key area of focus for CEs and hub-level staff.

Figure 29: Mutoko MPA literacy scores

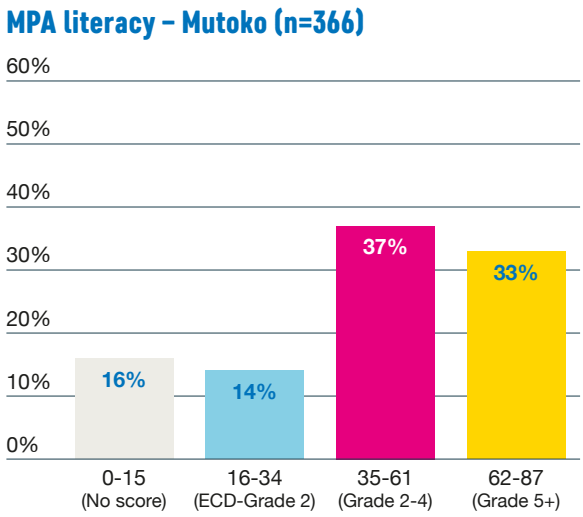
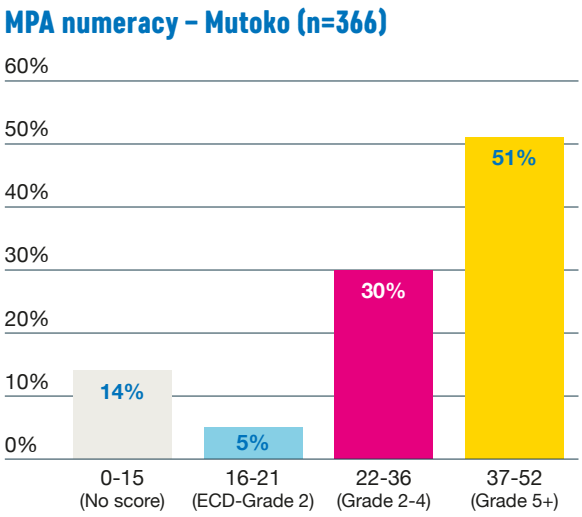


Figure 30: Mutoko MPA numeracy scores



Sub-groups represented within the Mutoko MPA cohort included 263 girls from the Apostolic community and 111 young mothers. At MPA, girls in Mutoko performed better in numeracy than in literacy; only a third of girls achieved the yellow colour band in literacy compared to 54% across the whole MPA cohort, and a significantly higher proportion scored in the white colour band in literacy (16% compared to 6% across all girls). In numeracy, the distribution was much more aligned with the total MPA cohort, with 81% of girls achieving the higher pink and yellow colour bands.

Noting the significant difference in the sample sizes between girls assessed at IPA and MPA in Mutoko, a slightly higher proportion of girls also scored in the lowest 'no score' colour band at MPA, after a year's exposure to the programme, than at IPA (16% at MPA and 11% at IPA). While the midline data is not sufficient to fully explain the reasons for this, it indicates issues affecting the acquisition of foundational literacy skills in this district.

As with other district workshops, CEs highlighted the challenges of meeting the needs of girls with disabilities, particularly in relation to supporting girls with special needs. The workshop also included discussions of consistent challenges girls faced in grasping skills such as mixed operations in numeracy and calculating percentages.

HATCLIFFE

This district is an urban resettlement located in the northern central part of Harare Metropolitan, which has four SAGE hubs. The sub-groups represented within the girls who undertook the IPA included a high proportion of girls from the Apostolic community (123 of 164), while approximately a quarter had never been to school (38 of 164).

Figure 31: Hatcliffe IPA literacy scores

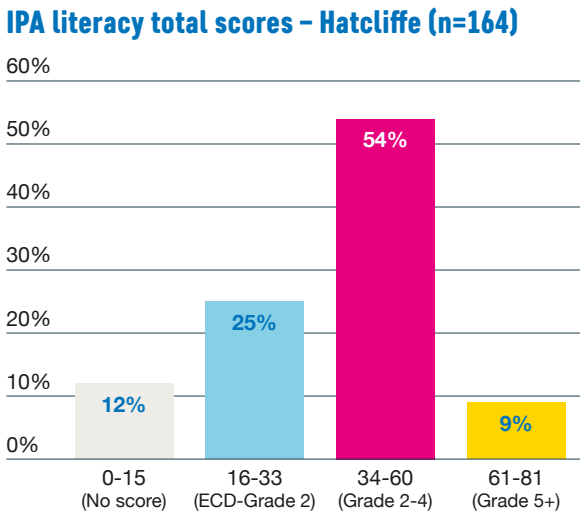
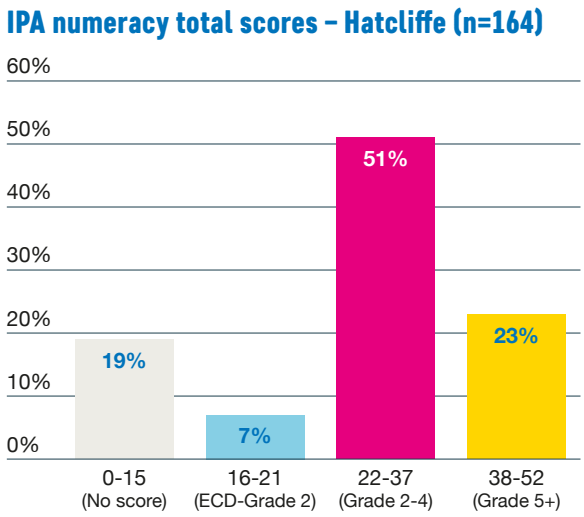


Figure 32: Hatcliffe IPA numeracy scores



The IPA scores for literacy and numeracy in Hatcliffe suggest that over half of girls entering the programme, assessed after five weeks attendance, have the skills equivalent to Grades 2-4. While a lower proportion of girls scored within the yellow colour band in literacy than across the overall IPA cohort (9% compared to 15%), there was a much stronger weighting within the pink colour band (54% compared to 37% of all girls). In numeracy, girls in Hatcliffe performed considerably better than the total IPA cohort, with 74% of girls scoring within the upper two bands compared to 58% of all girls.

This common entry point of girls entering the SAGE programme at Grade 2-4 level was a feature of workshop discussion, along with addressing the needs of those learners who arrived with very little prior knowledge and skills in literacy and numeracy, with white scores of 12% for literacy and 19% for numeracy. Through the workshop's analysis of data by sub-task, the team identified that girls in most hubs scored highly in letter sounds and word reading. This was attributed to the focus on these skills from the beginning of the SAGE programme, prior to the IPA assessment. Within numeracy, higher scoring girls performed well in counting and addition; this was attributed to the girls assisting their guardians with vending.

HARARE SOUTH

Harare South is an urban district, the majority of which is a non-formal settlement. The suburb is densely populated, and hubs are located close residential areas. The district has five hubs.

Sub-groups which featured within the sample of girls assessed at IPA cohort included 158 girls from the Apostolic community with low representation across other sub-group categories.

Figure 33: Harare South IPA literacy scores

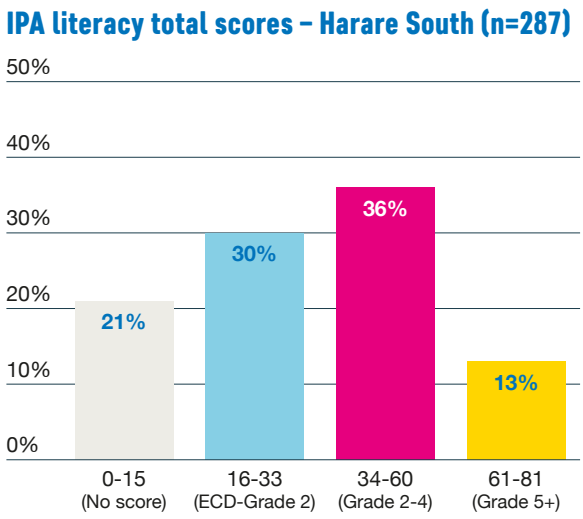
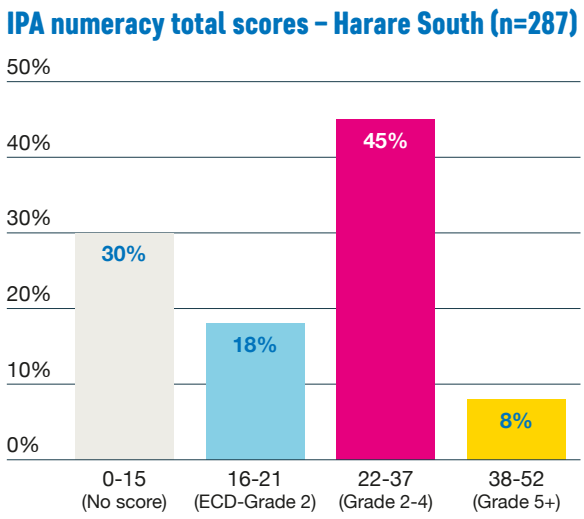


Figure 34: Harare South IPA numeracy scores



The IPA assessment data for Cohort 2 in Harare South suggests that a significant number of girls commenced the programme with very limited or no prior numeracy skills. For literacy, the colour band distribution was relatively similar (although slightly lower) than that for the overall IPA cohort.

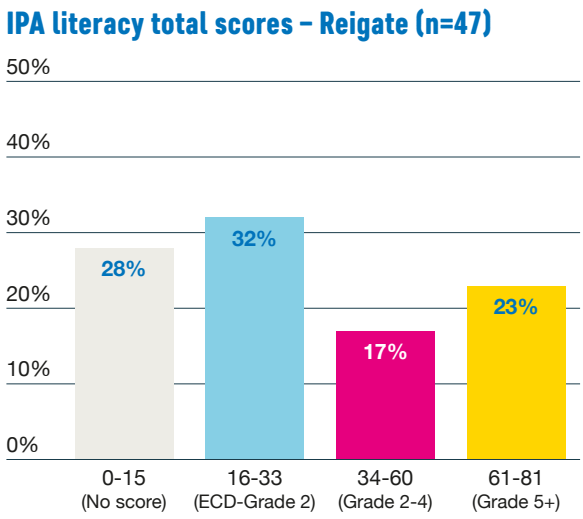
The district team undertook sub-task analysis, identifying that Place Value, multiplication and division were very challenging to most learners, and therefore that a focus on these skills would be required. SAGE volunteers participating in the district-level workshop identified that literacy scores were generally higher because reading tasks were conducted in both local languages and English, enabling girls to use whichever language they felt most comfortable. Higher literacy scores were also attributed to a widespread interest in reading amongst girls at their hubs.

REIGATE

Reigate covers the Northeast of Bulawayo City. Most of the six SAGE hubs are within the town, around 10-15km outside of the Central Business District. Girls in these areas frequently rely on casual labour and entrepreneurship including vending, working as house maids and providing manual labour. Some of the communities in Reigate are overpopulated to the extent that the formal schools in these areas cannot house the school-age population.

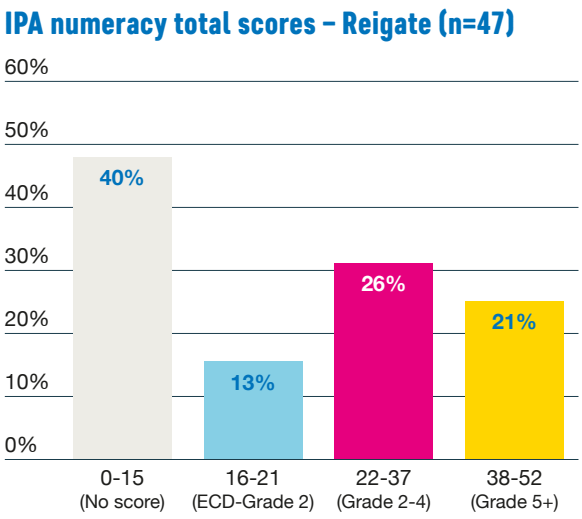
Sub-groups to feature within the district's IPA data (Cohort 2) include 17 girls from the Apostolic community, with a small number of girls from across the other sub-group categories. Of the 47 girls assessed, 9 had never been to school.

Figure 35: Reigate IPA literacy scores



Noting the small sample, literacy scores in Reigate show a fairly even distribution across colour bands, although they are weighted towards the lower end and with a significantly higher proportion in the white 'no score' band than across the total IPA cohort (28% compared to 18% of all girls). 60% of the girls assessed scored in the bottom two bands, compared to 47% across all girls who undertook the IPA.

Figure 36: Reigate IPA numeracy scores



In numeracy, a high proportion of girls attained within the 'no score' band, indicating low levels of existing numeracy skills for girls entering the programme which was identified as a key area for support by the district and hub teams. The sub-task analysis indicated that girls consistently found division, multiplication and comparing and ordering numbers the most challenging.

KHAMI

Khami, an urban district, is one of five districts in Bulawayo Province located in the city of Bulawayo. The district has six community-based learning hubs. All the hub communities are categorised as low-income, with many of the girls within this district involved in part-time manual labour, including firewood vending and trading in waste materials. The girls assessed in Khami were from Cohort 2 and undertook the IPA. Of the 77 girls, 17 had never been to school, 24 were from the Apostolic community and 10 were girls with a disability, with very few married girls or mothers.

Figure 37: Khami IPA literacy scores

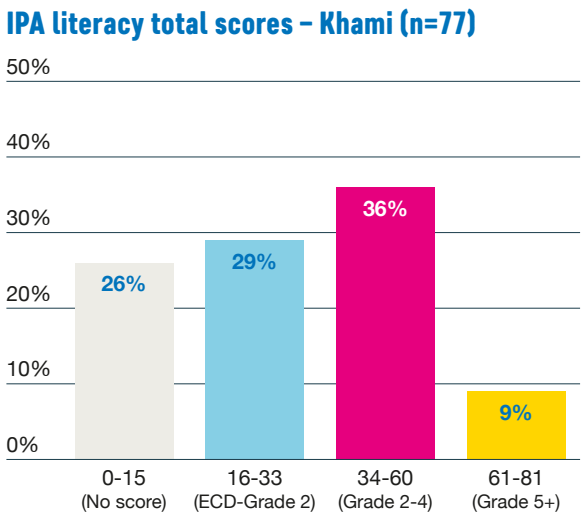
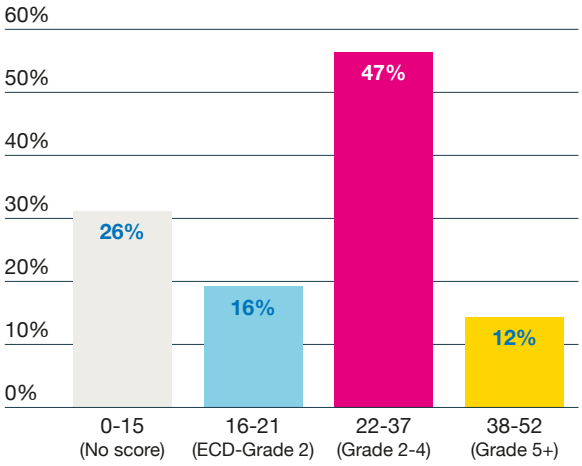


Figure 38: Khami IPA total numeracy scores



In literacy, the proportion of girls in Khami scoring in the middle two bands (blue and pink) was on a par with the overall cohort, at 66%. However, over a quarter of the girls who undertook the IPA scored in the white band, indicating very little prior numeracy knowledge, compared to 18% of all girls. In numeracy, the distribution of girls was similar to the total IPA cohort, although a lower proportion of girls achieved the highest yellow band.

The proportion of girls in the 'no score' band was the same for both literacy and numeracy, at 26%. Of the 77 girls who undertook the IPA, 22% (17) had never been to school while a further 13% (10) were girls with a disability, the sub-groups with the lowest overall attainment levels across the whole IPA cohort.

Summary of district-level workshops and consolidation of programme adaptations from wider LPA analysis:

The focus of the district-level workshops held to date have been to discuss the ways in which the CEs could support girls within the lower end of the scoring to grasp the foundational concepts required to progress through the SAGE modules. Within these workshops, district and hub teams asserted the importance of utilising progress assessments for improving learning outcomes for the girls, in particular the ability to identify individual learners' needs from their sub-task scores.

LPA data from both IPA and MPA has been captured and applied at a hub, district and programme-level to better understand the individual and collective needs of learners within each district, and provide the information required to develop CEs' pedagogical skills and improve learner experience and outcomes within SAGE hubs. Following the district workshops, the learning generated from the analysis and reflection process, particularly at sub-task and sub-group level, was consolidated by the ATL team. This learning has informed programme adaptations to support CE professional development and to strengthen learning outcomes for girls at SAGE hubs. These adaptations are summarised below.

Capacity building and continuous professional development:

- The programme has deployed a series of virtual CPD trainings sessions in numeracy and literacy to build CEs' capacity and confidence.
- Capacity development for CEs has aimed to bolster their understanding of how to use the LPA datasets across subjects, focusing on how CEs can use individual girls' attainment data to support girls to progress through the ATL curriculum and in applying individual differentiated activities.
- Staff training has been facilitated for CEs entitled 'Learnings from the IPA/MPA', with workshops designed to build CEs' capacity in the data capture and analysis required to apply the LPA model, enabling district and hub teams to identify areas for development and formulate hub-level actions plans.
- Staff training has been facilitated for CEs entitled 'Supporting Learning Conversations', designed to enable hub staff to identify girls' specific learning needs in numeracy and literacy and supporting staff to use the information to teach girls at the right level for the next module.
- CE training has also involved increasing CEs' understanding of peer learning approaches, focusing on how to work with high-attaining girls to assist girls with low attainment levels to improve skills in literacy and numeracy.
- From Year 4, the programme will apply eight internally developed Effective Practice, Effective Learning (EPEL) videos to demonstrate strong examples of pedagogic practice. Videos were developed by CEs and district teams to capture and share best practice within the programme.
- The programme has undertaken a capacity assessment of districts on strengths and weaknesses to facilitate targeted hub support; this will be supported by a CE needs assessment to formalise areas that CEs have identified as skills and knowledge gaps in literacy and numeracy.

Wider adaptations:

- SAGE has converted learning materials into disability friendly formats, such as audio content and large fonts.
- Ongoing and future activities to support girls with disabilities includes working with Teacher Training Colleges to assist by delivering inclusion trainings to SAGE volunteers.
- Learning materials have been translated of learning materials into local languages.
- Planned procurement of radios and development of audio files of sessions to facilitate home-based learning.
- Reinforcing activities and approaches with the teaching and learning materials that support the progress of the lower attaining girls (those in white/blue colour bands to help them progress into the blue/pink banding) and the extension of the higher attaining girls.

The above chapter is intended to provide an overview of SAGE's approach to designing and delivering an innovative model of ongoing assessment for out-of-school learners led by community volunteers. At the point of the LPA data captured and analysed within this report, there were limitations in the scale and representativeness of the learner journey data given that IPA and MPA data was only collected from two of the current six cohorts, with very small samples within some districts. The data analysed has nevertheless provided valuable results that have informed adaptations to the programme's design and pedagogic model at national, district and hub level.

As the programme moves towards its endline phase, the LPA model will continue to support Community Educators to conduct formative assessments of learners and tailor their support accordingly, while informing the programme's understanding of what works to support out-of-school learners and contributing to the wider body of evidence on NFE programming within Zimbabwe and the wider sector. SAGE has compiled tools on the accelerated learning programme and a guidance note on the Learning Progress Assessment model which can be found on the Open Learn Create site here: https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=6892

7.2 ATTENDANCE (IO1)

7.2.1 BACKGROUND:

Supporting girls and young women to attend SAGE sessions regularly is central to the programme's theory of change, which posits that girls' **learning** outcomes will be supported by regularly attending high-quality, accelerated learning sessions and increasing their self-efficacy and life skills.

Within this chapter, SAGE's approach to supporting girls to attend sessions will be outlined, including adaptations to the programme's approach to facilitate wider reach in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The report will then discuss key findings from the externally commissioned research study into attendance and retention and contextualise them using other sources of data collected as part of the midline approach. Finally, the chapter will outline key recommendations relating to girls' attendance at SAGE sessions.

As noted in Section 5.6, attendance and retention at SAGE hubs was identified in Year 3 of the programme as an area of concern that merited additional research to establish the risk factors surrounding attendance and inform adaptations to the SAGE attendance strategy.

Through programme monitoring, in Year 2 of the programme (August 2019-August 2020) SAGE identified a significant number of girls and young women who are attending fewer than half of SAGE sessions and are therefore deemed 'at risk of dropout'. Barriers to attendance were further compounded by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. Approximately 36% of enrolled girls missed all their learning sessions between November 2020 and January 2021 because of lockdown measures.

Within SAGE, dropout is recorded after the girl has given definite informed consent to be withdrawn from the programme or is deceased. As of June 2021, only 13 girls had met these criteria. The programme has purposefully created a narrow definition of dropout because of the likely erratic attendance of OOS girls and to ensure that girls understand that they can leave and re-enter the programme. Therefore, remaining girls are classified within three attendance categories of high concern, some concern and no concern. These categories were initially defined as corresponding to attendance levels of 0-49%, 50-79%, 80-100% respectively. However, with the approval of the Year 4-5 revised workplan and budget, the categories were adjusted to be 0-49%, 50-64% and 65-100%, recognising the additional challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic to regular attendance.

Expanding learning opportunities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to facilitate increased reach and support attendance:

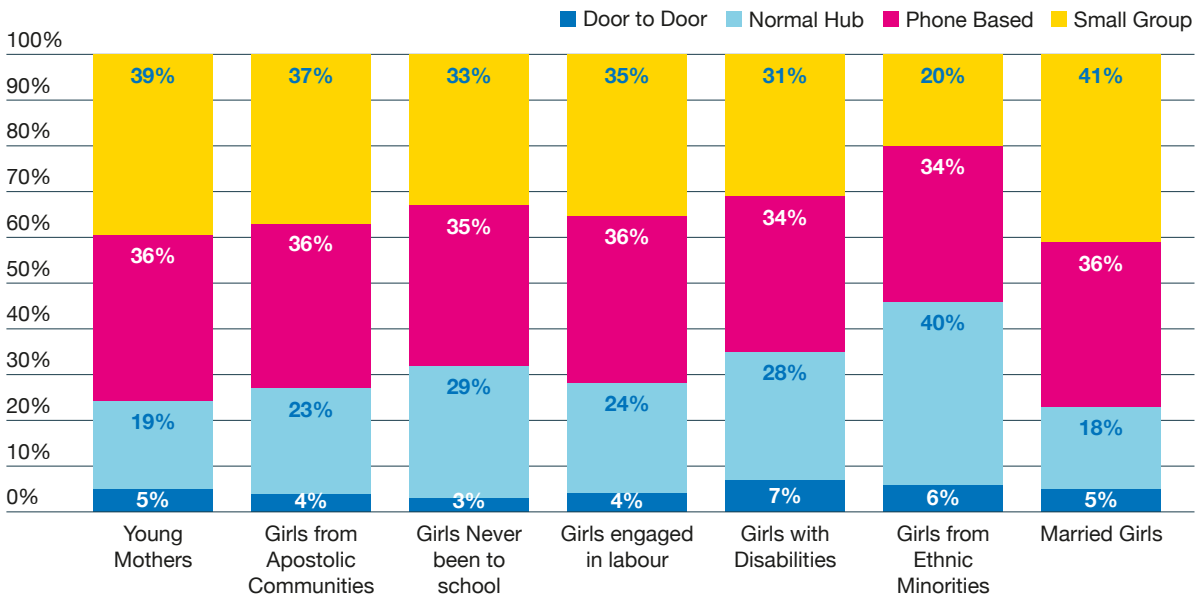
In Year 3, the SAGE programme successfully expanded beyond learning at only static hubs to a fully operationalised four-modality model which enabled girls to be reached through four learning support pathways: namely door-to-door, by telephone, community-based small groups and hub-based learning. This enabled SAGE services to increase reach and maintain contact with girls, even when regional and local lockdowns were enacted in response to fluctuating rates of COVID-19 cases.

The expanded model with multiple support pathways has been SAGE's greatest achievement in Year 3 enabling a flexible and inclusive model, in which the most marginalised girls were able to choose the most convenient pathway which fits their unique situation. Consequently, the programme completed Year 3 with an average reach of 88%3. This was a substantial increase from 23% in the first programme quarter following the onset of COVID-19 when only phone-based support was available (May-July 2020).

This model has been extremely well received, as demonstrated in attendance analysis as presented in the below Figure 39 presenting results from Year 3 which spanned August 2020 to July 2021. For example, girls with disabilities and those from ethnic minority communities were the least supported with small groups, only 31% or 20% respectively, preferring hub-based or phone-based support, with girls with disabilities most benefitting from door-to-door support (7%). However, married girls and young mothers most preferred the small-group activities with 39% and 41% of their sessions utilising this modality. Overall, face to face interaction with volunteers and learners constituted the higher percentage of reach.

Figure 39

Percentage of attendance for each support mode by sub-groups across Year 3



The girl-to-girl learning conversations conducted as part of this alternative midline have provided valuable evidence on the disruptions to girls' learning resulting from COVID-19 and girls' experiences of accessing learning through different modes.

The importance and challenges of phone-based learning are highlighted, as well as girls' responses to those challenges. In a conversation between two married girls, the participants recall that they missed initial lessons that were remotely conducted via phone because their husbands controlled the phones, but that after some time they were able to convince their husbands to allow them to use their handsets.

In another of the cameo case studies, two young mothers highlighted how COVID-19 has affected them and how they were no longer able to meet at the hub. They commented on difficulties they faced when the phone sessions were introduced, with one girl saying: *"As for me learning using phones was stressing me at some point, it wasn't fun."* However, as time went by, they grew accustomed to phone sessions despite the network and battery charging issues which meant that they missed some sessions; door-to-door input from community educators helped them catch up on their learning.

Other girls involved in the cameo case studies remarked on their appreciation for the opportunity to learn in small groups. A girl from the Apostolic community valued the potential for dialogue and interaction presented by this modality, noting that *"small group learning is more fulfilling for it allows for more interaction and contact with the community educator and peers, it also allows for a two-way communication allowing for free [open] question asking sessions and also getting feedback from the community educator."*

Through the lessons learnt exercise involving hub volunteers, the flexibility of the SAGE model was also identified as a highly effective mechanism for increasing participation and reach, as it can accommodate the competing demands on girls' time, which is highly valued by the girls as it enhances their chances of accessing educational opportunities. Key to this is consulting with the girls to understand their schedules and co-create the session timetable to maximise their chances of participating, while also generating a sense of ownership and responsibility. The involvement of learners in the designing of the session timetable is a key strategy that brings learners into decision making. It has also been noted that when learners are involved in the development of the session timetable it reduces non-attendance of sessions.

In addition, Community Educators noted during the lessons learnt process that the introduction of sporting activities also served to mobilise and engage learners. A number of hubs reported an increase in enrolment and attendance, which volunteers attributed to the appeal of sporting activities and existence of playgrounds. This has promoted participatory learning and created a platform for learners with different abilities to interact and work together as a team.

Despite the success of SAGE's approach of expanding learning modalities to support attendance and facilitate increased reach, barriers to attendance have remained a concern for the programme. Attendance and retention were therefore prioritised as the subject of a standalone research study, commissioned in May 2021 as part of the midline approach.

7.2.2 INTRODUCTION TO ATTENDANCE AND RETENTION STUDY

As outlined in Section 5.6, the study employed a mixed-methods design involving a quantitative Girls' Survey, Key Informant Interviews and FGDs. In each district, two learning hubs were purposively selected: one with the highest absenteeism rate and one with the highest retention rate in that district. In the Girls' Survey, girls were asked to self-report their attendance levels as either regular (80% or more sessions), fairly regular (between half and 80% of sessions), or irregular (fewer than half of sessions).

During the interview, the data collectors explained the definitions of these three categories to the girls and asked them to self-report their attendance to correspond to one of these three categories.

The table below indicates the respondents for both quantitative and qualitative data collection:

Table 26: Attendance study respondents

	Data collection method		
Respondent type	**FGDs**	**KIIs**	**Girls' Survey**
Girls with regular attendance (50-100%)	0	0	107
Girls with irregular attendance (0-49%)	5	0	223
Community Educators	0	28	0
CoGE facilitators	0	19	0
Head Teachers/NFE mentors	0	33	0
Parents/caregivers/partners	5	80	0
Community leaders	0	3	0
Total	**10**	**163**	**330**

Demographic characteristics:

The majority of the respondents in the survey were located in rural areas (64%, n=212) while 36% (n=119) were located in urban areas, including peri-urban areas.

The biggest proportion of the respondents (41%, n=136) were in the 10-15 years age group, while 37% (n=123) were aged 16-19 years and 22% of the respondents were 20-22[38] years old (n=72).

Table 27: Girls' Survey respondents by sub-group

Sub-group	Number of respondents to Girls' Survey
Married girls	85
Girls who had been divorced	8
Young mothers	113
Never been to school	29
Apostolic	195
Girls with disabilities	19
Ethnic minority girls (Kalanga, Tonga, San, Malawian, Zambian, Shangani)	26
Girls engaged in labour	324

38 Although the eligibility criteria for SAGE and GEC is 10-19 years this increased age covers girls who were 19 years on enrolment and reflect the challenges in age verification as reported in SAGE Inception Report in 2019.

Girls' employment status[39] was less clear, as the majority of the respondents classified themselves as unemployed (87%, n=288) but were engaged in informal labour, while 10% (32) were self-employed and only 0.7% were formally employed (n=4).

The majority of the girls surveyed (67%) had primary level education, 22% had secondary level education, 3% had ECD level education and 9% had no formal education. This indicates that a significant proportion of the girls involved in the attendance study had a relatively high level of prior education, having been to secondary school.

Table 28: Girls' Survey respondents by district

District	Number of respondents
Epworth	31
Imbizo	30
Mutare	30
Bulilima	27
Chimanimani	30
Harare South	32
Hatcliffe	30
Khami	31
Mutasa	31
Mutoko	30
Reigate	28
Total	**330**

Equal proportions of the girls surveyed – 41% – joined the SAGE programme in both 2019 and 2020, while 18% began their participation in the programme in 2021, indicating that the majority of respondents were from Cohorts 1 and 2.

The consultants aimed to survey 20 girls with irregular attendance and 10 girls with regular attendance from two hubs in each of the 11 districts (totalling 330 girls). The majority of data collection took place via phone due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, as outlined in Section 5.6.

39 The term employment was understood to mean formal employment waged employment. Self-employment was perceived as being engaged in some business that brings regular income to the girls.

7.2.3 FINDINGS

The study sought to assess risk factors that lead to irregular attendance of the SAGE sessions by the targeted girls across all the eleven districts. The assessment focused on individual, family-related, academic and hub-related factors that influence irregular attendance of the girls. In this section we will outline the key findings from the attendance study, integrating qualitative data from other sources including the MSC stories and cameo case studies.

Barriers to attendance:

Lack of time resulting from household responsibilities was the most common reason girls gave for missing both Accelerated Teaching and Learning (ATL) and CoGE sessions, cited by 26% and 22% of girls respectively. The highest proportion of girls who cited this barrier were in the 20-22 age group, reflecting the likelihood of older girls bearing greater domestic responsibilities.

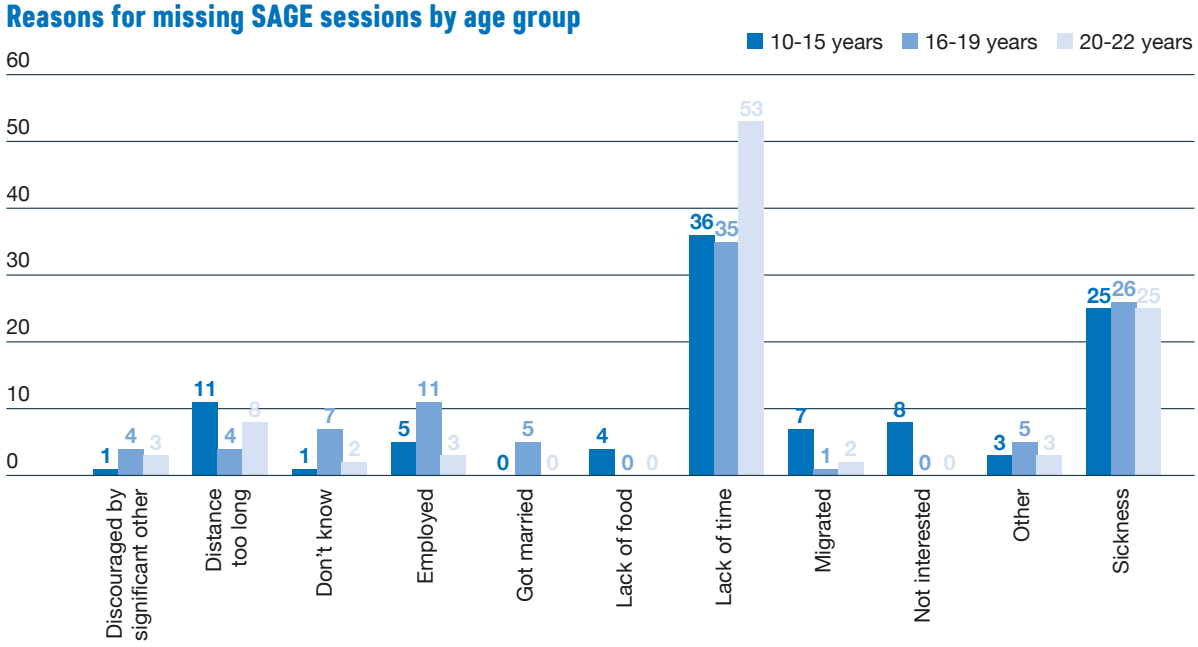
This theme also emerged through the girl-to-girl conversations. In a conversation between two young mothers, the girls reflected on the challenges of balancing their domestic responsibilities and the gendered expectations placed on them with their efforts to attend SAGE sessions. They discussed how they must balance their household chores and childcare alongside their learning. One girl noted that *"sometimes I face challenges with doing SAGE work as I have a school going child. I have to wake up… do everything for him, bath, take him to school… thereafter I go for my SAGE sessions".*

Her interlocutor agreed that she has similar issues arising from the role she is expected to fulfil as a wife and mother:

"When I get up, I take my child to school. To make matters worse I am pregnant so from taking the child to school I go back home as my husband expects me to do all chores before I go for my sessions. By the time I get to the hub it's late and there is only 20 minutes left to end of the session." These testimonies illustrate the gendered barriers faced by girls participating in SAGE, particularly older girls and young mothers.

Figure 40

Reasons for missing SAGE sessions by age group



The second most common reason given for missing SAGE sessions was **sickness,** which was defined as including menstruation and the sickness of their children. 16% of girls cited this as a reason for missing ATL sessions and 12% for missing CoGE sessions. Girls listed a lack of sanitary items and pain relief as barriers to attending SAGE sessions during their periods.

Long distances to the hubs and related security risks were also cited as reasons for missing sessions. As one girl who did not regularly attend SAGE sessions commented: *"If I do not find someone to accompany me, I will not go because of the long distances we have to travel, sometimes through bushes, which makes it a security risk when you are travelling alone. So if you do not have someone to accompany you, you will end up missing lessons".*

In rural districts such as Bulilima, long distances to the hubs and a lack of refreshments were cited as key reasons for missing sessions. However, the programme has sought to address this issue through the introduction of satellite hubs, which hub volunteers identified as an effective strategy during the lessons learnt process for improving enrolment and attendance. Distance to the hubs was highlighted as a major barrier to attendance at baseline, cited by 75% of learners. In response to the challenge, the programme started to establish satellite hubs to ensure learning services are easily accessible to learners. 15 satellite hubs were established in Year 3 and 12 are planned for Year 4 in rural communities. Following the introduction of satellite hubs, enrolment figures increased from 9,162 to 10,885 in the space of 6 months and in the context of strict lockdown restrictions.

Engagement in labour such as artisanal mining was a barrier to frequent attendance in some rural and peri-urban districts. In hubs such as Mthombothemba in the peri-urban Imbizo district, which had the highest rate of self-reported infrequent attendance, stakeholders noted that many girls were engaged in labour in the mines or involved in transactional relationships with miners.

Attendance was lower amongst girls who were not aware of the programme's objectives, suggesting that an understanding of the programme was a motivating factor for girls to attend sessions. 75% of the girls surveyed said they were aware of the programme's objectives while 25% said they were not, and 92% of those who did not know about the programme's objectives were girls with irregular attendance.

Some girls faced a backlash from husbands and communities deriving from patriarchal gender norms, particularly in rural areas.

The study found that, particularly in rural areas, married women and young mothers faced resistance from their husbands and families for a variety of reasons including the need to focus on household chores and care responsibilities, the fear of stigma related to having an 'uneducated' wife, the refusal by husbands who fear that the women might challenge their power after being more enlightened and concerns that the young women might engage in extra-marital affairs. Some girls also mentioned that they faced the risk of intimate partner violence if their husbands opposed their participation in SAGE.

"Some of us men are not comfortable to let our wives go and attend basic education sessions. One of the reasons is that when we married our wives, we lied to the communities that we married educated women, form six level. Now if the same community sees the same wife going for basic and elementary education, they start laughing at you saying you lied to us. So it becomes an embarrassment and some men will end up telling their wives to just stay at home. Some are also afraid that the women, when they learn about human rights, they will come back and challenge them and of course some are afraid that their wives will have the opportunity to engage in extramarital affairs during the SAGE lessons." (Community leader, Mutare Rural)

In rural hubs, some of the young married girls in polygamous families were prevented from attending the SAGE sessions by the older wives, ostensibly out of jealousy.

"Some of us are in polygamous families and we are the younger wives. When we came for the COGE lessons, we were taught how to become smart, to maintain personal hygiene and to look presentable. When that happens, the husband will start to give more attention to the smarter young wife and this does not go down well with the senior wives. They will then go and complain to the husband saying 'Why are you favouring her? She is doing nothing here except spending time cleaning herself and going those useless lessons. If you are not careful, you will lose her very soon to younger men'. And once that happens the husband will withdraw you from the lessons." (Married girl, FGD, Mutoko)

Lack of support from community and religious leaders affected attendance at SAGE sessions.

This relationship between knowledge of the programme and attendance was also influenced by the levels of support within a girl's community about the aims of SAGE. Qualitative evidence indicated that attendance was higher in communities with greater awareness and support for the programme's objectives, where girls were encouraged to attend sessions by their communities.

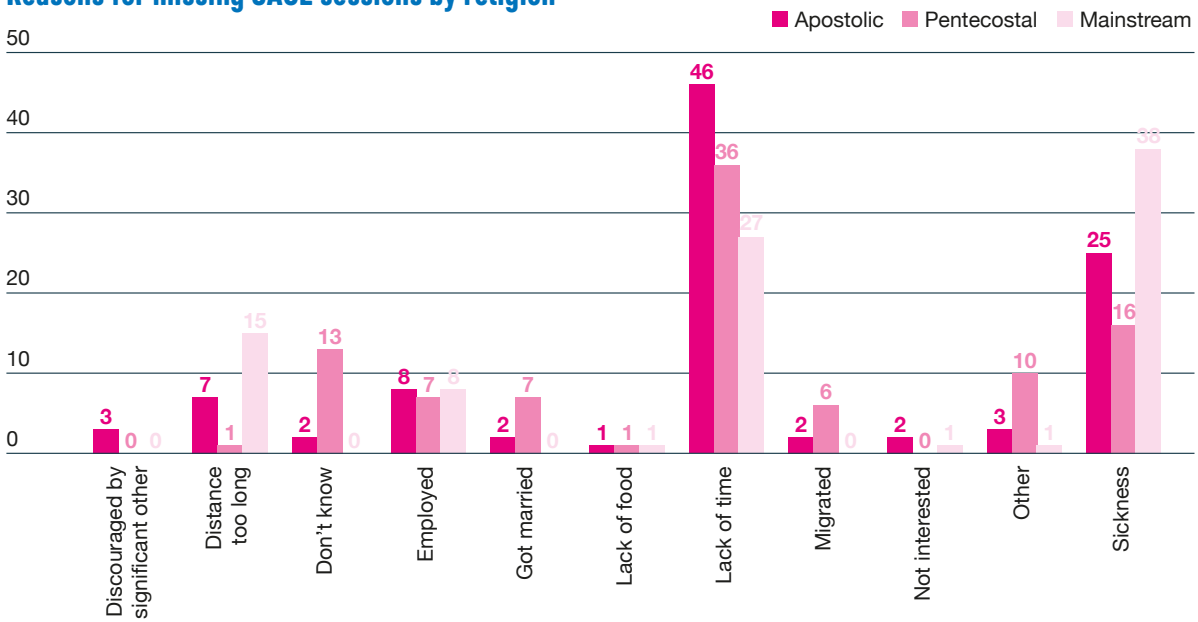
Attendance was also found to be affected by religious activities in some of the districts. This is further complicated by the fact that some churches are reluctant to allow girls to attend SAGE sessions arguing that they should concentrate on their gender roles and responsibilities within their families. 60% of girls from the Apostolic community, which traditionally places less value on girls' education, reported that they attended sessions regularly, compared to 75% of girls from mainstream churches such as Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist denominations. In Manicaland Province, there were concerns from communities and girls that participated in FGDs that Apostolic churches are also reluctant to have girls attend sessions on a regular basis for fear that they might be influenced by the education they acquire to abandon or rebel against their religion.

As noted by a community educator in Mutare: *"I have been to two different hubs in different communities. In one of the sub-hubs, there are a lot of Mapostori (Apostolic members) who really do not value education. They do not want their girls to be educated because they will 'open their eyes' and hence there is general negativity towards girl education. In that community the attendance by girls has always been low despite several follow-up attempts. The reason being that the girls are often mocked and discouraged by their families from attending the SAGE lessons. In the other hub, attendance is high because the community leaders really appreciate the programme and they encourage the girls to go for the SAGE lessons. The girls come for the lessons without any fear of being ridiculed by community members and you see that attendance is fairly high in this hub. So community support and attitude is a key factor in influencing attendance."*

A higher proportion of girls from the Apostolic community cited a lack of time as a barrier to attending SAGE sessions than from other religious groups, which could relate to the volume of religious activity (with some activities conducted mid-week over several days) as well as the domestic burden faced by girls from this community due to restrictive gender norms.

Figure 41

Reasons for missing SAGE sessions by religion



There were also disparities in self-reported attendance between different ethnic groups which were attributed to traditional practices. The proportion of girls that reported frequently attending ATL sessions was highest among the Ndebele (63%) and the Shona (61%) groups but was significantly lower among ethnic minorities such as Kalanga (20%), and Tonga (25%). Certain ethnic minority groups in Zimbabwe have historically faced prejudice and discrimination which may affect their ability to participate in social and educational activities. Key informants consulted for the externally commissioned research study posited that reasons for lower attendance amongst girls from these groups may include the fact that certain ethnic minorities lived in very remote areas and practised traditional lifestyles.

Key informants also asserted that a culture of dependency had grown amongst some ethnic groups due to previous NGO interventions and that support for SAGE had diminished when it became clear that there would be no material incentives for participating in the programme. These are the views of certain individuals consulted for the research study and do not represent the position of Plan International. The SAGE programme is interested in learning more about the experiences of ethnic minority girls through ongoing monitoring and as part of the endline.

Disability is a barrier to frequent attendance. A lower proportion of girls with disabilities (53%) reported attending SAGE sessions regularly, compared to 60% of other girls. Similarly, 79% of girls with disabilities reported that they had missed at least one ATL sessions compared to 63% of girls without disabilities. This indicates that learners with disability face numerous barriers in accessing learning facilities and lessons. Unlike other sub-groups, sickness rather than time poverty was the most common reason girls with disabilities cited for missing sessions. Reasons included challenges travelling to and from hubs, a lack of assistive devices and the need to rely on external support to attend, and a lack of capacity amongst some CEs to support girls with disabilities. The SAGE programme has however provided training to CEs on inclusive education including the use of sign language and braille and collaborated with specialist Teacher Training Colleges in discussions on supporting learners with disabilities.

Qualitative evidence indicates that there was a preference for practical skills training, especially amongst older learners. Older and more advanced learners also reported frustrations over the learning level of the curriculum and the challenges of mixed sessions.

Amongst some older girls, married girls and young mothers, there was a perception that it was damaging to their social status to be seen attending ATL sessions due to the nature of the curriculum.

For example, one girl commented: *"The lessons become a waste of time for those that will have reached a higher level of education, and besides people will laugh at us when they see mothers doing Grade 1 stuff that their children are supposed to do."*

A relatively high proportion (22%) of the respondents to the girl's survey for the attendance study had been to secondary school and therefore had experienced a higher level of schooling than SAGE's eligibility criteria which focuses on girls performing below Grade 5 proficiency level. There are a small number of girls in Cohort 1 who were enrolled in 2019 utilising a different tool (the WRAT test) which was decided to be less rigorous for out-of-school girls and thus joined SAGE with higher learning levels and more exposure to school than the girls intended to be targeted by SAGE. Since the enrolment of Cohort 1, SAGE modified its screening tool to ensure girls adequately met it eligibility criteria, which ensures now that only girls who have never been to school or who have dropped out before reaching Grade 5 proficiency in both literacy and numeracy can be enrolled. Furthermore, the screening tool also now enables girls to join SAGE at different learning levels based on their prior experience and learning levels. With these cumulative factors, it could contribute to why some girls may find certain areas of the SAGE learning programme easier, such as sub-tasks or subjects that they are more competent in and Module 1 which focuses on early foundational skills. This is corroborated by programme staff feedback, who report that girls do find Module 2a and 2b harder and need substantial time to proceed through all modules.

Nevertheless, experiences of being stigmatised or ridiculed for being too old to start learning emerge in the qualitative data. In a girl-to-girl conversation between two married girls they discussed how, at first, their families, and others, were not receptive to them joining the SAGE programme:

"At first some people used to laugh at us when they saw us going to SAGE sessions [laughs]. Even my husband used to say, 'You want to start learning at such a grown age?'. Even my child would say 'hee-hee mother you are going to school like me.'"

There was also a perception that SAGE's practical skills training component (ISOP) was more valuable to their future lives than ATL sessions, and some girls expressed a frustration that it had not yet started. A common perception among girls who reported attending ATL sessions irregularly was that the content was too theoretical and that practical skills would deliver more tangible benefits.

Girls commented that the frequency of ATL session at twice per week was too high and that more emphasis should be placed on practical skills training provided by ISOP and COGE.

"Some of us have attained Grade 7 and some even have gone up to Form 1, so to come here and be taught a e i o u is not useful to us. People end up laughing at us saying we are wasting time. What is more important to us is skills training, which is taking long to come." (FGD participant, Mutare)

This feeling from some girls that they were too advanced for the ATL programme and that livelihoods and life skills would be of more value to them was also noted by some SAGE volunteers, for example this CoGE facilitator from Khami:

"The girls, particularly those that have attained Grade 7 level, are more interested in the ISOP and COGE sessions, which are more practical and contribute to awareness of rights, SRHR issues and household income. However, there has been some frustration because the ISOP lessons have taken a bit long to come, so most of the time the girls are attending ATL lessons. You can only graduate to ISOP once you have attended a certain proportion of the ATL lessons." (COGE Facilitator, Khami)

Another facilitator noted that older girls were more likely to be married or have greater domestic responsibilities, and therefore that their priorities for learning would be different from those of younger girls:

"For the older age group, some are married and some have children and their main concern is to get involved in income generating activities to be able to fend for their families. They are thus interested in life skills training compared to the younger generation who are mainly interested in being able to read and write and have hope of continuing with formal education in the long term." (COGE Facilitator, Epworth)

The proportion of girls who reported that they attended CoGE sessions infrequently was highest amongst 10-15 year olds (although still fairly low at 8%) followed by girls aged 16 -19 (6%) and 20-22 years (4%), supporting the notion that girls are increasingly motivated to attend these sessions as they get older and face increased domestic responsibilities.

As girls aged, they were more likely to think that the SAGE programme resonated with their wider aspirations. 89% of girls aged 20-22 felt that the programme objectives aligned with their aspirations, dropping to 76% of girls aged 16-19 years and 63% of girls aged 10-15 years. While there was no clear explanation for this, it could be linked to the belief that SAGE would support them in their livelihoods, which is a higher priority for older girls due to their increased responsibilities and desire to support their families. In addition, the economic difficulties caused by COVID-19 have resulted in a more urgent need for skills development and income-generating opportunities. However, in some districts, there was a delay in securing equipment and materials for practical training which affected the rollout of the ISOP component and resulted in irregular attendance to ISOP sessions.

Some girls reported they have difficulties in grasping what is taught at the hubs, which disincentivised them from attending and completing assignments. Girls also highlighted the lack of textbooks at home as a challenge which could affect their motivation to learn. Another concern raised by girls was that mixing learners of different abilities in the same sessions was frustrating for more advanced learners. There were some reports that mixing learners of different ages in the same session could lead to tensions between older and younger girls.

Communication challenges presented barriers to some girls attending SAGE. Through qualitative data it emerged that a lack of access to phones could result in girls missing out on information about the timing of sessions. As part of the programme's COVID-19 response, SAGE has expanded its learning modalities to include the delivery of sessions by phone, but girls without access to their own phones commented that they were unable to benefit from this option. The challenges of accessing learning opportunities via phone are also highlighted in the girl-to-girl learning conversations. In one of the cameo case studies featuring two young mothers, the girls recall that they missed initial lessons that were remotely conducted over the phone, but that later they were able to convince their husbands to allow them to use their handsets. Another of the cameo case studies reveals that door-to-door input from Community Educators helped the girls to catch up on their learning.

Through the study, some girls reported alleged instances of bullying at the hubs as well as safeguarding concerns involving hub volunteers. Of the girls surveyed, 1.5% cited bullying and abuse as a reason for missing learning sessions. Some younger learners complained that they were subjected to hostile or violent behaviour from older learners. There were also a small number of reports of hub volunteers beating learners in some cases.

All safeguarding concerns that surfaced during this research study have been reported and followed up according to Plan International's Global Safeguarding Children and Young People policy and reported to the donor (the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office) as per the agreed protocol. At the time of this report being drafted, the investigation of these cases and selection of relevant recommendations were still ongoing and being managed within Plan UK, Zimbabwe and global safeguarding teams. Therefore, recommendations presented in this report in relation to these acts represent only initial recommendations based on programme staff's limited information and do not represent the full and thorough follow-up that will occur by Plan International.

Community support for SAGE is critical in driving attendance.

An analysis of the motivational factors by hub category (those with higher and lower attendance) established that the motivational factors were similar across these hub categories. The chief determinant of attendance across hubs was the level of community support for the SAGE programmes. In hubs with a higher level of community support for the SAGE programme, regular attendance was relatively higher compared to those hubs with low levels of community buy-in.

Amongst girls who reported regular attendance rates, the common factor mentioned across the hubs was strong community support based on appreciation of the benefits that the SAGE programme would bring to the girls. Where there was community buy-in, an enabling environment was created to support the girls' attendance of the sessions.

Encouragement from husbands played a role in promoting attendance at SAGE sessions.

During FGDs, it emerged that in urban areas married girls with children were more motivated to attend both the ATL and COGE sessions because of the hope on the part of their husbands that their participation in SAGE would enable them to generate income for their household in an economically challenging context. One girl commented on the link between her attendance at SAGE, economic pressures affecting her community, and the appeal of income-generating activities both for married girls and their husbands:

"At this hub married women and young mothers are encouraged to attend because of the responsibilities that we carry. Our husbands have realised that the burden of looking after the family is becoming heavy for them because of the prevailing economic challenges and therefore they appreciate any efforts by their wives to bring in additional income into the household. That is why those that are married actually get encouraged by their husbands to attend because they hope that the training that they will get (from COGE and ISOP) will help us to run income generating projects that will generate income for the household. Girls with less responsibilities and burden, might not see the need for regular attendance." (FGD participant, Harare South)

Similar testimonies emerged in the MSC stories in which girls reported that they were encouraged to attend SAGE by their husbands due to the perceived benefits that the skills they gained would bring to their households.

Qualitative evidence also indicated a gradual shift in attitudes amongst girls' husbands over the course of their participation in SAGE. In a cameo case study featuring two married girls, the girls recognised that, as time has progressed, their families', and others', opinions have changed. One girl illustrates this change by describing what she has noticed about her husband's attitude and the effect this has had on her ability to study:

"I realised on the first days when I started my SAGE sessions he wasn't happy. He would say 'oh you are now going to your school' but now he is realising I deserve respect here and there. When the educator calls me for learning I'm now able to leave serving him food and I go straight into my books."

Community volunteers were the most common entry point for girls joining SAGE. 30% of girls who participated in the study were introduced to the programme by community volunteers, although peers were also a common channel, cited by 26%.

Within the study, girls were asked what their main motivation was for joining SAGE. As per the graph below, the most cited reason was the desire to learn to read and write (61%), followed by the prospect of employment opportunities (30%). Other motivating factors mentioned included not wanting to be left behind in terms of development, the need to acquire life skills, being able to help children with homework, meeting with peers to share ideas for personal development, socialising with peers through playing sports and being empowered through gaining knowledge about their rights as girls and young women.

Figure 42: Motivational factors in attending SAGE sessions

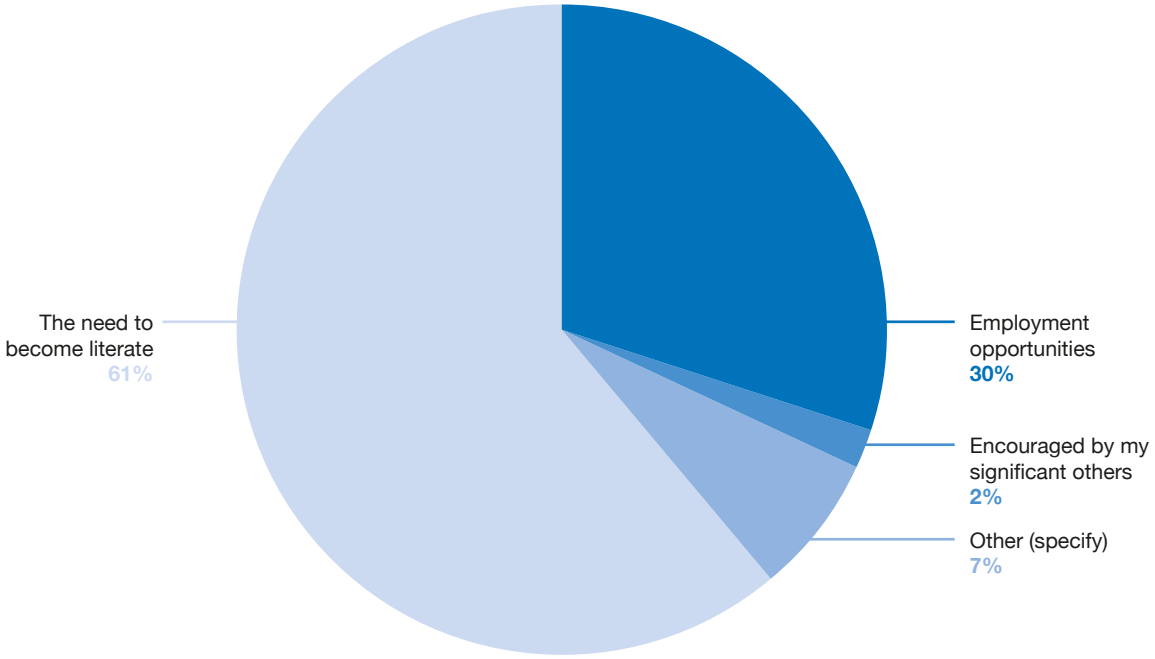


Table 29: Motivational factors by age group

Motivational Factor	10-15 years	16-19 years	20-22 years
Need to become literate	77%	50%	48%
Employment opportunities	15%	44%	32%
Encouraged by significant others	2%	2%	4%
Other reasons	5%	3%	15%

While the desire to become literate was the chief motivation across all three age groups, it is notable that the prospect of employment opportunities was a bigger pull factor for older girls. (Of the 15% (n=11) girls aged 20-22 who answered 'other', the majority (n=6) cited their desire to learn practical and life skills.)

Among young mothers, the need for employment opportunities and to become literate received equal weighting, while for girls who had never married, the need to become literate was the main motivation factor cited by the majority (70%) while the need for employment was cited by 20% of the respondents. For girls who were married, however, employment opportunities were the main motivational factor (cited by 54%) compared to the need to become literate (38%), indicating that generating income for their household is a priority for this group.

Across all ethnic groups, the majority of girls cited the need to become literate as the main motivational factor. Among learners with disability, 79% cited the desire to become literate as the main motivating factor for attending SAGE sessions while 11% prioritised employment opportunities.

Being literate is highly valued in Zimbabwean society and it influences the respect afforded to individuals in their communities, as well as to open up opportunities for their employment and self-employment. These motivational factors imply that the expectations of the girls are anchored around tangible improvements in opportunities for themselves and their families as well as in social status.

The opportunity afforded by participation in SAGE to develop peer networks and build social skills is a highly motivational factor for girls and young women and one from which they derive confidence. One girl involved in the study noted: *"When I fell sick, my hub classmates and teacher were coming regularly to see me. It helped me a lot as I felt strong after the sickness because of the care and love they showed me"*.

This benefit of attending SAGE sessions also emerged in the MSC stories and cameo case studies, with one young mother commenting that *"before I used to be a loner but through the programme now I have friends".* In a girl-to-girl conversation between two young mothers, the girls hinted that they have missed coming together for face-to-face sessions as a result of the lockdown restrictions. One of the girls commented that *"You have been out of sight and too silent for too long" while the other expressed gratitude "that we are able to meet like this…thanks to SAGE".*

Effectiveness of follow-up measures: The attendance study asked learners if they were aware of the current measures put in place to support all SAGE girls to attend learning sessions. The majority of the respondents (61%) said they were not aware of such measures, while only 39% were aware. Of those respondents that were aware, the majority (52%) believed that the measures taken were effective, while 45% respondents were of the opinion, that follow-up measures were fairly effective. However, when asked whether anyone follows up with them if they do not attend a session, 62% replied that they did. This may indicate a need for greater clarity over what constitutes support for attendance, as most girls were not aware of any dedicated strategies supporting attendance, yet the majority also said that follow-ups took place if they did not attend.

One girl reported: *"The follow up they do is good because when you miss lessons they [hub volunteers] come home and they bring notes that others would have done so that no one is left behind."*

Limited access to phones for both volunteers and girls, challenges with transport and long distances and lack of support from parents/ communities were cited as issues affecting the effectiveness of the follow-up process.

In conclusion, **household responsibilities and domestic pressures are the biggest barrier to attendance, particularly for older girls.** Some older girls or young mothers also believe that they will be stigmatised as a result of attendance at ATL sessions due to their age and their perceptions of the nature of the curriculum.

Support from communities and partners is a critical determinant in driving or hindering attendance. In communities with high levels of community support for SAGE, girls' self-reported attendance was in higher than those without. Some girls reported that their husbands encouraged them to attend, often because of the perceived benefits that participation in SAGE would bring to the household's income-generating potential, but there were also reports of girls facing resistance from their husbands which was a barrier to attendance.

Girls from certain religious and ethnic groups, as well as girls engaged in labour and girls with disabilities face specific barriers to attending SAGE sessions. Distances to the hubs also pose a challenge, although the programme has sought to address this through expanding the modalities through which sessions are delivered.

There is a preference for practical skills training over ATL sessions due to the perception that it is more directly linked to income-generating opportunities. The prospect of participation in ISOP is a motivating factor for attendance at ATL and CoGE sessions, as it is conditional upon it, but there have been frustrations at the speed of the rollout of ISOP and delays in acquiring materials.

7.2.4 EXPLANATION OF HOW SAGE IS ADAPTING APPROACH TO ATTENDANCE

Attendance data has been illuminating in presenting unexpected trends of preference for modalities even when direct contact activities were resumed. For example, between August to October 2021, the SAGE programme reached 9,422 girls, which is 87% of its enrolled cohort, with ATL and COGE sessions delivered using SAGE's full range of support modes. This led to 67% of girls attending a small group session; 54% of girls attending phone-based sessions; 28% of girls attending a session in a hub and 16% of girls received door-to-door support. At sub-group level analysis, all subgroups were reached mainly through small groups except for girls with disabilities, of whom 74% who were reached through phone-based support. Surprisingly, fewer girls were reached through hub support when compared to small groups and phone-based despite lockdown restrictions being lifted in this period. Girls' appreciation for different modes of learning emerges through the girl-to-girl conversations. In a conversation between two Apostolic girls, one comments on the benefits of small group sessions for supporting learning: *"small group learning is more fulfilling for it allows more interaction and contact with the community educator and peers, it also allows for a two-way communication allowing for free question asking sessions and also getting feedback from the community educator."*

The trend could suggest the effectiveness of small group and phone-based learning in providing a more convenient learning modality for girls. Therefore, all four learning pathways have been maintained even when hubs can reopen, which differs to the planning scenario in the MTRP.

In terms of access to learning, the programme has adapted to girls' feedback on distance and the varying trends of attendance in rural and urban areas. As part of its annual strategic review and to ensure value for money, in Year 4, the SAGE consortium has decided to focus future resources in rural areas whilst still maintaining the existing 31 urban hubs. Therefore, to maximise the potential in rural communities for further enrolments, the programme will be increasing support to rural communities by restructuring its team of programme staff and volunteers, to ensure a more effective distribution of resources.

A further 12 satellite hubs will be established in rural communities, in addition to the 15 hubs created in Year 3. Satellite hubs are learning spaces with basic infrastructure which are established with the collaboration of the local community and to which volunteers travel out to from their static hub and which girls gather to receive their sessions. By creating a network of learning spaces this reduces the distance to travel to learn.

Recognising attendance gaps have persisted for girls without or with limited access to phones or reliable connection, in Year 4, the programme will be strengthening home learning through the provision of radios to support girls and the provision of materials to facilitate home-based learning and messages to parents and caregivers. These adaptations will ensure learners continue to access learning during strict lockdown periods, particularly those learners with limited access to phones or have network challenges. Dissemination of messages on home learning will be done through bulk SMS's and via support from established SAGE structures such as the Hub Development Committees (HDCs) and will aim to engage parents and caregivers on the need for supporting learners at home. This model will also be prioritised for communities located along border lines with South Africa and Botswana. Male engagement through men's groups will be a cornerstone of this approach, by mobilising husbands to support their wives to continue accessing learning.

Trends in attendance have also illustrated the reality of marginalised girls' attendance patterns and erratic behaviour. This prompted the programme to make two changes in Year 3. Firstly, the target for regular attendance was shifted to 65% rather than 80% of sessions to better reflect girls' attendance patterns and contextual realities, with the programme confident that girls will still achieve learning progress with this lowered exposure. Secondly, SAGE has identified three levels of exposure for beneficiaries, with 10% of girls expected to enrol but not attend sessions but benefit from wider community-based interventions; 65% of girls to regularly attend and 25% to irregularly attend. Programme monitoring during Year 4 will seek to establish how closely these categories align to girls' actual attendance patterns and tailor follow-up activities accordingly.

7.3 SELF-EFFICACY AND LIFE SKILLS (IO2)

7.3.1 INTRODUCTION TO CHAMPIONS OF GIRLS EDUCATION (COGE) COMPONENT

The SAGE Theory of Change proposes that girls' acquisition of life skills and improved self-efficacy and confidence will also in turn contribute to and support their learning. The SAGE programme aims for this by ensuring all learners are concurrently attending Plan International's flagship life skills programme entitled 'Champions of Change' or as known in Zimbabwe, 'Champions of Girls' Education' (CoGE).

CoGE aims to foster positive gender attitudes among adolescents and encourage healthier relationships and practices. The CoGE curriculum delivered by volunteer CoGE facilitators in a two-hour weekly session supports girls to explore key issues, including self-esteem, sexual reproductive and health rights (SRHR), Gender-Based Violence (GBV), early marriage and economic empowerment. CoGE facilitators have been supported through a programme of initial and refresher trainings held in person or remotely dependent on the status of lockdown restrictions. The consortium with the support of representatives from ministries including the Ministry of Women's Affairs provides ongoing monitoring and technical support.

Since the baseline evaluation was conducted, the CoGE programme was successfully established, with sessions delivered to over 8,600 girls.[40] Recognising the importance of engaging girls' male peers and partners in promoting gender equality, a parallel curriculum for boys fosters critical reflection on harmful masculinities and supports boys to become allies, working with girls toward greater equality in their communities. At the time of the midline reporting, 1,163 boys were attending sessions.

In addition to these sessions in single-sex safe spaces, the Champions of Change model also involves facilitation of coeducational spaces, creating opportunities for boys and girls to dialogue issues around gender and girls' rights, self-esteem, healthy relationships and build mutual understanding.

These four sessions are an integral part of the CoGE curriculum and occur at specific point in line with the completion of accompanying modules. The first occurrence of these co-educational spaces was in 2019 when the first cohort of boys and girls had completed their Modules 1 and 2[41].

With the onset of COVID-19, activities were pivoted to be delivered through the four learning pathways. CoGE module content was adapted into bite-size sessions which girls could do remotely by phone with a volunteer. Modified sessions included an overview of the content, a vignette story to illustrate the issue, and follow up questions to check understanding and discuss values. Furthermore, the programme invested in external technical support to strengthen volunteers' capacity to integrate Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) into CoGE sessions to aid girls and boys to develop positive coping mechanisms.

7.3.2 FINDINGS

Qualitative evidence from interviews with girls who participate in both ATL and CoGE sessions indicates that they have contributed strongly to improvements in girls' self-efficacy, aspirations and relationships with others.

Participation in SAGE strengthens girls' self-efficacy and capability to aspire.

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their own capabilities, particularly their abilities to face challenges ahead and complete tasks successfully.[42]

A key theme emerging from the Most Significant Change stories collected as part of the midline is that girls can envisage realising their aspirations because of the skills they have gained through participation in SAGE. A girl who has never been to school says that learning to read and write has enabled her to believe in her ability to realise her dream of becoming a doctor, and therefore that she can *"foresee a bright future for herself".*

The improvement in girls' self-efficacy is linked to the development of their identities as learners. Across the cameo case studies, there is a common theme of the girls realising that they can learn; gaining confidence that they can learn; and often describing a journey, where they have had to overcome initial ridicule or their own lack of belief on their way to becoming and being a learner.

40 Latest attendance figures from Q13 (August – October 2021) record 8,682 girls attending CoGE. This is lower than wider attendance figures reported for ATL (9,422 girls in the same period). This difference is largely due to ATL sessions being held twice a week, rather CoGE sessions are only once a week so ATL session are able to reach more girls due to the higher number of sessions per week compared to CoGE).

41 First two modules for girls focus on 'Being Assertive' and 'Being Gender Aware'. For boys, their first two modules focus on 'Showing Solidarity' and 'Being a Young Man'.

42 Akhtar, M. (2008). What is self-efficacy? Bandura's 4 sources of efficacy beliefs. Positive Psychology. http://positivepsychology.org.uk/self-efficacy-definition-bandura-meaning/

For example, in a conversation between two married girls, it emerges that the two participants did not finish their schooling and believed that education was over for them. They did not realise that they would get another chance for an education when they left school. One of the girls recounted how she had *"given up on anything to do with schooling, I had told myself it's over".* Through participation in SAGE sessions, however, they revealed that they have overcome initial doubts in their own abilities and have acquired skills in literacy and numeracy which they believe will support them to achieve in the future.

Girls are also able to track the evolution of their identities as learners. There is a clear recognition by the girls of their own progress, successes and areas of weakness; girls are aware of where they are in their learning, where they are going next and how to get there. In one of the case studies, for example, a girl reflected: *"I have gained confidence in reading, writing and mathematical operations, though I still need to improve on fractions".* The cameo case studies generate valuable insights into how girls perceive their progression as learners and indicate that girls are astute and self-aware in their assessments of their own development. Language used by the participants suggests that girls often view their learning as a journey and are able to track their progress over time.

For example, in a conversation between two young mothers, one of the girls traced her understanding of fractions, saying: "*When we started, I was blank on the topic of fractions, but now I understand better."* The other girl commented that she is now able to read some English sentences. Though they can read words, understanding their meaning is still a challenge. However, they are thankful for the translation into the local language which makes learning better for them: *"All thanks to the translated stories."* One girl gave a specific example of how the translations have supported her understanding: *"I don't think we would be knowing this much if this SAGE project had not come to our place."*

A theme that emerges from the qualitative data is that becoming a learner and the confidence associated with developing this identity has led to a shift in girls' belief in their ability to deal with whatever they may face in life. As one married girl said:

"Now I can face my challenges differently. I'm able to deal with these challenges differently even if I'm married and a mother at a young age."

This conviction in their ability to succeed in the future is echoed in the MSC stories. A girl from an ethnic minority, who dropped out of school at Grade 1, has gained confidence through the programme to know that she *"will not struggle with reading and writing"* should she have the chance to return to formal school. A young mother, who has also never been to school, said that because of her participation in the programme she feels confident that she will be able to complete a dressmaking course, and subsequently build a career that will enable her to provide for her family.

These testimonies reflect the transformative effect that the skills built through participation in SAGE can have on girls' perceptions of their own capabilities to achieve aspirations that were previously out of reach, and to handle whatever may lie ahead. A girl with a disability who has never been to school urges other girls to join SAGE *"because it gives another chance to people whose hope for a better future would have been lost".* Participation in SAGE has facilitated an expansion of girls' horizons, a shift in their perceptions of their own capacity and an ability to envisage a *"bright future"* which girls now have the confidence to achieve.

Girls value the acquisition of practical skills which is linked to their sense of agency.

Also emerging from the Most Significant Change stories and cameo case studies is a strong emphasis on the practical application of skills acquired through SAGE, which girls link to their sense of agency over their own lives. This is a key element of Plan's gender transformative approach, which involves increasing the agency of girls, young women and marginalised groups, and improving both the daily conditions faced by girls, young women and marginalised groups and their position within society in a sustainable manner. The appeal of learning skills that could be practically applied to support different aspects of their lives also emerged in the attendance research study, as discussed in Section 7.2.

Across the different (and intersecting) sub-groups represented in the qualitative data, the skills gained through participation in SAGE have both an intrinsic and extrinsic value; being able to read and write, for example, is considered important but is also valuable because it supports the girls with other aspects of their lives.

For example, a girl with a disability who dropped out of school and is a young mother reported that through SAGE she has *"developed an interest in reading"* in and of itself, but that this skill has also supported her as a mother as she can now help her child with their homework with confidence. The way in which academic skills acquired through SAGE underpin broader life skills is echoed elsewhere. A girl who is married and had dropped out of school similarly commented on how the improvements in literacy and numeracy skills means that she can help her children with their homework and use her phone to communicate.

Girls focus on how they can use their knowledge and skills to support their livelihoods and in their future careers. Numeracy skills, in particular, are highly valued for their perceived benefits in enabling girls to achieve financial security. A recurring theme across the cases is how particular skills are related to business and the ability to generate income. For example, a young mother reflected that her learning in numeracy has enabled her to operate her vegetable vending business effectively, drawing on the addition and subtraction skills she had acquired. Words such as 'investment' and 'profit' are used in meaningful ways.

In one of the cameo case studies, the girls express confidence that they will start their own businesses and link this to the numeracy skills they have gained. One girl asserted:

"I will use numeracy skills that I get on SAGE especially calculations when I start my own business to check how much I have, money that I will use to pay my helpers, rent payments and my remaining profits."

Similarly, a girl who is engaged in casual labour to provide for her child and lives alone at a squatter camp commented that numeracy is "the most important thing I have gained" because it enables her to do calculations which will support her in her work. Girls also welcome the opportunity to learn practical skills such as dressmaking which they feel will empower them economically and give them greater agency over their futures.

Learning about rights is critical to building girls' agency.

Agency is a key element of Plan's gender transformative approach and the GEC's GESI transformative approach. To improve girls' agency, the programme is building their knowledge, confidence and critical consciousness and their ability to speak out about issues; to identify risks and self-protect; and to engage in mobilising and influencing others.

To build girls' agency the programme has explored opportunities for SAGE girls to participate at policy-influencing platforms to articulate their experience of systemic barriers which impede their access to learning, particularly in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in October 2021, the programme facilitated the participation of nine SAGE girls[43] in a conference which it co-hosted with the Education Coalition for Zimbabwe (ECOZI)[44] as part of International Day of the Girl commemorations, which were held under the theme, 'Digital Generation: Our Voice – Leave No Girl Behind'. The conference brought together over 70 marginalised girls from rural and peri-urban communities, who were engaged as a critical stakeholder in the conversation on issues affecting girls' education. Key policy issues raised by the girls centred on increasing financing for education, gender and social inclusion, online safety for girls and investments in rural learning institutions.

The confidence shown by the SAGE girls in articulating the barriers they experience to policy makers can be linked to their participation in Champions of Girls' Education (CoGE) sessions where girls have been encouraged to be assertive. The use of role plays in CoGE sessions is particularly effective as it involves girls acting out situations from their daily lives, which has contributed to their ability to speak out on issues concerning them.

For example, one of the SAGE learners highlighted how poor infrastructure in rural schools is widening the rural-urban divide in terms of accessing digital learning, which is contrary to government's commitment to 'Leave No One Behind'. As a result of the ECOZI event, there was an acknowledgement and commitments made by policy makers, including the Canadian Ambassador to Zimbabwe, on issues raised by the girls.

This demonstration of confidence in public platforms is corroborated by key findings from the girls' survey conducted in October 2021 which showed that 87% (n=233) of learners reported that their self-confidence has improved since joining SAGE. Furthermore, 90% of girls (n=233) responded that they are confident to handle challenges in their life while 9% are a little confident and 1% do not have confidence. Qualitative evidence strongly suggests that CoGE sessions, which aim to strengthen girls' confidence and self-efficacy, have contributed to these results.

Qualitative data points to the role girls' participation in SAGE, and especially CoGE sessions, has played in supporting girls to build their confidence. A striking feature of multiple MSC stories is how participation in CoGE sessions has improved girls' understanding of their rights which has in turn had a transformative effect on their relationships.

"The SAGE programme has played a pivotal role in changing my life. Besides empowering me with literacy and numeracy skills, it has enlightened me with other important life lessons under CoGE (Champions of Girls' Education). I now have great knowledge on girls' rights and SRHR."

A girl from the Apostolic community, in which patriarchal norms are particularly restrictive, reported that having married at 14 led to her being unprepared to handle the responsibilities of motherhood as she was herself a child and that she was physically and verbally abused because of this by her husband. This "took a toll on [her] confidence and self-worth" and she felt hopeless. As a result of the prevalent gender norms within her community she believed that the only purpose a girl could have was to get married and take care of her family. However, during CoGE sessions she learnt about SRHR, career options and children's rights, which expanded her perceptions of the roles girls and women could occupy in life.

43 Of the nine girls in attendance, one was a girl with a disability, three were girls from Apostolic communities; three had Never been to school and two were adolescent mothers.

44 Education Coalition of Zimbabwe

"It was through these sessions that I realised that the girl child is as important as the boy child is and has the potential to do well or even do better than boys when given equal opportunities […] The most significant change brought by SAGE, was a change of mindset about the value of a girl child during CoGE sessions. Through CoGE sessions, I now know that I matter and can strive to be more than just a housewife. I now know how to take better care of my family and myself and there is now peace in my life."

In one of the girl-to-girl conversations between young mothers from polygamous households, both girls shared that through CoGE sessions they had learned that they can venture into jobs that are perceived to be for men, noting that *"a job has no gender".*

The value of CoGE sessions to girls also emerged through the attendance study, which asked girls what they liked the most about the sessions. Girls reported particularly enjoying sessions where they are taught about how to take care of themselves and assert their rights as girls and young women. They also valued learning about women's rights, Gender Based Violence and where to report cases, menstrual hygiene and the problems associated with early marriages. Married young women appreciated sessions on family planning and on HIV prevention.

While this midline did not directly explore how and whether girls' knowledge and behaviours relating to SRHR had changed because of participation in SAGE, these findings resonate with a growing body of evidence which points to a relationship between improved self-efficacy and better SRHR outcomes, and that strengthening girls' knowledge about GBV and SRHR can contribute to improved self-efficacy.[45]

Rights-based education in CoGE sessions positively influenced girls' relationships.

In the data collected by AWET with girls and community leaders from the Apostolic community, a similar theme emerged relating to the impact of rights-based education provided through SAGE on challenging entrenched gender norms. A girl interviewed by AWET said: *"I am now equipped with basic life skills and am aware of referral channels to use if I encounter gender-based violence. I am capable of solving numeracy problems, and I now own a small business. I believe there has been a transformation between me and my husband because we now have enough food to feed our family, resulting in peace and harmony."*

Another girl credited SAGE with transforming her relationship with her husband. Before SAGE she accepted that violence was a legitimate way for her husband to treat her but in CoGE sessions she learnt it was not and shared this knowledge with her husband, who now no longer beats her. Similarly, a girl with a disability commented that COGE sessions had taught her about GBV and gender equality which has resulted in *"peace at home with my husband".* While these stories may be exceptional, they clearly illustrate the transformative effect SAGE has had on girls' knowledge of their rights and their ability to act on them within their households and communities.

There is also evidence of girls gaining confidence to build networks, advocate for the programme, and influence the views of others. Girls remarked on the value of SAGE in introducing them to wider networks and the effect this has had on their outlook. For example, a girl from the Apostolic community commented that *"interacting with girls of my age, from different non-Apostolic background gave me a new perspective on life. I became so close to some of the learners that I am now comfortable to talk about matters that are important to me."*

45 See for example Packer C, Ridgeway K, Lenzi R, et al. Hope, Self-Efficacy, and Crushed Dreams: Exploring How Adolescent Girls' Future Aspirations Relate to Marriage and Childbearing in Rural Mozambique. *Journal of Adolescent Research*. 2020;35(5):579-604. doi:10.1177/0743558419897385

This confidence translates into how girls engage with others, as well as how they perceive themselves. Through the girls' participation in SAGE, and particularly in CoGE sessions, there were instances of girls being able to speak out for themselves, acting as advocates for girls' rights in their households and communities, and encouraging peers and family members to join the programme. One girl from the Apostolic community interviewed by AWET said: *"I have been educated as a result of the COGE sessions that I attended, and I am now assertive and confident enough to say no to child marriages and educate my peers about the effects of child marriages on girls' education".*

A girl who had never been to school revealed that she now advocates for girls' education and SAGE with both girls and parents in her community, while a girl with a disability noted how she had invited her younger brother's wife to join, as she had also dropped out of school.

This qualitative evidence indicates that SAGE and the CoGE sessions, in particular, have helped girls to envisage a positive future, which is related to long-term goalsetting including the mapping out of transitions to education and employment.[46] As a girl from the Apostolic community said: *"through CoGE sessions, I now know that I matter and can strive to be more than just a housewife."*

These findings align with existing evidence indicating that life skills clubs are effective in improving participants' self-confidence, supporting resilience and contributing to more gender-equitable attitudes.[47]

It should however be noted that SAGE did not gather the perspectives of boys who participate in CoGE sessions as part of the alternative midline approach. SAGE does not have a specific intermediate outcome indicator relating to boys' experiences of the programme and were thus not included within the scope of the midline.

However, SAGE recognises that this represents a significant gap in the data and that there is considerable value in understanding both boys' perspectives on SAGE interventions and how their attitudes and behaviours shape and interact with girls' experiences within their communities. SAGE currently collects some data from boys through regular KAP surveys, and will continue to strengthen the inclusion of boys' voices through ongoing quantitative and qualitative monitoring, as well as the endline evaluation.

7.3.3 EXPLANATION OF HOW SAGE IS ADAPTING COGE APPROACH

As mentioned in a previous section, the most significant adaptation for the CoGE approach was the shortening of sessions into culturally relevant modules, centred on weekly session cards focusing on key messages which girls could do remotely with volunteer support via phone.

The programme also invested in the translation of CoGE manuals into three local languages to ensure effective content delivery by CoGE facilitators, following programme learning that session quality and hence learner experience was being hindered by facilitator modules which include challenging technical information, being only available in English.

46 Gavin, L. E., Catalano, R. F., Markham, C. M. (2010). Positive youth development as a strategy to promote adolescent sexual and reproductive health. Journal of Adolescent Health, 46(Suppl. 3), S1S6. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2009.12.017

47 Overseas Development Institute (2017), Gender & Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) Policy Brief: *Girls' Clubs and Life Skills Programmes: Positive potential, unanswered questions*

Programme data has also highlighted areas for adaption required in addressing negative gender norms. Whilst the CoGE sessions have helped in building girls' knowledge on negative gender norms and SRHR, it appears there are some entrenched norms which persist and affect girls' participation in programme activities. Attendance records have shown household chore load to be a recurring reason for absenteeism. KAP survey results collected May-July 2021 indicated that 40% of girls did not agree with the statement that men and women should equally share household chores, with the highest rate of response from the Chimanimani district where 31% of girls did not agree with the statement.

This result may be influenced by wider community values, for example, in Chimanimani which has a very high number of Apostolic girls who may be influenced by the upholding of patriarchal structures and male dominance which are prevailing in Apostolic communities.

Therefore, the SAGE programme will focus on adapting its CoGE sessions to focus on addressing negative gender norms around work opportunities for women and men and sharing of household chores to ensure girls have improved knowledge and self-efficacy around those areas. This will be complemented by those activities seeking to transform wider community norms as undertaken through inter-generational dialogues and male engagement.

SAGE learners have shown admirable confidence in national fora in articulating their experiences to policy makers of the barriers incurred to accessing education, which the programme has attributed to their participation in CoGE sessions where girls have been encouraged to be assertive and a range of participatory and active methodologies such as role play have aided their public speaking skills. Therefore, the programme will continue in Years 4 and 5 to secure further opportunities for girls to share their experiences at national level, for example, in forums including ECOZI and the Education Coordination Group.

7.4 TRANSITION (OUTCOME 2)

7.4.1 SAGE APPROACH TO TRANSITION

The SAGE programme aims for learning and skills acquired by girls to equip them to transition and exit the programme onwards into four pathways, with the programme aiming for 60% of girls to successfully transition into these pathways.

Girls' views and preference for these proposed pathways has been ascertained through wider programme learning on transition preference and girls' aspirations. This learning has been generated through the results gained from an initial Gender Analysis and girls survey undertaken as part of the baseline study, questions on aspiration in learning progress assessments and in girl-led research activities led by the OU.

In terms of preference for pathways, although the programme was designed anticipating significant numbers of girls transitioning to formal education, this was challenged by baseline evaluation results. It was found the majority of respondents reported a wish to transition into vocational training or employment/self-employment (47.6% and 47.1% respectively) and few aimed to transition into formal schooling (2.5%). This was attributed to the continued impact of economic crises in Zimbabwe reducing household incomes and the high proportion of girls enrolled and already engaged in labour. As detailed in the earlier section on programme participants, at this midline point, 97% of SAGE learners are believed to be engaged in labour, which in the Zimbabwean context is predominantly through informal employment which could include casual jobs such as farm workers, child minders and shopkeepers and where girls receive some form of payment.

The SAGE programme has sought to support all girls in their progression into transition pathways by:

- Noting girls' aspirations at enrolment stage and including these in SAGE's database.
- Facilitating discussions between CEs and students at the end of module 1c, particularly in terms of girls' interest and eligibility for SAGE's ISOP programme, interest in returning to school and understanding if girls will be seeking employment.
- At module 2c stage, learning materials incorporate upcoming graduations and encourage girls to revisit previous conversations and reflect on their next steps after leaving SAGE.
- In preparing for post-transition support, the programme team encourages discussions between girls so they can connect with peers holding similar aspirations to explore the possibility of mutual support.
- Ensuring all girls complete the module focusing on 'Becoming Economically Empowered' as part of the CoGE programme.
- Mapping transition pathways and identifying the partnerships with government and local stakeholders that will leverage success. Key relationships include with the MoPSE and the Ministry of Youth.

In terms of support for specific pathways:

For transition into non/formal education, SAGE has been engaging MoPSE representatives at district and national level to facilitate enrolment of SAGE learners under its Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM). This programme covers primary and secondary education school fees for students who cannot afford them and is coordinated with the Department of Social Services (DSS). At community level, the project is working closely with HDCs to ensure learners get the necessary support to access this programme.

For transition into skills training, as detailed below, the SAGE programme established its own skills training programme called the Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOP), for learners aged 15-19 years and utilising a community-based approach and in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth.

For girls who identify a wish to pursue employment opportunities/self-employment/ entrepreneurial independently or following graduation from the ISOP component, SAGE's activities will include undertaking business development training, piloting the linking in of girls with local business people and providing opportunities to link girls in with local markets at market fairs, as well as linking them into wider NGO or government-led activities or services such as small loans accessible through the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

As the first graduations for girls in Cohort 1 and 2 are planned for March 2022, cohort-wide results of transition outcome will not be included in this exercise and will be a focus of the endline evaluation. The programme will follow up with girls from Cohorts 1 and 2 after they have graduated from SAGE to understand the pathways they have taken and use this data to report on the transition outcome at endline.

The programme will also explore enablers and barriers to girls' transition. At the midline point, review of existing recorded transitions is possible as well as reflections on girls' aspirations and experiences of SAGE's skills training component.

7.4.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE INTEGRATED SKILLS OUTREACH PROGRAMME (ISOP APPROACH)

As the transition outcome has been shaped by girls' aspirations, it has also been shaped by the needs and capacities of local markets, government capacity and guided by a community-driven approach.

The programme is community-based (rather than residential or institutional) which makes it safer and more inclusive given the vulnerabilities of SAGE's learners and makes it more relevant in terms of providing skills via locally identified Mastercrafts people, who are present in girls' communities and whose skills are in line with girls stated interests. It is envisaged that this approach will promote income generation by girls and local development.

The programme design centres on ensuring the target of 6,000 girls undertake and successfully complete a two-month course, with girls' eligibility determined by the criteria of them being at least 15 years old, having completed modules 1a and 2c and having attended at least 65% of their ATL and CoGE sessions. By January 2022, a total of 2,035 learners had successfully started their ISOP trainings with support from 191 locally identified Mastercrafts people.

Starting with a mapping of vocational skills conducted in May 2020, the programme was able to ascertain the vocational skills in which adolescent girls would want to be trained. Community participation was invaluable in identifying the 250 Mastercrafts people for the trades as chosen by the girls and this also helped in addressing potential cases of resistance from community members.

This process has resulted in the establishment of 12 trade-specific courses across the 11 districts. Trades selected encompass hairdressing and dressmaking to trades such as carpentry, upholstery and fence-making which challenge traditional gender stereotypes.

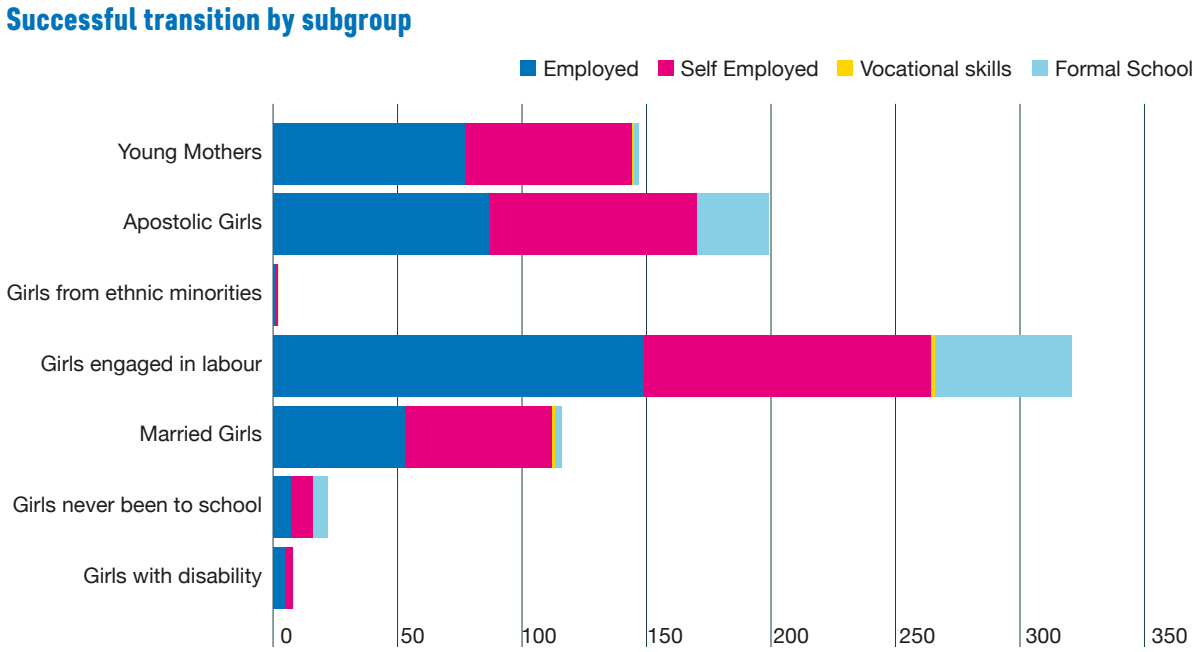
The ISOP component falls under the oversight of the Ministry of Youth (MoY), with the SAGE programme proactively engaging ministry representatives to offer technical guidance. In collaboration with the Ministry of Youth (MoY) and Vocational Training College (VTC) experts, the SAGE programme has conducted training of Mastercrafts people as well as co-developing ISOP training materials, standardised course outlines, step-by-step guides and assessment guides for each course. These assessment guides have supported the rollout of ISOP learner assessments, which aid the monitoring of competencies gained. By implementing a consistent structure, content, methods of teaching and ultimately learning outcomes, it should ultimately lead to girls obtaining a recognised certificate of participation from the MoY. Upon graduation from ISOP, as stated earlier, girls will then be supported to be able to initiate their own income-generating activities with linkages facilitated into local markets, entrepreneurs, business mentors and employers.

7.4.3 FINDINGS

As noted above, the SAGE baseline identified that a relatively small proportion of girls expressed an interest in re-entering education. This is corroborated by monitoring data collected in June 2021 in which SAGE followed up with 1,561 learners who had been identified as at risk of dropping due to their erratic attendance rates.[48]

The major objective for the follow-up exercise was to determine the reasons for erratic attendance and to map the girls who had transitioned along SAGE's three intended transition pathways. From the 1,561 girls, 21% (321 girls) had transitioned. Of the 21%, 82% transitioned to either employment or self-employment; 17% transitioned to formal schools and 1% to vocational skills.[49]

Figure 43: Graph to show numbers of girls transitioning disaggregated by sub-group



48 This follow-up survey was only conducted with a subset of SAGE girls who had already been identified as at risk of dropping out of the programme, and thus should not be considered representative of the wider cohort, but provides further evidence in addition to the baseline and midline indicating girls' preference for transitioning into employment.

49 This follow-up survey was conducted prior to the rollout of SAGE's ISOP component, reducing availability of vocational training pathways.

From the above graph it is interesting to note that no girl from the sub-group categories of girls with disabilities and ethnic minorities transitioned back to formal school when compared with the other five sub-group categories. The observation is not surprising for two reasons. Firstly, most schools lack infrastructure which is inclusive and lack skilled personnel who can accommodate the needs of learners with disabilities. Hence, many girls with disabilities prefer participating in SAGE's learning hubs which are community-based and where they are better accommodated. Secondly girls from ethnic minorities are affected by distance as there are few schools in their communities.

It is also interesting to note the low number of married girls and adolescent mothers who transitioned to formal schools. This could be an indication of the start of the impact of the new Education Amendment Act, which mandates school not to turn away girls on the grounds of being pregnant or married. Although higher rates are aimed for, it could illustrate the limited community awareness of girls' rights and the barriers of childcare and household duties which prevent girls from fulfilling a full school-day as well as a preference for self/employment reflecting their need to earn to support their children.

The ISOP component is a major incentive for participation in SAGE, as it is perceived as providing opportunities for income-generation.

Qualitative data collected as part of the midline approach supports the hypothesis that entering training or employment is a more popular pathway for SAGE girls than re-entering education. A recurring theme emerging from the attendance study was that, according to Head Teachers and CEs, girls in several hubs preferred the CoGE sessions to the ATL and were eager to participate in ISOP as they perceived them as offering routes to employment and income. As attending ATL sessions was a condition for participating in ISOP, it could be argued that for some girls their attendance at ATL was an indication of their interest in transitioning into skills-based employment.

Across the cameo case studies, girls often articulated their desire to go into business, linking this to their developing literacy and numeracy skills. In a conversation between two young mothers, the girls link their business ideas with the opportunity to make money, become financially independent and provide for their own families, with one participant stating: *"I should not be that child who is always asking for everything from parents."*

On the converse side, delays experienced in the procurement of local materials for skills training had a negative impact on girls' experiences of skills training and hence attendance, which could threaten their acquisition of these key skills within the finite ISOP course duration.

The girls in Mutare Rural noted that they had received training in various skills including baking, dressmaking and hairdressing, but that a lack of adequate access to the required equipment disincentivised them from attending. One FGD participant said: *"We only have one sewing machine that was donated by one of the lady teachers and all 15 of us have to take turns to use that machine. We also do not have baking ingredients and equipment to practise hairdressing. So there is no point coming every day if we have nothing to use during the training."*

The ISOP programme has illustrated girls' interest in a skills-based curriculum, which provides useful learning as to what educationally marginalised girls seek in what can be their 'second chance' for education and highlights how their transition pathways fuel their motivation early in their learning journey. The appeal of building skills which have practical real-life application is echoed in the MSC stories and cameo case studies, although girls also value learning in and of itself and some aspire to re-enter formal school.

As noted in Section 7.2, girls attach a high value to SAGE's potential to support them with practical skills that will enable them to enter income-generating pathways. The attendance study reported that "some of the girls believed that the ATL lessons [...] are too many and focus should instead be more on the practical skills training provided by ISOP".

In addition to this, "some of the girls believed that they spend most of their focus on the ATL sessions and yet what they really need are vocational skills that they can use to generate income for their livelihoods. They also bemoaned the lack of tools to use during their practical trainings such as baking, dress making, detergent making among other skills. Some learners compared the SAGE programme to the DREAMS[50] programme which they think has better learning outcomes because of its focus on practical skills training".

This proclivity for practical skills may be guided by married young women and young women with children who shoulder childcare and livelihood responsibilities and hence prioritise practical skills training over ATL sessions, as they believe it will expedite their potential to earn more and support their household.

Findings were interesting in terms of the speed at which some learners wish to transition versus the programme model. The research study noted that "learners felt that there should be a quick transition from the ATL sessions to the more practical ISOP life skills training. Some of the learners are more interested in life skills training, which they believe will enable them to embark on income generating projects. The slow transition frustrates some of the learners who will end up missing the ATL sessions".

Participation in SAGE supports girls to envisage and map out transition pathways.

Qualitative data provides evidence of girls articulating their aspirations for the future and their sense of new opportunities opening up to them because of the skills they have gained.

For some girls, their participation in SAGE has helped them conceive of alternative realities which they could not previously envisage. Girls express enthusiasm for the skills training provided through ISOP, which had not yet started when the MSC stories were collected. There is also a clear link between literacy and numeracy skills they have developed and their ability to transition into vocational training or employment pathways, validating the SAGE Theory of Change that supporting girls with access to high-quality education and skills acquisition will improve their confidence to learn, identify and proceed into positive transition pathways.

For example, a young mother who is engaged in labour commented on how learning numeracy will support her to improve her livelihood and transition into paid employment: *"The most important thing that I have gained in the SAGE programme is that I can now do proper mathematics which will help me in trading as I will be able to make calculations".*

Girls are supported to identify routes into paid employment and value the role SAGE plays in helping them identify viable employment pathways.

SAGE's role in supporting girls to envisage a transition into paid employment is a theme that occurs frequently throughout the midline data. In the attendance study, one girl commented that she is currently unemployed and that the opportunity to learn a practical skill such as soap making through SAGE will enable her to start her own business. Girls also identify professions which they believe participation in SAGE will help them to achieve, such as the law or teaching, and this acts as a motivational factor for their attendance.

50 Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-Free, Mentored, and Safe (DREAMS) is a USAID funded programme which aims to reduce new HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women by 40 percent in ten sub-Saharan countries, including Zimbabwe. The programme offers vocational and livelihoods training.

Another young mother linked the progress she has made in literacy and numeracy to the possibility of entering training and, eventually, paid employment. As a result of the ATL sessions, she can now recognise names and phone numbers. She added: *"This has made my life to be easy and I am happy with the progress I have made. I am now looking forward to starting a dress making course with Plan international. Now I have the confidence that after I have finished the course, I can make a career out of dressmaking and be able to take care of my children financially hence give them a decent life. I am so grateful for the impact that the programme has had on my life."*

Part of the value that girls ascribe to SAGE is its role in supporting them in both new and existing aspirations, and in helping them map out pathways to achieve them. For the young mother above, SAGE has helped her identify a new goal in life which she has the confidence to achieve through participation in skills training.

Across the cameo case studies, girls frequently identified pathways into trade and business that they felt confident they could achieve with the help of skills acquired through SAGE. Girls mapped out a diverse range of business opportunities and in some cases weighed up the advantages of certain pathways over others. For example, in a conversation between two Apostolic girls who are also young mothers, one girl reflected on a picture she likes from one of the SAGE learning modules which shows a woman farming tomatoes. Through this picture, she has learned that not much capital is required to start tomato farming, unlike her previous ambition of chicken rearing.

"It showed me that growing tomatoes did not require a lot of money; you only need to buy the seeds and plant them. There is minimal manual labor required and the profit I get from the sale of the tomatoes enables me to take care of my family. I can even use locally sourced manure to use as fertiliser for my tomatoes."

Other girls have mapped out professions such as hairdressing, carpentry and tailoring, and a notable feature of their language is often an awareness of the practical considerations involved in attaining these goals.

Re-entering education remains an ambition for some SAGE girls.

For other girls, their participation in SAGE has strengthened their confidence in their ability to realise existing aspirations that were previously out of reach. A girl who has never been to school, for example, said that when she joined SAGE, she *"knew that through the programme [she] was going to get a chance to go to school which had been my desire for a long time."*

She added: *"It had always been my dream to go to school and I would always feel sad seeing other children of my age putting on their school uniforms and going to school."* She also commented on the opportunity SAGE has given her to learn dressmaking and beading and opening up additional transition pathways into employment.

As discussed previously, there is considerable evidence that entering training or employment is a more attractive transition pathway for many girls than re-entering education. Re-entering education does however remain an ambition and a reality for some. A girl from an ethnic minority who participated in the MSC process commented that she has always wished to go back to school. As a result of the learning she has achieved through SAGE, she now feels confident in her ability to do so. *"I am happy that if I get a chance to go back to school, I will not struggle with reading and writing."*

A girl who has never been to school and who now recruits other girls in her community to join SAGE noted that some girls in her community have joined the programme but then transferred to other schools.

In conclusion, girls value the skills they have gained or anticipate gaining through ATL, CoGE and ISOP sessions in supporting them to identify and achieve a variety of transition pathways. Girls comment that SAGE has helped them to identify new directions in life and map out routes to achieve them, as well as strengthening their confidence through the acquisition of new skills to achieve existing aspirations.

Data collected through the midline also indicates that entering training or employment is a more popular pathway for SAGE girls than re-entering education, and that girls view participation in SAGE as a route into skills training and employment.

7.4.4 EXPLANATION OF HOW SAGE IS ADAPTING APPROACH TO SUPPORT GIRLS' TRANSITION

As explained earlier, as a new component and with girls approaching graduations, learning and hence adaptations are more limited in this outcome. However, there are some are that the SAGE programme will be further enhancing. The programme acknowledges the need for post-training and graduation support. Therefore, it will purse the development of a transition guide to collate information to aid girls as they progress further into their chosen transition pathways. This information could include signposting to relevant services and government departments and improving linkages to sustainable community structures such as self-help, savings and credit groups.

Adjustments were made to SAGE's overall approach to support girls to become economically empowered, with the removal of the Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) component from the SAGE model given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic making this an unfeasible model. Therefore, some wider skills such as saving and lending, budgeting and basic financial literacy have been enhanced in the ISOP component. Current programme learning has suggested the need to this strengthen the existing business development component, with girls showing gaps in their understanding of the concepts of budget and costing. Further support on this component is suggested from the Mastercrafts persons, MWACSMED and the MoY.

In terms of mitigating delays in material delays or gaps on equipment, given budget constraints and the need for sustainable measures, the SAGE consortium will continue in its efforts to encourage communities to assist learners. By October 2021, the programme had witnessed the emergence of community philanthropic support in some communities, whereby community members had been donating training equipment to learners such as sewing machines and hand tools.

The key challenge has been ensuring the continuity of practical skills training measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which effective distance learning platforms and pedagogical resources to support remote instruction for vocational skills training are generally lacking. Therefore, the SAGE team is analysing the twelve ISOP trades to determine which are compatible with each of the four learning support pathways and exploring which innovative approaches could be used such as the small group approach, 1-on-1 training for girls requiring individualised support, mobile training and the use of pre-recorded sessions.

7.5 SUSTAINABILITY (OUTCOME 3)

7.5.1 COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER (I04)

The SAGE ToC proposes that a sustainable transformation of existing discriminatory gender norms requires the involvement of the entire community surrounding girls. For this reason, SAGE works directly not only with girls, but also with boys and men through the CoGE model to promote greater gender equality and more equitable gender norms. The two main activities in this area are establishing community-based male engagement clubs and holding inter-generational dialogues.

The establishment of 88 men's clubs (one per hub) in February-April 2021 has provided a forum for SAGE CoGE male facilitators to work with adult men, targeting fathers and husbands of participating adolescent girls and guide them through a curriculum, which explores positive masculine role models and challenging entrenched negative gender attitudes and practice.

Intergenerational dialogues within the CoGE component aim to ensure boys' and girls' commitment to gender equality is supported by their families and their communities, with the first dialogues started between February to April 2021. Bringing young men and young women together with other members of their families and communities supports them to share their experiences and initiate an open dialogue on issues that affect them. Dialoguing with decision-makers in their communities is particularly powerful and allows girls and boys to exercise their agency and agree on positive actions to combat harmful practices that will be supported by the whole community. These activities include community awareness raising sessions led by young people to engage others and share information on issues that matter to them. The dialogues are facilitated by the volunteers and one meeting occurs per quarter for each hub (81 dialogues took place in Q13).

SAGE also utilises its Hub Development Committees to mobilise community support to girls' education. In Year 3, 87 contextualised sustainability action plans spanning SAGE's 88 hubs were developed through engagements with 1,083 HDC members. Key actions highlighted from the plans include enhancing collaboration between community leadership, School Development Committees (SDCs), community members, hub volunteers and the school on sustaining learner enrolment, attendance and exploring transition options. Future support will respond to their voiced need for support around governance systems and resource mobilisation at the local level to ensure the effective continuation of hub activities following programme closure.

7.5.2 FINDINGS

SAGE actively seeks to transform inequalities as a GESI transformative programme and works with men and boys to instil positive masculinities and create champions of gender equality through the approaches outlined above.

A KAP survey conducted as part of routine project monitoring with 117 adult men in October 2021 revealed relatively high levels of progressive attitudes towards gender amongst men in SAGE communities. The men participating in the survey were parents or guardians of SAGE girls, including men who had taken part in intergenerational dialogues and male engagement sessions. 91% of respondents believed that young women should have the same opportunities to work outside the home as young men, and 85% disagreed that women should have to tolerate domestic violence. The high levels of positive knowledge are linked to male engagement sessions, which aim to shift regressive attitudes towards gender equality. However, negative attitudes towards gender equality continue to persist: 16% (n=19) of the male respondents said they believed women are not good leaders and 56% (n=66) believed that a wife should always obey her husband.

Additionally, KAP findings revealed that most men (63%) agree that it is the sole responsibility of the girl to prevent pregnancy. It was also noted that for those who disagree with the statement that "It is the girl's responsibility to prevent pregnancy", 55% (n=43) of the men were not yet married. Going forward, targeted support on adult male engagement will be provided focusing on women's leadership, Gender Based Violence (GBV), sexual reproductive health and equal employment opportunities.

Positively, religious leaders, boys and young men, husbands, parents, and caregivers of SAGE girls are actioning their support of SAGE girls in practical ways. This has been demonstrated in them aiding recruitment of girls, encouraging consistent attendance and providing additional materials. For example, this included start-up cash for some girls as part of their independently established savings groups and contributing additional ingredients, materials and tools, as part of the ISOP component.

Interviews with leaders from the Apostolic community provided evidence that SAGE's engagement with some communities has been successful in overcoming concerns and generating buy-in. Through persistent engagement with church leadership, who hold positions of great influence in Apostolic communities, AWET found that the programme had received approval from the Head of Denomination in a particular district with high rates of child marriage. As discussed in Section 7.2, support from community leaders is a powerful tool in influencing attitudes and shaping social norms.

There is mixed evidence about the levels of support amongst community members and husbands for girls' participation in SAGE.

As discussed in Section 7.3, when girls learn about their rights relating to SRHR and GBV it can lead to a positive ripple effect within households and communities, driving positive changes in attitudes and behaviours.

Within the Most Significant Change stories there are also instances of girls being supported by their husbands to attend SAGE, even within relationships that had been abusive. Participants in FGDs for the attendance research study also noted that some husbands were supportive of their wives attending SAGE due to the expectation that their participation in CoGE and ISOP would enable the young women to contribute economically to the household.

However, the research study also surfaced instances of opposition and backlash to girls' participation in SAGE from husbands and other community members. These attitudes were found to be more prevalent in rural areas and grounded in fears that, through gaining an education and increased independence, girls and young women would challenge the prevailing patriarchal norms within their households and communities.

Male respondents revealed that it could be perceived as shameful to be married to a woman who is considered uneducated, or, conversely, that it was not deemed necessary for married women to learn as they should be prioritising their family.

One community leader said: *"Some of us men are not comfortable to let our wives go and attend basic education sessions. One of the reasons is that when we married our wives, we lied to the communities that we married educated women, form six level. Now if the same community sees the same wife going for basic and elementary education, they start laughing at you saying you lied to us. So it becomes an embarrassment and some men will end up telling their wives to just stay at home. Some are also afraid that the women, when they learn about human rights, they will come back and challenge them and of course some are afraid that their wives will have the opportunity to engage in extramarital affairs during the SAGE lessons." (Community leader, Mutare Rural)*

These findings speak to the degree to which patriarchal norms are entrenched within certain communities, and the need for continued focus on the programme's work engaging men and boys.

7.5.3 EXPLANATION OF HOW SAGE IS ADAPTING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

Activities under Intermediate Outcome 5 were launched in March 2021 and are thus the most nascent in the programme, particularly as their launches were hindered by extended lockdown measures. Adaptions to date have included male engagement clubs shifting to reach participants in lockdown by switching to Whatsapp-based conversations. Male engagement in men's clubs and intergenerational dialogues has been quite challenging because of lack of time and interest. Therefore, CoGE sessions have adapted to be conducted during (before or after) sport events and around planned government meetings.

These have proved to be successful strategies to approach male members of the society and engage them in conversations around gender and girls' education. The SAGE programme will continue to strengthen the implementation of intergenerational dialogues by ensuring specific community-level action plans are established and acted upon to address emerging issues, particularly those linked to instances of opposition and backlash to girls' participation in SAGE from husbands and other community members.

7.5.4 RELATIONSHIP WITH MINISTRY OFFICIALS/GOVERNMENT (IO5)

The SAGE ToC proposes the crucial need for strong and active partnerships to be formed with Ministry officials and other civil society actors to advocate for more inclusive, gender-responsive education policies.

SAGE's stakeholder engagement approach has centred on collaboration and partnership since the programme design phase, with service delivery launched under the formal oversight of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE). Since the baseline evaluation was conducted, the SAGE programme and its consortium members have consistently grown and maximised strong relationships with national and district stakeholders. This has resulted in sharing of programme learning, influencing of national policy, improved community access, co-design of teaching and learning materials for the ATL and ISOP components, conducting assessments together, joint monitoring and embedding sustainable approaches. Regular coordination is undertaken through district level stakeholder engagement meetings across the three Programme Areas/provincial operational areas which focus on sharing progress updates, plans, addressing specific issues and strengthening support and synergies. Additionally, district-level multi stakeholder engagement is also undertaken through joint monitoring, visits which include multiple ministries and facilitate direct exposure to SAGE good practice.

Resultantly, the programme has been able to secure permission to conduct small group learning during strict lockdown periods in six districts. Partnerships have grown with multiple Ministries beyond MoPSE to include the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Department of Social Development and the Ministry of Youth and span all eleven districts, with coordination at local, district, provincial and national-level platforms.

As the programme looks towards its closure by July 2023, its sustainability planning and strategic review has recognised the following key aspects:

- Uptake of SAGE accelerated learning materials and support approaches within the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE)
- Community capacity to support learning and social development of out-of-school (OOS) learners sustained under the technical oversight of MoPSE
- Champions of Girls Education (CoGE) community clubs to be sustained

These three objectives are underpinned by a strategic shift of leadership and service delivery from Plan International to community structures and MoPSE and other relevant ministries. It can be envisaged as below:

In terms of progress to date, the shift away from the SAGE consortium directly leading services has begun and evidences the consortium's commitment to a sustainable model. For example, in Year 4, volunteers professional development trainings have started to be led by MoPSE staff such as District Lifelong Learning Coordinators and District School Inspectors, with Plan staff providing technical support whilst Safeguarding and Child protection trainings were led by the Department for Social Services District officers. The consortium is also planning to trial new incentive models for volunteers to establish a more sustainable model which can be maintained post-project closure. Consultations with other active projects have been undertaken ahead of discussions with HDC's and MoPSE.

Substantial achievements have been made in the uptake of SAGE's learning materials. Through national and district level stakeholder engagement with MoPSE departments, particularly the Curriculum Development and Technical Service (CDTS), Non-Formal Education (NFE) and Learner Welfare and Psychological Services (LEPSI) departments in the Accelerated learning material development process, the programme was able to facilitate the approval of SAGE materials for use in learning hubs. Furthermore, in 2021, SAGE accelerated learning materials were approved by MoPSE for use in schools and communities, as part of resources materials to complement distance learning during a period of heightened school closures where a gap was identified for print materials to support marginalised communities, as well as support for early grade school learners needing to catch up on learning when returning to school. This resulted in the formal launch of the SAGE modules by the MoPSE Permanent Secretary in April 2021 leading to the materials being uploaded on MoPSE website http://mopse.co.zw.

Through collaborating with other GEC Zimbabwe partners (CAMFED and World Vision), the programme has managed to influence the recognition of teaching and learning approaches in supporting blended learning. For example, the small group learning concept introduced by the three GEC Zimbabwe partners is now part of the MoPSE Learning Catch Up Strategy. Also, some of SAGE teaching and learning reading cards have been integrated into the draft Implementation Framework of the MoPSE National Learning Catch Up Strategy. The uptake of these materials was one of SAGE's greatest achievements in Year 3 and illustrates a clear achievement of ensuring sustainable and long-term impact. Anecdotal feedback has been gained suggesting that learning progress assessments and SAGE materials have been utilised by teachers in formal schools. The programme has also seen some school heads embracing teaching and learning practices from SAGE hubs and adapting them for implementation in their schools. For example, one school head from Chimanimani district confirmed his commitment to explore administering SAGE Learning Progress Assessments at school level to help them determine learning levels, following his participation in a SAGE training on progress assessments.

The school head commented: *"The school-hub linkage has created opportunities for resource sharing and learning. I have learned new ideas on progress assessment at my school."*

MoPSE has been in the forefront of facilitating of sustainability action plans at hub-level. Issues discussed during the HDC meetings included financing of volunteer incentives, maintenance of renovated structures and preparatory discussions ahead of the sustainable volunteer incentive piloting. These discussions have been heavily aligned and guided by the MoPSE and Council policy which elaborates expectations for communities on how to take over projects after programme closures and enables the sharing of lessons learnt which will aid SAGE's close-out planning.

As highlighted in the introduction, the SAGE programme works with and has expanded partnership with multiple government departments, with SAGE now even enhancing linkages between them. Joint monitoring visits have been ongoing with different relevant government ministries which include Women's Affairs, MoPSE, Department of Social Development and MoY. A joint exposure visit was conducted in May 2021, with the other two GEC projects in Zimbabwe which are led by CAMFED and World Vision. The monitoring visits aimed at influencing scaling up of sustainability actions. The programme optimised the opportunity to share good practices and lessons learnt during implementation with the government stakeholders. Feedback also highlighted how the departments were able to learn about each department's strategies and identify linkages based on the visit. The consortium will look to replicate these multi-stakeholder learning events and exposure visits further across Years 4 and 5. By sharing SAGE's good practice, it will inform the implementation and refinement of MoPSE's NFE policies and aid long-term service provision for marginalised learners in Zimbabwe.

In terms of strengthening community-based protection mechanism, in Year 3, Plan partnered with the Department of Social Development to enhance referral, psychosocial support and reporting mechanisms. DSD Officers were part of trainings of volunteers on local referral pathways and cascaded the MHPSS training to all volunteers. Their participation was invaluable, with volunteers gaining greater appreciation of the role and knowledge of DSD in child welfare issues. Volunteers were also made aware of the community-based child protection structures that work with DSD, which directly contributed to volunteers reporting 10 cases to them. This is a more sustainable approach which will aid the reporting of protection cases even after the end of SAGE programme.

Plan and the DSD also built the capacity of Child Protection Committees (CPCs) to ensure that the CPCs were well prepared to deal with cases and offer protection services at community level, as per their mandate, and CPCs were made aware of referral pathways so they can handle and deal with cases effectively and efficiently. It is also anticipated that during future lockdown restrictions, CPCs will be able to assist and support survivors of abuse at the community-level and ensure they liaise with relevant service delivery organisations for appropriate support. The programme also strengthened collaboration with CPCs so they can assist to raise awareness on safeguarding together with volunteers in communities, as well as to lead on safeguarding trainings themselves.

The engagement of Ministry of Youth at national level to support the roll out of the ISOP component to support transition pathways has seen the programme being recognised by the ministry as contributing towards the achievement of its key result areas of youth empowerment, hence its inclusion in high-level Cabinet reports, as explained in Section 7.4.

A key driver to this outcome is the ensuring of programme evidence and learning including girls' own voices and experiences are shared with key stakeholders at district and national level. This alternative midline process looked to achieve this using qualitative tools such as the MSC stories, case studies and KIIs and then the dissemination of findings to key stakeholders. Results will complement findings from wider programme research which includes participatory girl-led research led by the OU and the experiences of girls shared at district-level and national-level education to influence key civil society and Ministry stakeholders.

Creating a sense of responsibility amongst community leadership is critical in leveraging their support.

The SAGE programme is a community-based programme. As such, involvement of community level leadership is critical towards ensuring wider community support and sustainability of interventions.

To secure sustained support from local leadership, the programme deliberately included local leadership representation in the Hub Development Committee (HDC). The HDC committee mirrors the Parents Association or School Development Committees (SDCs) as existing in formal schools; however, the HDC is a deliberate creation to help support in addressing the needs of out-of-school learners. Through their participation in HDC committee activities, the local leadership has become aware of issues affecting out-of-school learners and the resulting support required. As a result of this local leadership support, there has been an emerging trend of community philanthropic activities whereby local leadership is mobilising resources to support effective provision of learning for girls at community level.

Local leaders have also become advocates for the programme, disseminating information in communities, promoting enrolment of eligible girls and identifying safe learning spaces.

The key lesson the programme has learnt from its engagement with community leadership through the Hub Development Committees is that they are more effective in supporting interventions if they are given a degree of responsibility and ownership over the implementation of the programme.

8. CONCLUSIONS

As the Education sector globally and in Zimbabwe rethinks and resets education service provision in the era of COVID-19, the SAGE programme as an innovative NFE model focused on out-of-school girls offers an example of how educationally marginalised girls of various identities, abilities, ethnicities and circumstances can be supported to learn, lead and thrive before and during a pandemic[51].

At the end of this alternative midline process, it is useful to revisit the guiding questions which underpinned it, namely:

- What progress can the programme demonstrate for each of its outcomes and intermediate outcomes?
- What were the specific impacts of the pandemic on our intervention?

Learning Outcome

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

By pivoting to a multi-modal and flexible delivery model involving learning pathways spanning door-to-door learning, phone-based learning, small group learning and hub-based sessions, SAGE has enabled girls to exercise more control over how they would like to access learning content in the context of their individual circumstances. This is evident through the increase in service uptake from phone-support to the expansion of small group and household-level modalities, as well as the sustained demand for these modalities from girls even when the hubs reopen. This underpins SAGE's strong progress towards its goal of supporting girls' learning outcomes by enabling access to high quality learning and life skills.

In early 2020, the SAGE programme acknowledged the need to move towards distance learning but the onset of COVID-19 fast-tracked this adaption. It is rewarding to see that the impact of COVID-19 has been to open up new opportunities for girls who have been historically left behind but can now learn in a modality that meets their needs and enables them to access learning whilst balancing wider childcare, household and livelihood demands. Within a participatory research strand led by the OU and for further dissemination in 2022, girls voiced their wish to be asked what they want to learn and for 'Learning spaces to fit around our lives rather than assuming we can change our lives to fit into learning spaces'. The SAGE multi-modal model demonstrates how learning spaces and education services can fit around the lives of educationally marginalised girls. Its innovative design holds substantial potential to be tested at scale and influence how education provision at the system-level can be made flexible to accommodate the various needs of girls.

51 Text based on introduction of the 'Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel. (2022). Prioritizing learning during COVID-19: The most effective ways to keep children learning during and postpandemic. [K. Akyeampong, T. Andrabi, A. Banerjee, R. Banerji, S. Dynarski, R. Glennerster, S. Grantham-McGregor, K. Muralidharan, B. Piper, S. Ruto, J. Saavedra, S. Schmelkes, H. Yoshikawa]. Washington D.C., London, Florence: The World Bank, FCDO, and UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti'.

Furthermore, the shift in learning modalities away from static locations and large groups can also open up new benefits for girls' learning and social development. As reported in section 7.2.5, girls appreciate the shift to small group learning and find it more fulfilling given the increased interaction with peers and educators, as well as access to 'two-way communication' and faster feedback. Girls have shown through their actions and testimonies that they appreciate the opportunity to continue learning through small group sessions and the ongoing support from CEs both through door-to-door visits and via phone.

Pivoting services was a strenuous operational manoeuvre but SAGE illustrates how, despite the disruption and damage caused by the pandemic, it has been able to ensure that the unique learning needs of educationally marginalised girls are assessed, adapted towards and that local volunteers have been supported to respond to these needs.

The SAGE programme fully acknowledges that more is required in terms of maintaining access, with the views of girls with disabilities reinforcing the need for girls' and community's participation when identifying new sites and the continued need for satellite hubs which enable volunteers to serve a wider catchment area.

Regular attendance requires the holistic support of peers, volunteers, families, male partners and communities

The SAGE programme's Theory of Change is founded on the assumed causal link between girls' regular attendance at high-quality learning sessions and improved learning outcomes. This alternative midline process provides useful evidence as to the holistic and multi-pronged approach required to achieve this and the areas where SAGE is making progress towards this as well as areas of improvement needed. The commissioning of the research study component was instigated by the programme's monitoring of attendance rates and the emerging negative impact caused by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting restrictive measures and hub closures.

Supportive enabling environments at household, hub and community-level are highlighted as integral to girls' attendance, with evidence from this process that SAGE has been able to progress and support the development of these. For girls who reported attending SAGE sessions regularly, the common factor mentioned across the hubs was strong community support based on appreciation of the benefits that the SAGE programme would bring to the girls. In addition, some girls reported that their husbands encouraged them to attend, often because of the perceived benefits that participation in SAGE would bring to the household's income. Girls also highlighted the strong support of volunteers, who demonstrate their commitment and passion for the girls learning, even to the extent of thoughtful actions such as taking notes to the homes of absent learners. In multiple accounts, girls refer to the strength and joy that developing peer relationships and friendships through SAGE has brought them, with these contributing to girls' attendance, learning and wellbeing.

Through the research study and wider qualitative methods, the SAGE programme has gained a greater understanding of the barriers which impede girls' learning journeys beyond initial access and their nuanced impact dependent on girls' characteristics. Barriers include cultural and religious practices and the impact of gender norms, including resistance from husbands and community leaders and girls' household chore burden, as well as health-related issues such as menstruation and geographical distance to hubs. Factors such as early marriage, pregnancy and motherhood can act as obstacles to learning, but interestingly can also be mobilised by girls as sources of motivation; girls reported that their desire to support and provide for their families (both through income-generation and other forms of support such as being able to help their children with homework) served as an incentive to acquire both literacy and numeracy and practical life skills.

This alternative midline process also unearthed examples of where SAGE's standards and expectations may not be enacted, as well as the scale of transformative change needed. The alleged instances of bullying and violence in hubs highlighted to the consortium the need to reinforce safeguarding and behavioural standards to learners, as well as volunteers. Evidence of the backlash some girls receive from their communities, peers and partners, as well as the burden of household chores and care responsibilities, demonstrate the importance of gender-transformative programming such as SAGE, whereby learning activities are complemented by interventions including CoGE which seek to tackle the root cause of gendered social barriers and mobilise change at the community-level. Efforts by the SAGE consortium partners, particularly within Apostolic communities, are still essential to transform harmful patriarchal norms and highlight the ongoing journey still ahead in enacting girls' rights to education.

SAGE is supporting out-of-school girls to develop literacy and numeracy skills during a time of severe educational disruption

The rollout of the Learning Progress Assessment (LPA) model has enabled the SAGE programme to follow a girl-centred approach by utilising a volunteer-applied assessment methodology. Its results from 2,713 girls in Cohort 1 (who undertook the MPA) and 756 girls in Cohort 2 (who undertook the IPA) provide evidence that SAGE is successfully progressing girls towards improving their learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy.

Results showing that girls have achieved higher learning scores in both literacy and numeracy, after a year's exposure to the programme, despite being in a period of disruption caused by the COVID-19 onset, offer evidence as to the effectiveness of SAGE's gender-responsive, learner-centred and innovative accelerated teaching and learning programme and relevant adaptations made during the MTRP phase.

With the onset of the pandemic, it prompted concern that learning would be lost and progress halted. Encouragingly, the findings presented from the SAGE learning progress assessments undertaken between November and December 2020 present evidence that following completion of module 1c, equivalent to a year's exposure to SAGE's learning interventions, SAGE learners are achieving stronger results in literacy and numeracy. This reflects an approach whereby SAGE has focused on important foundational skills and, through the LPA approach, sought to understand where individual students are in their learning via a continuous assessment model. This has led to educators structuring their pedagogical approach to teach at the right level, providing tailored support and even sending notes to those who missed sessions. As seen through the cameo case studies, girls' feedback on their learning experiences offers a welcome and rarely gained insight into the experience of being an out-of-school learner, the impact of their second chance to learn, a shift to identifying themselves as learners and their pride in their achievements in gaining literacy and numeracy skills.

However, due to the cross-sectional nature of the learning assessment data analysed for this report, the programme is unable to track individual girls' learning journeys and thus to identify definitively the extent to which SAGE has supported individual girls to improve their learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy. At endline, the programme will have data for individual girls across multiple assessment points such as for Cohort 1 girls from MPA to EPA stage and Cohort 2 girls from IPA to MPA stage, which will enable it to draw further conclusions about SAGE's impact on learning. The consortium is proud of the achievements to date on the rollout of the LPA model and welcomes the learning that results from this process that will help to refine the approach, including through further strengthening of data processes, communication and linkages into SAGE's adaptive management approach.

Skills-based, gender-responsive and practical learning facilitates girls' aspirations and motivation to enrol in accelerated learning programmes

This alternative midline process has also added to understanding on what educationally marginalised girls want to learn. Skills-based, gender-responsive and practical learning has been found to broaden girls' aspirations and propel girls into new and previously unimagined pathways. This is aided by the integration of aspiration as a driving concept from SAGE's inception phase, actualised through a gender analysis exercise, ongoing participatory research and teaching and learning materials in which every unit is centred on stories which present new and unimagined pathways to girls. These unit stories have strongly resonated with girls and aspirations borne from these emerged as a key theme in the girl-to-girl learning conversations.

SAGE has centred itself on the importance of acquiring practical skills, which girls have strongly associated with their ability to transition successfully and engage in income-generating activities in the future. This is particularly the case among older girls and young mothers, who voiced their preference for practical or vocational skills training over purely literacy and numeracy learning. The programme has been able to harness the desire for vocational skills training as an effective incentive for girls to enrol into and attend literacy and numeracy sessions by linking participation in ISOP to completion of the ATL component. For future programmes targeting out-of-school girls, this points toward the need for a holistic set of interventions incorporating a vocational skills or livelihoods element alongside other forms of learning.

The CoGE model is an effective and valued mechanism for improving girls' confidence, self-efficacy and agency, and should be considered for integration into other OOS programmes

SAGE has made successful progress in continuing to support girls to learn, build confidence and life skills and access vocational training through a time of immense disruption.

The CoGE component is one of the programme's core strengths and is valued highly by girls participating in SAGE. Evidence gathered in this process indicated that participation in CoGE has introduced girls to a variety of future pathways, while the confidence gained through CoGE sessions has strengthened girls' belief in their capability to learn and achieve their chosen transition route, in line with SAGE's ToC. Through the MSC stories, girl-to-girl conversations and attendance study, evidence emerged that participating in CoGE sessions has supported girls to improve their self-efficacy and gain the confidence to advocate for themselves and others.

Findings suggest that the process of change between knowledge, to attitudes to practice requires time and reinforcement. Although results in this report are encouraging, when reviewed versus programme monitoring data from May-July 2021, it was indicated that 40% of girls did not agree with the statement that men and women should equally share household chores. Evidence within this alternative midline suggests that CoGE sessions provide girls with a space in which they can question gender norms and stereotypes and explore and expand their understanding of the roles that women can occupy in life. It is not clear yet whether this behaviour change process has been slowed by the onset of COVID-19 whereby girls have been challenged to gather in groups in and outside of SAGE sessions and whether one-on-one phone or household sessions by SAGE volunteers allow this exploration to fully take place.

Becoming a Champion of Girls' Education has a wider transformative influence

The CoGE curriculum not only invokes change at the individual-level but evidence gathered in this process demonstrates that when girls learn about their rights relating to GBV and SRHR, they share these messages within their households and communities, creating a ripple effect that contributes to positive changes in attitudes and behaviours. Evidence from girls that they themselves have become educators, by sharing their knowledge and experience with their partners and husbands, and that this has had a positive influence on their inter-personal relationships, is enlightening and demonstrates the strength of the CoGE component.

Transition Outcome

Girls' preferred transition pathways may not conform to programme assumptions and more exploration of the impact of contextual and intersectional factors that shape girls' aspirations is needed

Despite four different transition pathways being promoted through SAGE, at midline, girls continued to express a preference for transitioning into skills training or employment over re-entering education. This was identified at baseline stage too and has been substantiated both by monitoring data and midline findings. During Year 3 (June 2021), SAGE followed up with 1,561 learners who had been identified as at risk of dropping due to their erratic attendance rates. From the 1,561 girls, 21% (321 girls) had transitioned. Of the 21%, 82% transitioned to either employment or self-employment; 17% transitioned to formal schools and 1% to vocational skills.

Findings in this process highlight a perception amongst girls and their husbands that participation in ISOP will aid their household income. In the context of the protracted economic crisis in Zimbabwe, it is unsurprising that pathways linked to skills acquisition and income generation are particularly favoured, with the possibility that the worsening of Zimbabwe's economic status, following the onset of COVID-19, is likely to have added to this motivation.

The preference amongst older girls and young mothers for vocational skills training is also indicative of a wider need to tailor and nuance interventions according to the needs of girls and young women at different life stages. Whilst there is considerable evidence that entering training or employment is a more attractive transition pathway for many girls than re-entering education, some girls expressed a desire to return to formal or non-formal education. It is also imperative not to overlook the younger age groups not eligible for ISOP (aged 10-14 years), who graduate from SAGE with over two years of learning exposure. Although the programme understands that for a subset of girls, re-entering education remains a desirable transition pathway, it does not conclusively understand if it is this younger group. Assumptions are made based on younger girls feeling more confident to return to school given that their same-aged peers are in secondary education, as well as older girls being more engaged in childcare and livelihood responsibilities.

As the SAGE team rolls out a new quantitative survey tool to assess transition preferences with the first cohort of graduates from February 2022, the programme will be able to add to the evidence base on how characteristics such as socio-economic status, age and marital status could influence girls' preferred transition pathways and their successful transition. The programme has also yet to fully understand how information about available opportunities, as well as improved financial and emotional support from their families, influence girls' preferences and success in pursuing their preferred transition pathways.

Skills training is a major incentive for enrolment and participation in SAGE

The SAGE ToC proposes that transition outcomes will be achieved by highly marginalised adolescent girls having improved levels of market-relevant livelihood skills. This alternative midline process has demonstrated that SAGE's skills training component, which is centred on a community-based market driven approach, has successfully progressed towards this outcome.

This report's inclusion of qualitative evidence provides a refreshing insight into what girls who are often seen as the 'hardest to reach' want in an accelerated learning programme and their transition journey when their ambitions and aspirations have been ignited, in what has previously been referred to, as their 'second chance'.

Although findings are based only on SAGE's first cadre of ISOP participants who have yet to graduate and for whom a larger body of evidence will be gathered in early 2022, the feedback from girls and their wider community has signalled that the ISOP component has been a major incentive for participation in SAGE, as it is perceived as providing opportunities for income-generation and employment. By tying entry to ISOP with attendance, the SAGE programme has been able to utilise girls' energy and motivation to improve their participation in ATL and CoGE elements. Achieving this force of sustained interest by girls is particularly impressive when viewed alongside the concurrent influence of COVID-19 which hindered the start of ISOP sessions, rollout of volunteer trainings and delivery of procured items. By focusing on a community-based approach utilising local Mastercrafts people rather than supporting girls to access static or residential settings, it has demonstrated a more inclusive and resilient model, although the consortium continues to evaluate how to sustain girls' learning when small group activities are not permitted under lockdown measures. Identifying the gaps or misperceptions in girls' understanding of ISOP's timing and alignment with other learning components illustrates the need to reinforce messaging regarding programme objectives.

As findings indicate, girls value the skills they have gained or anticipate gaining through ATL, CoGE and ISOP sessions in supporting them to identify and achieve a variety of transition pathways. With a clear link developed between the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills and their ability to transition into vocational training or employment pathways, it validates the SAGE Theory of Change that supporting girls with access to high-quality education and market-relevant skills will improve their confidence to learn, identify and proceed into positive transition pathways.

Sustainability Outcome

Support from the community and male stakeholders is key to supporting girls' education with more work ahead on shifting harmful gendered norms

Since its inception, the SAGE programme has employed a community-driven approach with community-based structures and members playing an integral role in the establishment of learning activities, enrolling girls, maintaining attendance and mobilising wider community support. This has provided positive indications that SAGE's communities have been able to adopt more positive and supportive attitudes toward girls' education, leading to girls enjoying a more enabling environment that supports their education, and suggests that programme impacts will be sustained as per SAGE's ToC. This approach has been intensified in SAGE's third year, with the launch of specific interventions in the form of CoGE's intergenerational dialogues and male engagement sessions.

This alternative midline process did not specifically gather evidence from community members, but findings from across the qualitative sources have presented evidence of male stakeholders demonstrating their support to learners in practical ways. This has been illustrated by religious leaders, boys and young men, husbands, parents, and caregivers aiding the recruitment of girls, encouraging consistent attendance and providing additional materials. It appears that the mobilisation of support has taken time as SAGE's reputation has grown, with qualitative evidence indicating that levels of support for SAGE have changed over time as husbands began to realise the benefits that their wives' participation in SAGE can bring to their households.

Support from communities and community leaders has been critical in encouraging attendance and participation in SAGE. Amongst girls who reported regular attendance rates, the common factor mentioned across the hubs was strong community support based on appreciation of the benefits that the SAGE programme would bring. In communities with traditionally lower levels of support for girls' education, such as the Apostolic community, successful engagement with religious leaders was instrumental in creating an enabling environment for girls to participate in the programme, with AWET essential to mobilising this support.

Although progress towards mobilising positive gendered attitudes is promising, the consortium is conscious of the longer journey ahead, with programme monitoring data utilising KAP surveys still detecting a substantial minority of men who expressed regressive views. The programme has also encountered challenges in engaging men in men's clubs and intergenerational dialogues due to a lack of time and motivation. The consortium will continue to adapt to not only mobilise support but facilitate transformative shifts at community-level.

Strong partnerships with national and district-level stakeholders have been established and hold promise for the long-term and sustainable handover of SAGE's services

SAGE's collaboration with multiple government agencies at various levels has yielded tangible results and is one of SAGE's key achievements. The approval of its accelerated learning materials by MoPSE in April 2021 for use in schools and communities, as part of a suite of resources to complement distance learning during school closures, remains one of the programme's greatest contributions to the long-term provision of non-formal education in Zimbabwe. Through sharing of programme learning, joint monitoring visits and engagement in national fora, the SAGE programme has established itself as a programme that is able to demonstrate to government agencies the operational reality of implementing their policies as they aim to provide inclusive, equitable and quality education for highly marginalised learners. These small steps are contributing to ensuring the larger policy environment is made more responsive to girls' needs.

SAGE's effective collaboration and engagement at district level have also facilitated a shift towards service delivery being taken over by MoPSE staff, a practical step towards meaningful sustainability ahead of the programme closing in July 2023.

By maximising its community-driven approach, the SAGE programme has offered an example of how community-based volunteers can maintain learning support through the most challenging of events. This level of independence and autonomy will aid the programme as it moves towards embedding a hub-specific focus through which hubs and their surrounding communities are taking ownership of their own activities and systematically reflecting on how they can strengthen support to learners. This has been bolstered by capacity building efforts through this alternative midline process and ongoing professional development activities which have enabled technical support for programme staff, hub volunteers and district-level MoPSE staff. Hub volunteers are now able to analyse and reflect on girls' learning data on a regular basis to identify strengths and gaps and differentiate their support. This capacity not only enhances individualised support but integrates well with SAGE's sustainability plan which aims for communities to continue supporting their hubs to operate beyond the end of the programme.

Overall, evidence collected through this innovative and creative alternative midline approach indicates that the SAGE model has made strong progress towards the attainment of its three key outcomes of learning, transition and sustainability.

For the SAGE consortium to be able to deliver services, enhance its monitoring of them, analyse and present those findings whilst mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout 2020-2022 is a testament to the SAGE consortium's commitment to learning within itself and for the girls, communities and government partners it supports. The SAGE consortium has valued the opportunity to utilise evaluation funds in what transpired to be an innovative, flexible and collaborative approach that has strengthened programme learning and the capacity of the wider consortium. It has also recognised and amplified the experiences and voices of girls, who have been "been out of sight and too silent for too long". Cumulatively, this assists the SAGE consortium and wider stakeholders to continue to strengthen the quality of the services they deliver to out-of-school girls in Zimbabwe.

8.1 LEARNINGS FROM ALTERNATIVE MIDLINE APPROACH TO BE INCORPORATED INTO ENDLINE

Conducting the alternative midline approach internally has generated a considerable amount of learning which SAGE intends to use to inform the endline process.

1. The enhanced monitoring approach and capacity building provided by the OU has proved invaluable in boosting the SAGE team's qualitative data collection capabilities. Prior to the investment in enhanced monitoring through the alternative midline, qualitative data capture on SAGE was a limited component of programme monitoring. Through the investment and training in qualitative approaches, qualitative monitoring is becoming an integral part of SAGE's MERL approach, as evidenced through the MSC stories and girl-to-girl learning conversations drawn upon for this report. As the programme approaches the endline phase, SAGE will continue to utilise qualitative methodologies to aid the programme's in-depth understanding of its effectiveness and impact at intermediate outcome and outcome level, and to contextualise and nuance quantitative findings. The consortium will continue its focus on qualitative evidence collection through the collection of case stories and MSC stories and with further capacity building to be conducted internally and determined by analysis of capacity development. In particular, the programme aims to collect qualitative data that will support SAGE to explore and understand aspects of girls' and CEs' experiences of teaching and learning and factors influencing girls' learning results at a district and sub-group level. Building on the internal qualitative capacity developed through the alternative midline, SAGE will seek to ensure that qualitative approaches are at the core of the endline methodology, drawing on data collected internally, and supporting the programme to tell a meaningful story which places girls' and community members' voices at the centre.
2. The qualitative data collected at midline has predominantly focused on girls participating in SAGE. This has partly been a deliberate choice and partly driven by logistical constraints (often due to COVID-19) which have restricted access to other stakeholders. Qualitative evidence generated through interviews with SAGE girls, in addition to a limited number of testimonies from male community members, have generated initial insights into ways in which communities engage with and perceive SAGE as well as broader attitudes towards the value of education for out-of-school girls and young women and how these intersect with gender norms. Incorporating these voices more fully into ongoing monitoring between now and endline and the endline itself will provide SAGE with a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of the programme's engagement with men and boys and the sustainability of its GESI transformative approach.

3. The alternative midline process has enabled the rollout and testing of a learning progress assessment model which enables analysis at hub, district and programme level to strengthen the programme's understanding of girls' progress towards literacy and numeracy outcomes. By investing in capacity building, the SAGE programme has been able to move from the theoretical model of the LPAs to practical implementation. This has led to the utilisation of results by hub educators to guide individualised support, the identification of wider learning needs at a sub-task and sub-group level, and as an internal mechanism to chart girls' learning progress. The consortium is proud of these achievements to date and eager to further enhance its rollout. Ahead of the endline evaluation, the consortium will seek to maintain activities started from this alternative midline process, and the enhanced scope of work by the Open University on utilising learning progress assessments will continue its focus on capacity building specifically on results from the MPA to EPA stage.

However, there have been considerable challenges with the rollout of the LPA model, which is an ongoing learning process for the SAGE team at Hub, district, PIZ and consortium level. SAGE's rolling enrolment model necessarily means that IPAs are administered on a continuous basis as girls enter the programme, which has implications for CE capacity. There have been delays in some instances of LPA data being shared from Hub level to the programme and M&E teams. The iterative nature of the LPA model also poses challenges for the analysis process as the team is working with a continuously changing dataset, with data coming in from different hubs and districts at different times. Going forward, and in line with SAGE's adaptive management approach, a priority area for the programme is to tighten the loop between data collection, sharing, analysis, dissemination and feedback to ensure that LPA data is being maximised to inform the programme's strategic approach to teaching and learning and ultimately strengthen the support offered to SAGE girls. Although the foundations of this have been installed through capacity building, technical documents and through the current trialling of the model, the consortium acknowledges that learning will guide necessary improvements.

4. The Learning Progress Assessment data analysed and reported on for this midline has generated some preliminary findings on the learning levels of Cohorts 1 and 2 at a particular point in time. This has allowed for comparisons within each of the IPA and MPA datasets at a sub-task, sub-group and district level. Within this report, we have also been able to outline how learning data has been used at hub level to inform volunteers' understanding of individual girls' learning and identify areas of strength and weakness which has enabled them to tailor and differentiate their pedagogical approach. Based on analyses of equivalent subtasks from baseline, we have also been able to map these to IPA and MPA data and to project tentative conclusions about girls' learning levels according to length of exposure to the programme (as noted throughout, these assessments are of different girls in two different cohorts). As the data collected for this report is cross-sectional rather than longitudinal, we have, however, not been able to track girls' learning journeys over time and draw conclusions about the impact of the programme on individual girls' learning outcomes. At endline, we will have longitudinal data across IPA, MPA and (depending on timeframes) EPA for individual girls which will facilitate the tracking of individual girls in certain cohorts. Within this approach, we will nevertheless need to take into account the complexity of the SAGE cohort model, in particular:

   - The rolling enrolment approach which means that girls within the same cohort join the programme at different times;
   - The implications of the screening process, principally the fact that girls start the programme at different stages of learning and with a variety of prior experience and this determines the module in which they are enrolled;
   - The implications this has for girls' length of exposure to the programme. For example, if following the screening tool a girl joins the programme in module 1c, she will take the MPA after being exposed to the programme for a shorter period of time than a girl who joins at module 1a, due to her existing learning levels being higher;
   - As a result of the factors above, the programme expects to have different sets of learning data for different cohorts at endline.

   Overall, the unique and complex nature of the SAGE cohort will entail specific and detailed considerations for how we track girls' learning outcomes at endline.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations were developed through a participatory and reflective process involving the wider SAGE consortium. The emerging findings were shared with the consortium for review and each partner engaged in an internal reflection exercise to consider actionable recommendations to take forward based on these findings. The consortium then conducted a participatory workshop to share the outcomes of each partner's internal reflections and to create space for discussion. The recommendations below are for new actions and originate from this participatory reflection and discussion process. They are also complemented with existing adaptative measures which feature in previous chapters.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO AID LEARNING OUTCOMES

1 Enhancing SAGE's existing 'Communities of Effective Practice'

The SAGE programme, with the technical leadership of the Open University, has established a strong and responsive continuous professional development model which has supported volunteers to implement the SAGE teaching and learning strategy via high-quality delivery using SAGE teaching and learning materials by utilising gender-responsive, inclusive and learner-centred pedagogies in pre- and current COVID periods. This has been aided by the establishment of a 'community of effective practice' which draws upon a range of modalities including direct and virtual trainings, mentoring support, reflective tools, lesson observations, videos of good practice and partnerships with Teacher Training Colleges and district-level MoPSE representatives.

This process has indicated areas for volunteers to further develop and suggested adjustments of existing modalities, with those that support SAGE's sustainability outcomes of particular interest.

As presented in Section 7.1, LPA findings indicated a trend for lower learner scores in numeracy than literacy at IPA and MPA. Based on this, the consortium recommends pairing district teams based on identified areas of weakness and strength to further facilitate the sharing of expertise within SAGE's communities of reflective practice. Additionally, the consortium will look to develop online CPD trainings focused on numeracy and incorporating EPEL videos. CE trainings will look to include a focus on specific numeracy sub-tasks to identify where the issues are, both in terms of girls' understanding and teaching practices.

To support learners who are already attaining yellow band scores (Grade 5+) at MPA stage, the consortium recommends supporting educators to understand how they can provide extension work to stretch and motivate higher-achieving girls through differentiation of activities. As extension activities are already incorporated into SAGE's ATL modules, this support will be undertaken through refresher training.

2 Strengthening learning support to specific sub-groups

In terms of further support required, IPA findings indicate that girls with disabilities enter the programme with the lowest literacy and numeracy attainment levels and hence have the furthest to travel in their learning to attain SAGE's aim of Grade 5 equivalent proficiency. As noted in the Learning Chapter under adaptions, the programme will continue to encourage volunteers to utilise the SAGE Disability Directory, which was designed to support volunteers' understanding of girls' individual needs. However, the consortium recommends maximising its existing partnership with Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) to aid the assessment of learners with disabilities as part of existing screening processes and in LPAs.

This would strengthen the obtaining of solid and reliable results to reflect the true picture of the learners' performance level and provide a mechanism for communities to understand how to support learners with disabilities even after SAGE closes. The consortium also recognises the benefits of further targeted hub-specific CPD on how to support learners with disabilities, which would build on learning gained from existing centralised programme-wide trainings. This would enable hub volunteers to work together on issues they recognise as most pertinent in their hubs based on the specific needs of their enrolled girls with disabilities.

Given the lower scores at MPA stage for girls who have never been to school, it is recommended that CEs identify girls from this group and provide targeted support upon entry. It would also be beneficial for the programme to explore in more detail the specific barriers to learning for this group. Feedback gained in the early implementation of the MTRP indicated that girls who had never been to school struggled to study independently in times of limited movement. As the programme seeks to enhance its home-based learning component, it is envisaged this group will particularly benefit from this adaption which will engage and strengthen parents' capacity to support learners at the home-level.

3 Increasing learners' awareness of SAGE objectives

The girl-to-girl conversations illustrate the pride, value and identity that girls develop within the SAGE programme and in becoming a learner. The diverse benefits that learning brings them, from reading text messages to being able to calculate profits, is testament to the holistic model that SAGE has created.

The challenge of this holistic model is maintaining a consistent understanding of what SAGE can provide and its objectives, which if misunderstood can also impact on learner engagement and wider enrolment and attendance. The feedback of some girls, particularly older girls and those with children, indicating that they perceive SAGE as too elementary for them and consequently feel that there is stigma attached to their attendance, or their preference for ISOP over ATL, challenges SAGE's core principles that foundational literacy and numeracy underpin girls' progression into life and vocational skills.

The consortium recommends follow-up internal analysis and monitoring to understand which girls relayed these views and if they are girls who have entered at higher school experience levels based on their results in the programme's first screening tool which was less rigorous, or following the rollout of SAGE's current screening tool which enables girls performing under Grade 5 equivalent in at least one subject to enter. Furthermore, monitoring would aid understanding in whether these views persist through module 1 and through to module 2 in both subjects and in all sub-tasks, or feature more in the earlier stages of girls' learning journeys.

For girls who struggle to understand SAGE's objectives and the linkage between foundational skills and life and vocational skills (the three components of SAGE being ATL, CoGE and ISOP), the consortium recommends further messaging and sensitisation at the community and hub-level to link the components and strengthen girls' and communities' understanding of how the ATL curriculum can facilitate girls' transition into vocational and employment pathways. This would emphasise all three components' crucial impact on their individual success, realistic timeframes for accessing ISOP, and the long-term benefits of SAGE. This would also aid those communities and learners from ethnic groups who suggested support had diminished when SAGE's lack of learner incentives became clear.

4 Facilitating Safe and Gender Equitable and Socially Inclusive Learning Environments to aid attendance

By continuously seeking to understand the barriers external and internal to SAGE, SAGE aims to facilitate safe and inclusive learning environments for girls across a wide range of ethnicities, ages, identities and circumstances. Maintaining regular attendance of girls has been an ongoing challenge within SAGE, not aided by the disruptive onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Girls' feedback from the research study related to bullying and violence in the hubs prompted thorough investigation and follow-up measures and highlighted the need for consistent understanding by learners and volunteers of appropriate behavioural standards and reporting mechanisms. Current recommendations include monthly awareness raising to girls on safeguarding standards and reporting mechanisms by reinforcing messages currently in modules; including a module on bullying and hub codes of conduct in CoGE sessions; and refresher training for hub volunteers on safeguarding standards and their code of conduct. Monitoring by SAGE staff will also be strengthened to assess the impact of trainings and messaging from the delivery-level to the girls' understanding.

In relation to reports of tension in some sessions due to mixed age and ability-grouping, based on wider programme learning, the consortium believes mixed sessions can be effective for learning but recognises that issues can arise from this model. Therefore, it is recommended that a more hub/context-specific approach is required whereby if incidents occur and hub monitoring findings report concerns, then hub teams may be supported to reflect on whether a return to non-mixed groups is preferable.

In relation to girls' reports of attendance being hindered by sickness and menstrual hygiene management, the programme is challenged in terms of budget and availability of sustainable approaches. The programme is not in the position to provide sanitary items or pain relief. However, it is committed to referring girls to available local SRHR services and other programmes within and outside of PIZ and will renew efforts to identify more community-based sustainable approaches such as self-production of reusable pads. We can commit to linking girls to other programmes both within and outside PIZ.

For girls with disabilities who reported challenges accessing hubs, the team will seek to ensure these girls are fully aware of and linked to small group or door-to-door sessions. However, it is recognised that this reduces opportunities for peer interaction. The team will explore the possibility of girls with disabilities being able to support site selection of future satellite hubs.

Key to ensuring hubs meet girls' needs is learning through follow-up activities what prevents girls from attending. Given 61% of girls surveyed reported not being aware of SAGE's follow-up measures, the consortium recommends increasing follow-up processes through its MERL team as well as through sustainability meetings held with HDCs at hub level, which reinforce the role of HDCs in supporting following up of girls identified as at risk of dropping out.

5 Shifting harmful norms and attitudes

Findings in this alternative midline process illustrate promising and positive experiences of support from the wider community and men following involvement in SAGE's CoGE focused activities.

Recommendations are for the content and discussion topics of male engagement and boys' CoGE sessions to be adjusted to mobilise the shift of entrenched negative gender norms related to women's leadership and GBV as well as on sharing of household responsibilities to aid girls' participation in SAGE, in response to the findings from the attendance study that girls' household chore burden was the biggest barrier to attendance. This would be particularly useful in Apostolic communities where a higher proportion of girls cited a lack of time as a barrier to attending SAGE sessions than from other religious groups.

There is an acknowledgment that behaviour change can also be achieved through methods other than delivery of the CoGE curriculum. Many social norms approaches recognise and promote the power of role models in the change process. Role models may persuade people to adopt new norms, condemn existing norms and/or simply make an alternative seem feasible where previously it was unimaginable. They may be community leaders, religious figures or other boys, girls or adults who challenge particular norms or who have done so in the past and can be seen as living proof that adjusting attitudes and behaviour can lead to positive outcomes. Therefore, the SAGE programme could look to publicise role models to promote the benefits of new behaviour that complement CoGE activities and align to its gender-transformative approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO AID TRANSITION OUTCOMES

6 Expanding post-training support

SAGE's vocational skills component (ISOP) has proven to be an extremely popular and motivating component. However, findings suggest that more expansive support may be valuable to girls after the training period to consolidate their skills into viable self/employment and by maximising linkages with existing services, government departments or supportive networks. These are to include the development of a 'Transition Guide' to aid signposting to further advisory services, facilitating access to local financial services, providing further information in management, marketing, technology, resources etc. through government departments, linking with and mainstreaming into local economic development programmes (such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs Development Fund and Bank) and follow-up visits from these wider advisory and technical services.

7 Mobilising community support

Adequate and appropriate equipment is essential to the production of quality products that are viable and competitive in the market. Cognisant of its budget constraints, the consortium proposed that the ISOP component strengthen its business development element and self-help, savings and credit groups as a strategy for equipping girls with a means to access capital and hence obtain profits that could assist them to purchase equipment and other resources that can help them grow, diversify and sustain their small businesses. This builds on programme learning which has found some hubs have independently organised themselves into savings and lendings groups and have managed to purchase extra resources to ensure continuity and growth of ISOP.

8 Supporting transition to formal school

Whilst it is acknowledged the majority of learners have shown a preference to transition to employment/self-employment, the programme is also conscious of the fact that there are younger girls (10-14 years) who require support to enrol into formal schooling as per the provisions of MoPSE policies. To facilitate transition to formal school, support to learners will be provided in two ways: firstly through BEAM[52] support and secondly by signposting girls to other organisations supporting learners with school fees. Regarding BEAM support, the programme will leverage the support of the established Hub Development Committees (HDCs) to facilitate the enrolling of learners in formal school. This will be accomplished by linking HDCs and community level BEAM selection committees to co-opt SAGE learners under the BEAM support scheme.

A community mapping exercise will be conducted by the project to identify existing opportunities from other organisations that may be focusing on offering school fees assistance to out-of-school learners to enrol back into formal schools. The programme will engage with the identified organisations to facilitate girls to be considered for support.

The programme will look to further assess the impact of age as a factor on transition pathway preference. This will enable the SAGE programme and similar NFE programmes to balance efforts and accommodate transition focus between two substantially different age-groups and direct these girls to the appropriate government partners for all viable pathways, which in the case of Zimbabwe sit under MoPSE and MoY.

Underpinning all this support will be raising awareness to girls and parents/caregivers about the New Education Act[53] which prohibits schools from turning away learners for non-payment of school fees and on the basis of pregnancy.

52 Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM), is a government led scheme to support orphans and vulnerable children with school fees payments. Each school has a BEAM selection committee which lead the selection of eligible girls at community level.

53 *New Education Act, 2020 Section 68C(i)*

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUSTAINABILITY OUTCOMES

9 Enhancing the sustainability of the CoGE component

As highlighted in its findings, the CoGE component has demonstrated its value in improving girls' self-efficacy and would benefit from strengthened partnerships and community linkages to ensure these changes and reach can be sustained post-programme closure. The consortium recommends strengthening links with the most appropriate partners that will own, reinforce and support the intervention and ensure its impact. These include the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MWACSMED), traditional and religious leaders, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and women's rights organisations. Although the SAGE programme has been engaging with the MWACSMED, as demonstrated by the role of District Ward Coordinators in the delivery of training (an approach adopted across all SAGE training), there is a need to strengthen that engagement by ensuring that CoGE clubs are integrated in MWACSMED's action plans at community level including the recommendation for the involvement of Community Development Coordinators (CDCs), who are government staff, in the facilitation of the male engagement groups. MWACSMED is the parent ministry under which CoGE clubs fall, hence their role will be essential to facilitate integration and recognition of CoGE clubs within their community level structures.

Other forums which the SAGE consortium believes could be of value in strengthening government engagement would be through the participation of the programme in the national-level Education Coordinating Group as a platform to advance SAGE's influencing agenda. This would be aided by the support of the FCDO Zimbabwe office to gain access to this forum. This is in addition to the existing participation in national-level forums such as ECOZI and the Education Cluster.

10 Sustainability of SAGE's Learning approach

The programme has tested innovations by offering alternative learning support pathways as part of COVID-19 adaptations and developed models around NFE delivery aligned to the updated curriculum's objective of having learners exiting the education system with competency skills. These approaches offer great opportunities for strengthening the implementation of an inclusive NFE policy. To facilitate the recognition of the tested innovations at system level by the MoPSE, the programme will focus on delivering multi-stakeholder learning events, starting with one scheduled for March 2022. These multi-stakeholder learning events will create an opportunity to disseminate results such as those in this report and for relevant stakeholders to learn about the programme's positive impact on the delivery of learning opportunities to hardest to reach marginalised girls. It is hoped that through such learning events, SAGE's programme learning will support the effective rollout of an inclusive, relevant and quality NFE policy in Zimbabwe.

10. ANNEXES

The Annexes listed below are available in the Attachments Panel of Acrobat Reader. To view them go to View > Show/Hide > Navigation Panes > Attachments.

Annex 1: Inception report

Annex 2: Logframe

Annex 3: Theory of Change

Annex 4: Mapping of sub-tasks from baseline to IPA and MPA

Annex 5: Cameo case studies

Annex 6: MSC stories

Annex 7: Externally-commissioned research study

Annex 8: SAGE Learning Progress Assessment strategy

Annex 9: Draft Learning about Learning ToR

Annex 10: Sub-group data analysis

Annex 11: SAGE baseline evaluation report and sub-group analysis

Annex 12: Summary of District-level LPA workshops

Annex 13: AWET KII report

For children and equality for girls

Plan International UK
Finsgate,
5-7 Cranwood Street,
London,
EC1V 9LH

www.plan-uk.org
@PlanUK
policy@plan-uk.org
T: 0300 777 9777

Registered charity no: 276035