

Final reflections

Achievements and lessons learned

TEAM Girl Malawi,
Link Education International

MALAWI

AUGUST 2018 – OCTOBER 2023



Girls'
Education
Challenge



LINK
EDUCATION

Link Education: Basigiri-based

“The project has been helpful to the children in the community by making sure that they are safe from any kind of abuses.”

Community member



● Malawi

What did the TEAM Girl Malawi project do?

In 2018, 2.3 million children were identified as being out of school in Malawi.¹ The number of out-of-school children further increased by the prevalence of child labour², the aftermath of COVID-19, and the impact of Cyclone Freddy in March 2023, which forced 724,709 learners to stop attending classes.³ Existing education challenges – such as poverty, poor infrastructure, inadequate teaching and learning materials, lack of qualified teachers etc. – have been amplified and enrolment has decreased and dropouts have grown.⁴

The Transformational Empowerment of Adolescent Marginalised Girls in Malawi (TEAM Girl Malawi) project aimed to improve learning and life chances for some of the most marginalised young people in Malawi. The project reached 6,300 (5,250 girls and 1,050 boys) highly marginalised learners aged 10 to 19 years who had never been to school or who had dropped out of school without gaining functional literacy and numeracy skills.

TEAM Girl Malawi was implemented by Link Education International in partnership with Link Community Development Malawi, Theatre for a Change, Supreme Sanitary Pads, CUMO Microfinance, and CGA Technologies between 2018 and 2023. The project recognised the multiple intersecting barriers to learning faced by marginalised learners – particularly by girls and children with disability – such as extreme poverty, child labour, early marriage, pregnancy and childcare. In order to tackle these challenges, the project implemented four key interventions across 65 communities in two rural districts (Dedza and Mchinji) and one urban district (Lilongwe) of Malawi:

1. Community-based Complementary Basic Education Centres (CBEs) to provide high quality, inclusive and gender responsive education.
2. Girls' Clubs to provide girls with knowledge of their sexual and reproductive health and rights and improve their life skills and social and emotional learning.
3. Support for transition into primary school and vocational training.
4. Support to families, community members and government staff.

“I am now able to read and write. I want to encourage my fellow learners not to give up.”

Girl



¹ The National Education Sector Investment Plan, 2020-2030

² [Malawi: Children working on tobacco farms remain out of school, say UN experts | OHCHR](#)

³ Malawi 2023 Tropical Cyclone Freddy Post-Disaster Needs Assessment

⁴ 2022 Malawi Education Statistics Report

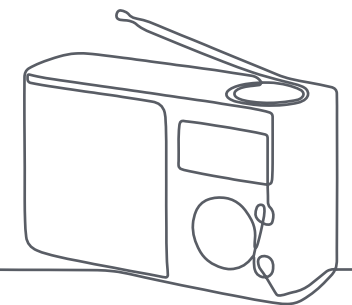
How did the TEAM Girl Malawi project adapt during COVID-19?

In response to COVID-19, TEAM Girl Malawi strengthened its adaptive management approach. The project's adaptive management cycle was designed to capture and share information and learning across the project stakeholders through recurrent meetings. During these meetings stakeholders would review all project components including attendance and learning data disaggregated by gender, disability, orphanhood and child marriage. Participants also discussed child protection and safeguarding issues and plans for the next term.⁵ These meetings helped to develop a sense of ownership among stakeholders and were useful in engaging with all project stakeholders such as the government, the consortium partners, the communities, and the learners. Using internal project data and evidence, the adaptive management meetings at community, district, and national levels helped inform timely and collective project decision-making, which supported the improvement of the quality and effectiveness of the project activities and outcomes. TEAM Girl Malawi used the adaptive management approach to review and reflect on progress and challenges and make necessary adjustments to project workplans and budgets. These included:

- Development and airing of COVID-19 awareness programmes on our Tisinthe radio programme. This reflected an initial rapid assessment among learners and their parents mainly to bridge the knowledge gap in COVID-19 management but also to provide education on roles for continuity of learning.
- Introduction of phone counselling sessions to both learners and their parents/guardians. Due to limitation on travel remote counselling proved a best strategy for supporting survivors and perpetrators on reported cases.
- Online recording and production of the radio drama and other components was started was adopted by the radio team. This was followed by the airing of Tisinthe live radio broadcasts without community listeners/listening clubs convening together but rather listening in their individual homes.
- CBE programme adopted a home learning approach – learners would come to the centre once a week for marking of weekly tasks and to collect hard copy weekly deliverables for the oncoming week.
- Due to limited contact and as a result of the rapid assessment to co-create a project with the stakeholders, learning areas / subjects were reduced from seven to four, merging some subjects. The merging focused on maintaining key content for the CBE programme intact and devolving “home learning” as part of core subject delivery.

“I am excited to go back to primary school. I will work hard so that I can become a teacher one day.”

Girl



⁵ [Adaptive-Management-Approach-Paper.pdf](#)
(linkeducation.org.uk)

// TAKONDWA'S STORY

Takondwa is a young girl with cerebral palsy who participated in the TEAM Girl Malawi Community Based Education (CBE) programme. She has multiple disabilities that affect her feet, hands and speech. Her family noticed these challenges when she was one year old and could not stand, hold objects or make sounds. She developed physically, but still needed support to sit upright. Her grandmother is her main caregiver and companion, while her mother works to provide for the family.

When Takondwa was eight years old, during a community health outreach visit, she was referred for physiotherapy services at the local hospital. The exercises helped her to improve her posture and head control. In 2022, she was selected to join the CBE programme in her area. Her family was hesitant about her learning potential, but they agreed to enrol her. The CBE programme staff explained to them that learning is not only academic, but also social and personal. They said that learning can help girls with disabilities to develop self-esteem and independence.

Takondwa reaches school on a wheelchair that the project provided. There, she met another girl of her age, Sherifa, who speaks the same language as her and helps her with her needs during the classes. She was welcomed by her classmates and teachers, who interact with her easily. She can sit upright for some time or lean on a mat with arm support and keep her head steady throughout the lessons. Her grandmother trusts the learning centre staff and the other children to take care of her.

Both at home and school, Takondwa has shown remarkable progress in her communication and interaction abilities. She can make sounds and gestures to express herself and respond to others. She smiles a lot and has good hearing. She can also grasp and hold objects between her arms and body, thanks to the exercises that the school provides. She can hold a pen and draw lines, strokes and circles of different sizes and shapes. She enjoys writing in the sand. Takondwa is a wonderful and inspiring person to be with and watch. Her family is very proud of the confidence she has gained.

// JOYCE'S STORY

Joyce is an 18-year-old girl from a rural village in Malawi. She has five siblings and an elderly father who depend on her. She dropped out of school before finishing primary education to help her family with farming and other household chores. Joyce joined the TEAM Girl Malawi Community Based Education (CBE) programme and vocational training and learned about literacy, numeracy, and life skills, including sexual reproductive health and rights. After that, she also enrolled in a life skills programme on how to make reusable pads, bags and school uniforms. The programme was offered by Supreme, a local partner of TEAM Girl Malawi.

Joyce developed a passion for tailoring and wanted to pursue further education in this field. She applied to a Technical Training College and passed the written entry exam. The course she wanted to take normally requires a Junior Certificate of Education, but Joyce was able to use the certificates she obtained from the CBE and vocational training programmes as alternative qualifications. Joyce is now in her final term at the Technical Training College, preparing for her exams and internship.

“Sewing dresses has always been a passion of mine, ever since I was a little girl. I wanted to create beautiful garments that would make me feel confident and happy. However, I did not have the opportunity to learn how to sew until I joined the TEAM Girl Malawi project. The project taught me the skills and techniques of sewing, as well as the business aspects of tailoring. It also provided me with a sewing machine and materials to start my own business.”



What did the TEAM Girl Malawi project achieve?

Improved literacy and numeracy. Results from the Endline Evaluation revealed that the project had an impact on girls' literacy skills. Girls' improvements in literacy were measured against the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA). The percentage of girls who improved their aggregate EGRA score from midline to endline was 76.9%. The mean aggregate for EGRA scores improved significantly from 31.6 at baseline to 52.7 at endline. Endline results also showed that girls improved in numeracy. Girls' improvements in numeracy were measured against the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA). Overall, 76.9% of girls improved their aggregate numeracy score from a mean aggregate score of 32.3 at midline to a mean aggregate score of 63.2 at endline.

Improved teaching. The project provided both pre-service and in-service capacity building trainings and support to facilitators to deliver the CBE curriculum using gender-responsive pedagogy and inclusive and child-centred teaching methodologies to meet the needs of diverse learners. According to the endline evaluation, all facilitators had integrated these methodologies into their teaching at endline. Also, all CBE facilitators surveyed at endline reported that their perceptions of gender had changed, which was a significant increase from baseline.

Improved attendance and learning. Results from the Endline Evaluation showed that the project managed to improve attendance to CBEs, Girls' Clubs and vocational and business training. This resulted in the project achieving an average of 71% attendance. Also, 92.6% of the girls surveyed at endline reported that barriers to learning had been tackled.

Enhanced transition and life skills for marginalised girls. At endline, 54.8% of the girls supported by the project indicated that they would pursue self-employment, which was a significant increase from baseline (33.3%). According to the Endline Evaluation, the majority of girls (74.1%) supported improved their life skills including sexual reproductive health, self-esteem and self-confidence, in comparison to their baseline scores. Comparative analysis between baseline and endline showed there was a significant boost in life skills scores, increasing from an average index score of 1.8 to 2.3.

Contributed to improved education policy. According to the Endline Evaluation, Ministry officials were familiar with the project and believed the ministry had interest in scaling up CBE across Malawi. Close partnership with government ministries and involvement in Technical Working Groups at national level positioned TEAM Girl Malawi to influence relevant CBE policy at national level including through organising the first CBE Conference in Malawi.

Built partnerships at community level. TEAM Girl Malawi supported parents, communities and schools in promoting girls' education. Linkages with the district councils and disability organisations were created or strengthened to increase learning and learning outcomes for marginalised girls. At endline, 86% of community members reported that CBE would have lasting impact on their community and 88% of girls reported that their participation in the project had improved their future.

“I have been inspired that I can do anything, this school gave me the opportunity to know about child rights and where to report and also I have learned how to read and write.”

Girl





“TEAM Girl Malawi taught me that educating a girl child is key to changing our communities.”

Community leader

The TEAM Girl Malawi project in numbers



Number of headteachers
(286 male, 151 female)
trained in inclusive education

437

Number of learners reached
across three districts

6,300

(5,250 girls and 1,050 boys)



Number of girls that
participated in Girls' Clubs

5,250



Learners that had
various types
and degrees
of disability

13%

14.7% of enrolled girls had never been to school before.

529 learners provided with assistive devices.

324 Individualised Education Programmes developed.

3 curriculum reviews conducted with the Ministry of Education (MoE).

34,217 copies of learning materials distributed to support teaching and learning.

366 CBE facilitators trained in gender-responsive and inclusive child-centred pedagogies.

5,250 girls provided with sanitary pads and underwear.

1,262 learners provided with school packs (uniforms and learning materials).

2,290 community members and school staff trained on child protection and safeguarding.

634 (530 girls, 104 boys) learners graduated from vocational training.

Over **35** community buildings upgraded to be used as training facilities.

118 CBE parents supported through Vocational Training pilot programmes.

1,902 learners transitioned enrolled entrepreneurship.

954 (647 girls, 97 boys) learners graduated from entrepreneurship training.

94 facilitators trained to deliver entrepreneurship training.

To what extent did the TEAM Girl Malawi project deliver value for money?

The TEAM Girl Malawi project offered good value for money according to the GEC Fund Manager's assessment. Most project activities were relevant, with strong equity, particularly the community-based education. Most barriers that girls experience to access education were addressed except for some that were not in the scope of the project, such as lack of vocational training options and barriers of farming season duties and food insecurity. Beneficiaries were selected through working closely with communities and ensuring girls with disabilities were included. Highly marginalised girls were also identified and included. The project had some strong findings, including community attitudes improved, and demonstrated good efficiencies and adaptive management. At closure TEAM Girl Malawi had built foundations for systems level sustainability, including some positive ministry signals about the community-based education model and the safeguarding processes embedded in communities. The project set-up and fixed costs incurred were shared with the Malawi Government and would form strong foundations for continuity of the community-based education model if future funding is secured.

“I used to walk on sticks, but with the help of a wheelchair, I can now go to different places including school and marketplace.”

Boy

What did the TEAM Girl Malawi project learn?

Adopting adaptive and flexible approached to implementation. The adaptive management approach adopted by TEAM Girl Malawi proved useful in soliciting stakeholder feedback and input on the project implementation and adaptations. Furthermore, the project used feedback and recommendations from the regular meetings held with the communities to respond to contextual changes and the needs of the learners and their communities and adapt the project interventions accordingly. For example, the training provided to facilitators was adapted and improved following up from these meetings.⁶

Supporting transition. Programmes need to also be aware that the movement of learners of this age group can be very high and impact enrolment and retention figures. To facilitate smooth transition, learner handover processes were developed by the transition task team to support learners throughout their transition phase, specifically starting transition processes early enough in the education cycle. In subsequent cohorts, TEAM Girl Malawi learned that the process is more effective handled on a case-by-case basis, i.e., integrating the individual choices of learners, merged with guided skills identified to map a transition pathway for each learner. Linkages are also critical with external service providers for a comprehensive understanding and continued support considering the vulnerability of most CBE graduates.

Building girls' agency, life skills and decision-making. Providing girls with knowledge of their sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) is key to increase access to SRHR services available to girls, such as mobile health clinic visits and open day activities on SRHR services. Providing girls with life skills is a key element of CBE interventions, especially for girls who are not interested in returning to mainstream education.

Tackling poverty. It is important to recognise that the root cause of girls not being able to go to or stay in school is mostly a series of poverty related factors. Programme designs should think carefully about what incentives or interventions would support girls' learning either tackling this root cause interlinked to education / learning or clear transition pathways that could transform poverty-stricken girls to become independent, tackling poverty is thus a critical component to adolescent youth programming. Learning from the first cohort, TEAM Girl Malawi made adaptations to provide food, soap and economic opportunities for parents/guardians to ensure they attain sufficient resources to keep their girls in school, but also establishing linkages with external service providers.

Operating through existing systems and structures. TEAM Girl Malawi worked on utilising existing systems and structures at community and national levels. Working closely with community leaders, schools and government officials is key to maximise the impact and deliver a quality and inclusive education for marginalised girls. The project also built linkages with other public and private sectors – such as health, labour, sports, gender, agriculture – to create sustainable solutions that addressed the multiple barriers to learning faced by marginalised girls. Also, religious and cultural factors affecting education and communities were taken into account by the project. For example, market days and prayer days – which affected the delivery of some of the project activities – were considered during implementation. During the Endline Evaluation these integration systems were seen to have achieved strong value for money.



⁶ [Adaptive-Management-Approach-Paper.pdf](#)
(linkeducation.org.uk)

Keeping girls safe through strengthening safeguarding systems.

Building and/or strengthening safeguarding systems that prevent and respond to violence, abuse and exploitation that may occur in or around learning centres or communities is key to build trust among learners, families and communities, and ensure accountability for the provision and outcomes of inclusive education and programming. Ensuring girls are safe and protected increase their wellbeing, participation and learning outcomes, especially for girls who face multiple barriers, such as poverty, disability or other marginalisation factors. Protecting girls and providing them with life skills and SRHR is key to tackle barriers to education such as unintended pregnancies and early marriages.

Building partnerships to ensure sustainability. Partnerships with ministries throughout the project life cycle ensured alignment to national policies and priorities and the possibility to influence the development of the CBE policy framework. TEAM Girl Malawi also leveraged connections with district councils, communities and parents to ensure adequate support for girls to access learning. Through these connections, the project managed to build trust and identified the needed resources for implementation. These partnerships also ensured that project interventions were relevant and sustained by project stakeholders being responsibilities, knowledge and resources shared among stakeholders.

Screening girls and developing Individualised Education Plans

(IEPs). Girls who were not able to either attend or to continue with school due to physical or mental disability were screened for accurate diagnosis of their limitations and appropriate assistance was provided. IEPs were developed for girls with special educational needs, with the content shared with parents/caregivers, which enabled them to better understand the ability and development of their girls as they continued supporting them on simple home assignments. It was understood that for some girls, there was very little or no academic achievement to be achieved, but social skills could improve allowing them to work and build positive social relationships.



Girls'
Education
Challenge



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Find out more: www.facebook.com/LinkEducationInt | www.girlseducationchallenge.org

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