Project Evaluation Report

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Notes:

Some annexes listed in the contents page of this document have not been included because of challenges with capturing them as an A4 PDF document or because they are documents intended for programme purposes only. If you would like access to any of these annexes, please enquire about their availability by emailing uk_girls_education_challenge@pwc.com.

Girls' Education Challenge

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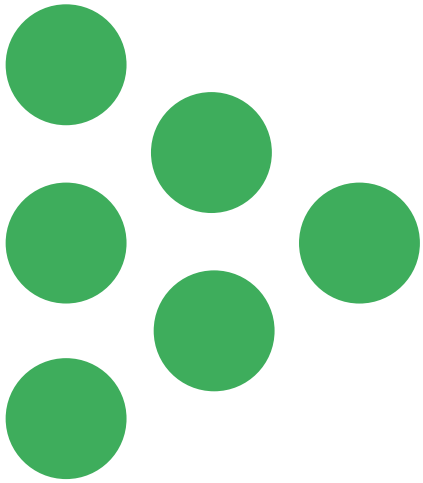
Endline Evaluation of the Girls' Access to Education, Girls' Education Challenge (GATE-GEC) Programme

Final Endline Report

November 2021

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)



Endline Evaluation of the Girls' Access to Education, Girls' Education Challenge (GATE-GEC) Programme

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AA	ActionAid
ASC	Annual School Census
BOG	Board of Governors
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
ENA	Rapid Education Needs Assessment
EPG	Education Partnership Group
EQ	Evaluation Question
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FM	Fund Manager
FQSE	Free Quality School Education
GATE	Girls' Access to Education
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GEC	Girls' Education Challenge
GER	Gross enrolment rate
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GII	The Index of Gender Inequality
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
HDI	Human Development Indicator
HI	Humanity and Inclusion
IfD	Institute for Development
Int.	International
IPE	Implementation and Process Evaluation
JSS	Junior Secondary School

LA	Learning Assistant
MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MGCA	Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MSW	Ministry of Social Welfare
MTRP	Medium-term Response Plan
NCTVA	National Council for Technical, Vocational and other Academic Awards
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NQFT	Newly-Qualified Female Teacher
OU	The Open University
PFA	Psychosocial First Aid
Plan	Plan International UK
PWRT	Pupil-Qualified Teacher Ratios
PS	Primary School
PV	Programme Volunteer
QA	Quality assurance
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMC	School Management Committee
SSS	Senior Secondary School
ST	Student Teacher
STRP	Short-term Response Plan
TOC	Theory of change
TOR	Terms of Reference
TSC	Teaching Service Commission
TTC	Teacher Training College

UK	United Kingdom
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association

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Executive Summary

Introduction

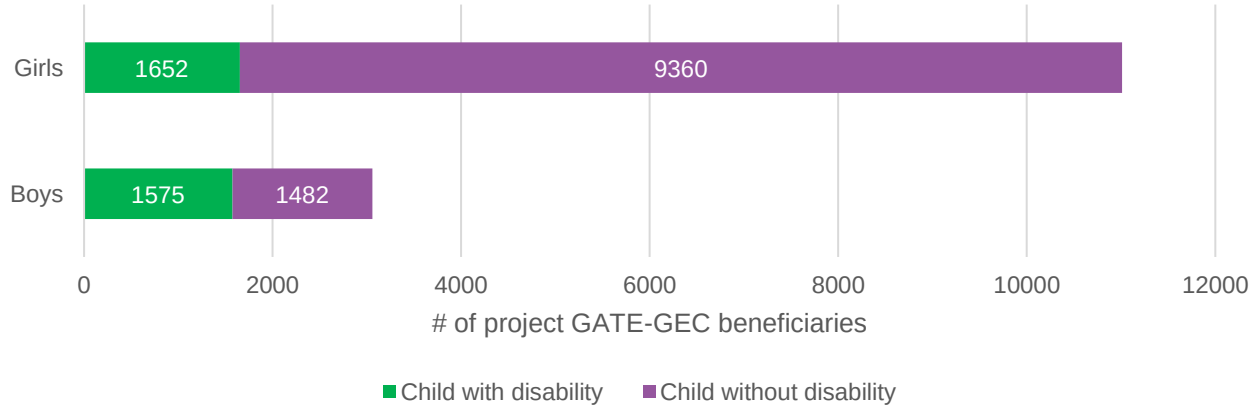
This report presents the findings from the endline evaluation of Girls' Access to Education: Girls' Education Challenge (GATE-GEC) project. The endline evaluation was undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and the Institute for Development Sierra Leone (IfD) between January and July 2021.

Funded through the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) portfolio of the United Kingdom's (UK) Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), GATE-GEC built on its predecessor project under GEC-1, which had been operational from 2013 to 2016. GATE-GEC aimed to support marginalised girls and children with disabilities in primary schools (PS) and junior secondary schools (JSS) in Sierra Leone to attend school, reach their full learning potential, learn in a safe and inclusive environment, and successfully transition to further education and beyond. Operating from 2017 to 2021, Plan International UK worked with Humanity and Inclusion, ActionAid, and the Open University to deliver the project across the districts of Kailahun, Karene, Kenema, Kono, Moyamba and Port Loko in Sierra Leone. In response to the outbreak of COVID-19, the project implemented a short-term response plan (STRP) and a subsequent medium-term response plan (MTRP) in order to adapt to the rapidly changing context.

Beneficiary population

An understanding of the beneficiary population derives from data from the beneficiary reverification survey, which was conducted by the GATE-GEC at the start of each school year (2017 – 2020). The survey captured data from two sets of populations: the **original cohort** of direct beneficiaries, who have been tracked longitudinally throughout the project, and the **expanded cohort** of initially indirect beneficiaries, who participated in and benefitted from project study groups alongside the original cohort and were additionally directly targeted and tracked as part of the STRP/MTRP interventions.

Figure 0.1 Summary of GATE-GEC beneficiary composition based on project data (2017-2021)[1]



[1] Source: 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 reverification data.

The analysis of this data confirmed that the GATE-GEC project reached a total of 14,069 beneficiaries across the project's lifetime across both cohorts in PS and JSS.2 This beneficiary population was comprised of a total of 11,012 direct female beneficiaries (girls, including girls with disabilities), 1,575 direct male beneficiaries (boys with disabilities) and reached a further 1,482 indirect male beneficiaries (boys). Of the beneficiary population, 40 percent were at the PS level (2,618 girls and 3,057 boys) and 60 percent (8,394 girls) were at the JSS level. Of girls, 15 percent were girls with disabilities; of boys, 52 percent were boys with disabilities, with a total of 23 percent of the population were identified as children with disabilities. The samples identified by the baseline and midline evaluations, the analysis of the location of the schools targeted by the project and the fact that it reached a higher proportion of children with disabilities than the national average3, demonstrate that the beneficiaries targeted by the project can be considered as marginalised.

In 2017, the original cohort included 6,586 beneficiaries. In the final year of the project, 9,049 beneficiaries were being reached, which included 7,593[4] as part of the expanded cohort and 1,566 of the remaining original cohort. This suggests that over time, a total of 5,020 beneficiaries left the project. While the project did not track the beneficiaries who left, the possible reasons for leaving include successful transition from JSS to senior secondary school, drop-out, or moving out of GATE-GEC project schools/districts. The majority of project leavers (67 percent) left at the JSS3 level. Looking longitudinally across the original cohort, the proportion of children with disability increased over time and the number of PS students (where the majority of children with disability have been targeted) amongst the original cohort remained high. This suggests that the reason for leaving the project were more likely due to the completion of JSS rather than drop-out in earlier grades and that children with disabilities were retained throughout the project.

Evaluation Design

The endline evaluation used a theory-based implementation and process evaluation approach to blend a systematic analysis of existing project monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) data and documentation with qualitative primary data, in order to capture an in-depth understanding of beneficiary experiences and the project's contribution to outcomes. Data collection took place in May 2021 in one JSS and one PS in each of the six operating districts of the GATE-GEC project, totalling 42 project beneficiaries and 20 school stakeholders. Data was also collected with project staff across all consortium partners and four key stakeholders.

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[2] The total figure is derived from the summation of the count of unique IDs for the original cohort of beneficiaries counted at the start of the project in 2017 with the expanded cohort counted in 2020. It should be noted that NFER's analysis differs slightly from the project's figures, with a difference of 110 beneficiaries. This discrepancy is likely due to differences as a results of data cleaning differences in the expanded cohort dataset, whereby NFER's analysis is not able to account for if entries were removed due to inaccuracies or duplicated entries under different IDs. We have adopted the project's more conservative figures as the final total of beneficiaries reached, but the subsequent analysis is based on our figures.

[3] The 2019 ASC found that approximately 15 percent of school aged children present a disability. For comparison, the 2017 MICS found that 23 percent of children in the country aged 5 to 17 (both in and out of school) had at least one functional disability.

[4] Note that the project has reported a slightly lower figure for the expanded cohort total of 7,483.

The following limitations should be noted, when interpreting the findings of the endline evaluation report,:

- **Evaluation design**: As a result of the outbreak of COVID-19 and related school closures, it was not possible to collect data on learning outcomes data or from a comparison group. The evaluation design was adapted from a quasi-experimental approach and representative sample. Therefore, the attribution of impact to the project cannot be confirmed within the scope of the evaluation. The adaptation of the evaluation design also meant that it was not possible to directly compare results from the baseline and midline. However, where possible, we draw upon previous evaluation results to inform the conclusions of our endline study.
- **Data sources and analysis:** The evaluation design utilised the extensive monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) data collected by the GATE-GEC project, including from the beneficiary reverification process conducted at the start of each school year throughout the project's lifetime. We worked closely with the MEL team to understand the existing quality assurance systems and to reconcile discrepancies emerging from analysis. The restrictions on international travel meant that enumerator training and data collection coordination was conducted remotely. Finally, the sample utilised for qualitative data collection was not representative and limited to beneficiaries currently in schools. However, the sample was designed to be purposive and to capture a diverse range of perspectives, particularly from beneficiary sub-groups.

Findings

The key findings are presented against the first two evaluation objectives. The first objective **took stock of the GATE-GEC project to examine the project's design and adaptation** by analysing the project's reach, on-going relevance and how well it was able to adapt to the changing needs of its beneficiaries. The second objective of the evaluation **examined the project's three intended outcomes of learning, transition, and sustainability** by documenting the experiences of the vulnerable and marginalised beneficiary groups. Additionally, we explored the available evidence from previous evaluations, project progress reporting, and project MEL data to demonstrate progress made over the life of the project and to assess the contribution of the project towards learning and transition, and the extent to which the project took steps to ensure that key innovations and interventions have a lasting change.

Objective 1: Project design and adaptation

The design of GATE-GEC has continued the progress of GEC-1 and its focus on intersectionality and safeguarding and child protection, strongly differentiated it from other projects in Sierra Leone

The design of GATE-GEC continued the progress made by its predecessor project, GEC-1, through both support to educators and students and attention to intersectionality. It also benefitted from lessons learned from GEC-1 by including a greater focus on inclusive education, engagement and ownership, and beneficiary monitoring. Its differentiation from other projects in Sierra Leone positively contributed to its ability to engage national stakeholders. The consortium design of

GATE-GEC allowed each member to contribute and build upon their thematic expertise. The structure also posed challenges to the implementation of district-level activities where priorities competed, such as in the delivery of thematic activities versus monitoring data collection.

With regards to adaptation, the original design of the GATE-GEC project was carefully informed by an understanding of beneficiary needs

Building on the project's previous experience with Ebola and through the use of a comprehensive rapid educational needs assessment, the project's response to COVID-19 was able to successfully target beneficiaries' changing needs. In particular, the project's MTRP response increased its emphasis on beneficiary physical and mental wellbeing to ensure that children stay connected and return to schools. This was made possible due to the project's existing focus and strengths in this area. However, as a result of the necessary project adaptations, important project interventions focusing on financial needs and barriers were unable to be implemented.

Objective 2: Outcomes

Learning

The findings from the baseline and midline evaluations demonstrated mixed results from learning assessments as compared to the control group, but validated the importance of targeted support for marginalised girls and children with disabilities

Baseline findings demonstrated that children with disabilities performed as well as or better than children without disabilities. The midline evaluation found that the progression in numeracy and literacy was slower than anticipated in comparison to the targets set. This was attributed to delays in project implementation. For the activities that were on-going, the midline evaluation found that beneficiaries held positive attitudes towards the impact of those activities on learning. Finally, for sub-groups, the midline evaluation found that at the JSS level, a number of characteristics, including having a disability, or being a single or double orphan, was related to lower learning outcomes, validating the importance of targeting marginalised students and especially girls.

For children with disabilities, the project provided key support to improve their ability to participate in classroom learning activities and mobility

The project supported inclusive learning and environments, through the provision of model schools, itinerant teachers, and assistive devices. Assistive devices were provided to a selection of students whose needs were identified as part of GEC-1, while the model school and itinerant teacher interventions were designed as demonstrator projects. The project successfully met all associated output targets for these activities. These interventions reached a relatively small proportion of the overall beneficiary population. Therefore, the coverage as compared with the overall beneficiary population is low and data cannot confirm the extent to which activities were effective in meeting the specific needs of beneficiaries. Where received, there are positive indications that these led to improvements in the school environment and the individualised support available to children with disabilities to attend and engage while in school. A small number of children with disabilities who had not received assistive devices expressed challenges in travelling to school in particular. Overall, the indications from limited data suggest positive

feedback, and in order to facilitate further scale up or replication it is necessary to collect further evidence on their effectiveness in meeting the needs of girls and children with disabilities.

Study groups were a key intervention for all sub-groups, including marginalised girls and children with disabilities, which provided a positive learning space for students and gave PVs an opportunity to apply the skills and techniques gained during continuous professional development (CPD)

Beneficiaries stated that study groups were more conducive to learning, and with support from PVs, helped students to feel more confident and to increase their understanding of school subjects. While views of study groups were overwhelmingly positive and attendance was high, beneficiaries and school stakeholders identified distance to school and hunger as common barriers to regular attendance in both regular classrooms and study groups.

Further activities were conducted to support wider school management through support to school leaders and School Management Committees (SMCs) or Boards of Governors to institutionalise the changes such as study groups and support provided to teachers. The implementation targets were met, and training and support provided by the project appears to have supported the development of School Development Plans (SDPs). However, there is limited data to provide further insight into the effectiveness of these activities, and progress was likely delayed due to school closures during the final year of the project.

MEL data and beneficiaries and school stakeholders' perspectives both validate that teaching practices and methods of programme volunteers (PVs) had improved as a result of GATE-GEC CPD activities

GATE-GEC supported PVs through CPD activities to improve the quality teaching and the project successfully met almost all related output targets. Beneficiaries and school stakeholders noted changes such as PVs ability to identify and respond to the specific needs of students, increased use of participatory teaching practices, and better time management and punctuality. PVs and head teachers demonstrated a strong commitment and motivation to deliver quality teaching, inclusive education, and improving the wellbeing of marginalised children, and CPD activities helped to further improve teacher attitudes, particularly towards children with disabilities, by giving them the tools and confidence to identify appropriate methods to support them.

Transition

The project was successful in maintaining high transition rates throughout its lifetime, with beneficiaries expressing positive experiences of transition and an increased in proportion of beneficiaries being promoted versus repeating a grade over time

The baseline found that GATE-GEC targeted students experienced similar transition pathways and faced similar barriers to those of the control group. The midline evaluation found that transition rates were high for both GATE-GEC students and control group students, although this may be explained by the categorisation of repetition as a form of transition. The midline evaluation also found that disability was not a barrier to transition within both intervention and control groups, suggesting that the children with disabilities who are able to stay in school, are able to transition similarly to their peers.

The findings at endline further support the project's progress in achieving strong transition rates. Examining the progress of the original cohort of beneficiaries, of those who transitioned, the proportion of students promoted to the next grade (as opposed to repeating) increased from 69 percent in 2017 to 76 percent in 2020. The longitudinal analysis also provides some insight on transition by examining the beneficiaries who leave the project and are no longer tracked. Although the reasons for this could include transition, drop-out, or moving schools or migrating to a different region, those who left were more likely to be in JSS3, female, and a child without disability. This suggests that a large reason for leaving the project is likely tied to the completion of JSS. The project was additionally successful in supporting the return of children back to school following school closures as part of STRP and MTRP efforts.

Beneficiaries highlighted both the instrumental and intrinsic value of transitioning through school and on to further education, in terms of supporting future careers, life prospects and ability to support families; as well as for the potential to increase their independence, self-belief and self-worth. Most students had positive experiences of transition, and felt aspirational about continuing to progress through school with the right support.

In some cases household context impacted the extent to which families were able or willing to support students to attend school and ultimately transition. Beneficiaries from single-parent families, or living with extended family, were generally more likely to highlight challenges with family support. Children did not directly identify disability as a barrier to transition, but those with disabilities were likely to experience barriers more acutely than those without a disability. For example, distance to school was a barrier to attendance for many, but is likely to be more pronounced for children with disabilities.

Community-level interventions built on existing positive attitudes towards education for girls and vulnerable children to further provide communities with further knowledge, awareness and skills to support children

At the community level, activities which supported community awareness included the introduction of Community-Based Rehabilitation Volunteers (CBRVs) who supported families and sensitised the community on issues relating to education and child protection, and scorecarding activities to provide community members with opportunities to feed into school improvement plans. Beneficiaries were positive about the level of community and family support they received and cited this as an important factor which helped them to attend and stay in school. However, community attitudes were not necessarily a change as a result of the project, as the baseline and midline evaluations that found families were supportive even before the project. While the necessary motivation existed previously, GATE-GEC provided additional means with which to send children to school, and the knowledge, awareness and skills to support them while they are learning, in particular for children with disabilities. In the relatively small number of cases where family support was low or inconsistent, it appeared to be linked to household context, such as beneficiaries living in single parent families, or with extended families or elderly relatives.

Support to address economic barriers provided by GATE-GEC was highly valued by both beneficiaries and stakeholders, although also as a result of COVID-19, economic barriers remain a large concern for beneficiaries

The project sought to address barriers to attendance and transition through economic support. Bursaries were intended to provide short-term support to families but the activity was discontinued in 2018 in order to comply with the new government Free Quality School Education (FQSE) policy. Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) were successfully capacitated and operational, although COVID-19 affected the progress of VSLAs towards income generation at a pivotal moment. The reinstatement of bursaries and the mobilisation of VSLAs were important to GATE-GEC's COVID-19 response at the community level.

Beneficiaries and stakeholders highlighted the value of GATE-GEC economic support to enable attendance and transition, stating that it helped maintain the motivation for communities to send children to school and helped reduce the burden on parents to provide the materials and support needed. The baseline and midline evaluations found that communities already held positive attitudes towards spending income for education prior to the start of the project; this continues to be the case at endline. However, despite both the support provided by the project and the government's FQSE policy, economic challenges have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and remain one of the most frequent barriers to transition identified by beneficiaries.

The strengthened community structures and work around accountability for child protection contributed to the successful retention of the project's cohort

The project drew on lessons learned from the Ebola crisis to include a focus on safeguarding and well-being as part of GATE-GEC; this served the foundation for an expanded approach to safeguarding and well-being in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included strengthening protocols at the school and community (through VSLAs and CBRVs) levels to support community-based child protection and safeguarding, training to project stakeholders in Psychosocial First Aid (PFA) and provision of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MPHSS) support, and setting up girls clubs to build girls' confidence and resilience. As a result, beneficiaries generally reported feeling safe and were aware of to whom to speak and how to report concerns or challenges. School stakeholders were more confident in their abilities to support students with safeguarding issues and to apply a counselling approach to support individual students, working with them to identify, and seek support to mitigate against, potential risks to their safety and well-being which could lead to drop out. These activities supported a strong retention rate of students and re-enrolment following schools reopening. However, it would be too soon to know the extent to which these activities have had an impact on student learning and transition.

Sustainability

Disruptions to VSLA and livelihood activities pose the greatest threat to the sustainability of impact at the community level

The evaluation found that positive attitudes towards the education of marginalised learners and a high commitment from the community to support their learning. However, financial challenges persisted. VSLA activities were designed as the key long-term mechanism to support the financial sustainability for enrolment and attendance. The baseline evaluation in particular validated the importance of VSLAs as a mechanism to support households to start or boost savings. The importance of VSLAs was further underscored by the strong reception of activities at the community level as well as by national stakeholders who emphasised that community ownership

and buy-in was the most important means to support economic sustainability. However, while VSLAs were successfully mobilised during the project, the disruption to VSLA and livelihoods activities as a result of COVID-19 meant that this activity was never able to reach its full conclusion.

At the school level, educators expressed strong commitment to professional development and new pedagogical practices and a desire to continue with study groups

PVs expressed that they developed a strong commitment to their professional development and gender-sensitive and inclusive pedagogical practices over the course of the project. GATE-GEC training and support was particularly beneficial for PVs, many of whom do not hold teaching qualifications and have received limited training opportunities prior to the project. PVs expressed a commitment to and interest in pursuing further training and qualifications, which can have a wider and lasting impact beyond the life of the project.

Similarly, school stakeholders (including PVs and head teachers) expressed a desire to continue with study groups, either officially or unofficially, and hoped to extend the benefits to the wider school through additionally study groups. However, there is still a risk to sustainability as study groups require financial support for stipends for PVs and the provision of learning materials and food for students in study groups.

The design and implementation of the MyBook tool offers an opportunity to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and protect against future school closures, though more research is needed to understand its impact

Following school closures, the project designed the MyBook tool to be used directly by students for in-person during study group and catch-up sessions and for homeworking for future school closures. This provided opportunities for the project to support foundational skills for beneficiaries, who had fallen behind prior to the pandemic as well as for all those who experienced a loss of learning during the pandemic. Guidance and training was provided to PVs, NQFTs, and head teachers to support students in distance learning (via telephone) and in study groups. While it is too soon to know the impact of these activities, training was also provided using a 'training of trainers' model to educators and government stakeholders to ensure that the programme can be used more widely, offering protection against future periods of school closures.

Through strong government engagement, the success of the LA/ST model's impact on young women has the potential for systems adoption and scale

LA/STs played a unique role in the GATE-GEC project as both direct beneficiaries of the project supported with learning, placements and material support and project support actors, who in turn support teachers and beneficiaries in GATE-GEC schools. GATE-GEC built upon GEC-1's assistance to the first two cohorts of LA/STs (now newly-qualified female teachers, NQFTs) by supporting a third cohort, working with all three cohorts during COVID-19. The LA/ST model appears to have had a demonstrable impact on the lives of those interviewed from Cohorts 1 and 2 (NQFTs), including in terms of improving the way that they perceived themselves, their standing in communities, and their potential to be role models and influencers for marginalised children. They reported that the assistance from the project enabled them to provide girls with guidance and

support, and to influence life decisions. GATE-GEC undertook engagement efforts with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) and Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) to extend the LA/ST model beyond the scope of the project.

GATE-GEC's engagement and alignment with education decision makers offers a strong opportunity for sustainable impact at the systems-level for its inclusive education pilots, the LA/ST model, and curriculum-aligned resources such as MyBook and CPD materials

At the systems level, the project increased its alignment and coherence with government priorities and institutions, as well as other projects operating in the country. This was aided by the change of government in 2018 and a new government focus on inclusive education and the recruitment of female teachers. Activities aligned with government priorities include the supply of assistive devices, the development of model schools, the use of itinerant teachers, and the LA/ST model. Although the coverage of these activities has been limited within the implementation of GATE-GEC, these have served as important demonstrator projects which has generated government interest and serve as important models for possible future programming. Furthermore, CPD modules, LA/ST programming, and the MyBook have been developed to align with government curricula and in consultation with key stakeholders such as TSC and TTCs, which also supports further government uptake of GATE-GEC developed materials. The outbreak of COVID-19 has been a further impetus for government cooperation as part of the government's emergency response. The alignment is reflected in the project's STRP and MTPR activities, which included regular attendance to the national-level pillar meetings and coordination at the national and district levels with institutions such as TSC and with MBSSE leaders.

The increased engagement is evidenced by the stakeholder's descriptions of alignment with national and regional strategies and structures. As opposed to the findings at baseline, national stakeholders expressed a commitment that for the GATE-GEC project to have a wider impact. Hence, it was important for MBSSE and the TSC to find ways to integrate lessons learned from the project into national teaching frameworks so that teachers can be further supported. Although is too early to identify if these activities will be further adopted, the close coordination and discussion with government stakeholders is promising.

Conclusions

Project design and adaptation

Looking at the design, implementation, and adaptation of GATE-GEC, the project successfully learned lessons from the experience of GEC-1 and the outbreak of Ebola. These lessons informed a strong focus on intersectionality, safeguarding and child protection. This differentiated it from other education projects operating in Sierra Leone, providing a unique opportunity for stakeholder engagement. The learnings from GEC-1 also influenced the project's response to the outbreak of COVID-19, ensuring that project adaptations were shaped by the needs of beneficiaries. With the outbreak of COVID-19, the project was required to make a concerted decision to prioritise certain interventions, with a focus on social protection and safety, well-being, and efforts to support continuity of learning and a return to school. The project was able to implement these efforts through its existing structures, such as emergency distribution of food, study materials, dignity kits

through study group enrolment lists, and community awareness raising through CBRVs and VSLAs, as well as catch up and school-based well-being initiatives through PVs and NQFTs. As a result, livelihood grants and other efforts to promote the financial sustainability of activities, were less relevant to deliver. Thus, financial sustainability remains an important persisting barrier for beneficiary communities.

Learning

We found that the project met almost all the targets set at the output level involving CPD activities and study groups to improve the quality of teaching and learning and school management and to promote better inclusion in schools. Although it was not possible to measure changes in learning outcomes at endline, the evaluation found strong evidence from beneficiaries, school stakeholders, and monitoring data that the project contributed to a set of important preconditions to boost learning for marginalised girls and children with disabilities. This, in turn, increased their confidence in their own abilities, their sense of belonging, and the feeling that their needs were better understood and recognised.

Transition

There is strong evidence that transition rates have remained consistently high throughout the lifespan of the project. Additionally, the project was successful in supporting the return of children back to school following school closures as part of STRP and MTRP efforts. The existing data did not follow those who dropped out of the GATE-GEC project. Possible reasons for leaving the project include transitioning, dropping out of schooling, moving schools or migrating, with the latter being particularly difficult to trace following the effects of Ebola and COVID-19. However, analyses of the profiles of the students prior to their departure revealed that the majority of those leaving the project did so during or just after JSS3, suggesting that the completion of JSS was their main reason.

Sustainability

The outbreak of COVID-19 and the necessitated project adaptations disrupted many of the project's planned efforts to support the sustainability of its activities and impacts. These activities were intended to build on communities' pre-existing positive attitudes towards supporting marginalised girls and children with disabilities to attend and stay in school, through supporting the sustainability of commitments to school fees and other school equipment. Similar efforts were also intended at the school level to support the sustained implementation of study groups. However, it appears that financial barriers persisted.

Despite this, the project made improvements to other sustainability mechanisms, notably through strong and increased engagement with national stakeholders. The strongest likelihood for sustainability appears to be for activities that were closely aligned with government priorities, such as the pilots that supported inclusive education, the LA/ST model, and training modules aligned with curricula, such as CPD, MyBook and the LA/ST learning materials. There was demonstrable interest from government and national stakeholders to take up these activities. The evaluation was not able to confirm if these activities will be adopted by the government but the project took key

steps in the design and implementation of these activities to improve their potential for sustainability.

There is strong evidence that the project has successfully targeted and reached children with disabilities

Of the total population reached by the project, 3,227 students (23 percent) were children with disabilities, as compared with a national average of 1.5 percent enrolled in schools. At endline, there was strong evidence that improvements in knowledge and pedagogical practices for PVs helped to shift the attitudes of PVs and head teachers on the need for individualised support and the importance of and value of supporting children with disabilities to attend school and learn.

The project supported children with disabilities to attend and participate in schooling through the provision of assistive devices, the construction of model schools and the engagement of itinerant teachers. These interventions reached a relatively small proportion of the overall beneficiary population over the project's lifetime. Although implemented on a relatively small scale, these interventions had an impact through their role as demonstrator projects, which helped to secure the buy in of government and community members around the value of inclusion.

Based on the available MEL and evaluation data, it was not possible to determine the relevance of the individualised support. Further data collection would be crucial to better understand whether the needs of children with disabilities have been met by the project as well as to understand how such needs might change.

There is strong evidence that the teaching practices and methods of programme volunteers have improved as a result of CPD activities, supporting longer-term changes to attitudes towards and commitment to gender-sensitive and inclusive education

Beneficiaries and school stakeholders provided examples of improved teaching skills and practices of PVs to support the individual and diverse needs of marginalised girls and children with disabilities, with particular emphasis on gender-sensitive, inclusive and participatory pedagogical practices. CPD training helped to improve attitudes of educators towards vulnerable learners, in particular strong long-term commitment and motivation to support marginalised girls and children with disabilities, to improve their learning and increase their feelings of belonging.

Educators demonstrated a strong drive to continue their professional development to support marginalised children. This commitment could have wider impacts beyond the life of the programme, provided that CPD activities continue in the future. Overall, the alignment of the GATE-GEC CPD curriculum with national curricula offers opportunities for government uptake or scale out of the training.

Study groups were a valued intervention to reach marginalised girls and children with disabilities and offer a key mechanism to scale up individualised education practices

Throughout the project, study groups had high levels of attendance and attendees reported perceived improvements in literacy and numeracy. Students emphasised the value of study groups as not simply additional study time, but as positive learning spaces. Study groups created opportunities for students to work more closely with peers and educators in smaller groups than in regular classrooms. Students also expressed that in the small classes, they could ask for help,

apply what they learned in class, and be able to catch up when falling behind, which served to increase their confidence.

Students also valued the role of PVs in study groups, reporting that study groups were spaces in which PVs helped students to feel included and supported and to participate equally in activities. For PVs, study groups were opportunities to apply their CPD training. Study groups were identified by PVs as an important mechanism which should be continued beyond the lifetime of the GATE-GEC project.

While community engagement was strong throughout the project, economic barriers beyond the project's control remained an ongoing challenge

Efforts around safeguarding and child protection, especially after the outbreak of COVID-19, likely contributed to the largely successful retention of programme's cohort, with stakeholders being more aware of child protection issues, actively addressing concerns and providing direct support to beneficiaries. Overall, GATE-GEC households were found to be supportive of education and learning of girls and children with disabilities; evidence from the baseline and midline evaluations suggests that this was the case prior to the start of the GATE-GEC project. This was particularly true for household commitment to prioritising the costs of education for girls and children with disabilities.

While community engagement, particularly through VSLAs, was valued by households, with the introduction of FQSE and the outbreak of COVID-19 the project was unable to fully implement its planned interventions, such as livelihoods activities. At the close of the project, economic barriers, largely beyond the project's control, continued to be a challenge for many families and beneficiaries. Future programming should pay particular attention these barriers and lessons learned around them from GATE-GEC, in order to successfully improve learning opportunities for marginalised learners.

Lessons and Recommendations

This final section of the endline evaluation reflects on the findings and conclusions from Objectives 1 and 2 to capture lessons and recommendations from the project. These are organised around the support they can offer to the sustainability of GATE-GEC's impact, as well as for future programmes in Sierra Leone seeking to target learning outcomes for marginalised girls and children with disabilities.

Strengthening the sustainability of GATE-GEC's impact could be supported through expanding the evidence base of its most promising activities. This includes:

1. Expanding the evidence base around the effectiveness of distance learning and catch-up solutions introduced by GATE-GEC (such as MyBook), which could be used in emergency settings and as part of non-emergency learning settings
2. Collating and mainstreaming the evidence and lessons learned on the LA/ST model across GEC-1 and GATE-GEC to strengthen the theory of change around how this model supports the development of a female teacher workforce and its impact on girls' education

3. Conducting and reframing the analysis of the LA/ST needs as learners, as well as in terms of professional development needs, in order to build a model that supports learning for out-of-school girls
4. Monitoring the needs of children with disabilities, at the school, community and learner levels, for instance in terms of assistive devices, recognising that these needs can change over time

The momentum around project closure and its attention to project successes and impact could be used to cement the governmental and institutional partners' (such as MBSSE, TSC, and TTCs) engagement to support the following activities:

5. The inclusion of study groups in future programming to strengthen inclusion in Sierra Leonean schools
6. The uptake of teacher training materials developed by GATE-GEC, capitalising on their alignment with the curriculum and its goals
7. Scaling GATE-GEC's work around CPD in terms of subject-specific training as well as training for inclusion
8. Continuing to pilot the LA/ST model as a means to address the challenges of distance learning and expanding inclusion of women in the teaching workforce, particularly in remote areas

Finally, the endline evaluation offers several lessons and recommendations for programme implementers and donors on future programming on girls' and inclusive education in Sierra Leone to consider:

9. Tracking and monitoring the participations who leave the programme to further understand transition and its barriers
10. A broader and whole-school approach to expand the range of beneficiaries and ensure a more systemic change approach to equity and inclusion of vulnerable youth, including out of school children in future interventions
11. Continually monitoring and addressing the persistent financial barriers to learning, which have been demonstrated to be an on-going challenge to learners' school attendance, retention and transition as part of future interventions
12. Taking forward and emphasising the lessons learned from strengthening community engagement in safeguarding and well-being during COVID-19 to national and international stakeholders
13. Investing in capacity building and the development of tools that can capture learning progress and teaching quality in a way that can also contribute to the evidence base of national approaches to learning measurement. These can include development of comprehensive and diverse tools to such as project-specific classroom observation methods, comprehensive and formative assessment methods, methods that capture localised understandings of socio-emotional learning, and training and coaching systems to make sure educators can feel confident using these. By considering the use of assessment materials beyond the use of the project monitoring and evaluation, this can contribute to wider and more sustainable systemic learning.

1 Introduction

Introduction to the assignment

In January 2021, Plan International United Kingdom (Plan) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and the Institute for Development Sierra Leone (IfD) to undertake the endline evaluation of the Girls' Access to Education: Girls' Education Challenge (GATE-GEC) project in Sierra Leone. Funded through the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) portfolio of the United Kingdom's (UK) Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), GATE-GEC supports marginalised girls and children with disabilities across six districts in Sierra Leone to attend school, reach their full learning potential, learn in a safe and inclusive school environment, and successfully transition to further education and beyond.

This report presents the findings from the endline evaluation undertaken from January to July 2021, which aimed to:

1. Take stock of the GATE-GEC project (2017-2021) to examine the project's design, adaptation, and intended results achieved.
2. Document and trace the experiences of the vulnerable and marginalised beneficiary groups as part of the GATE-GEC project, providing an understanding of their evolving needs, the drivers and barriers to their learning, transition and well-being, and how the project has generated change for them. This included an exploration of sub-groups, examining unique and commonalities of experience, to understand how and why change has occurred for different groups.
3. Capture lessons and recommendations from the project, particularly on how and how well it adapted and responded to changing needs and contexts, the successes and failures with regard to project design and implementation, and implications for sustainability.

Structure of the report

The structure of the report is as follows:

- **Sections 2 and 3** summarise the context of the GATE-GEC project and its design and subsequent adaptations (particularly in response to the outbreak of COVID-19).
- **Section 4** outlines the evaluation design, including the evaluation approach, the research questions that guided evaluation, and the methods applied for data collection. This section is further supplemented by Annex A, which provides a detailed explanation of the evaluation methodology, data collection, and analysis.
- **Section 5** presents the key findings of the evaluation in support of addressing the evaluation's first objective. This section covers the following evaluation questions (EQs):
  - EQ1. How and how well was the project designed and implemented?
  - EQ2. How and how well did the project adapt its design and implementation to respond to changing needs and contexts?
  - EQ4. How and how well did the project include and support marginalised/vulnerable groups, including children with disability?

- EQ5. How and how well has the project responded to the evolution of project beneficiary profiles and needs, particularly with regard to the effect of COVID-19 on retention and dropout?

- **Section 6** presents the key findings against the evaluation's second objective. This section is structured by the GATE-GEC project's three key outcomes and the sections explore how the project has generated change for its beneficiaries. This section covers the following EQs that examine the project's key outcomes:
  - EQ6. How and how well has the project supported project beneficiaries to improve learning outcomes through support to improve the quality and inclusiveness of teaching and inclusiveness of the school environment?
  - EQ7. How and how well has the project supported project beneficiaries to successfully attend and/or return to school and ultimately transition, through support to beneficiary well-being and for beneficiaries to feel safe and supported by their families, schools, and communities?
  - EQ8. How and how well has the project created positive and lasting change for marginalised girls and children with disabilities and with what evidence?

Within each of these sections, examines a series of cross-cutting EQs:

- EQ3. To what degree did the project achieve its intended results, including differential results across groups?
- EQ9. How and how well do the different project activities, outputs and intermediate outcomes come together to generate outcomes for the beneficiary experience?
- EQ10. How and how well has the project addressed the major factors (drivers, enablers and barriers) to achievement and sustainability of project outcomes for different project beneficiary groups?
- EQ11. How and how well has the project contributed to higher level effects (social, environmental or economic, both positive or negative and intended or unintended) and will they be expected to continue beyond the project?

- **Section 7** addresses the final objective of the evaluation and summarises the conclusions from the evaluation and identifies lessons learned and our key recommendations.

2 GATE-GEC Context

The GATE-GEC project aims to provide support to vulnerable girls and other marginalised learners in Sierra Leone. The challenges of the context are high, as Sierra Leone is one the poorest countries in the world. The Human Development Index (HDI) value for the country, composed of life expectancy, expected and means years of schooling, and per capita income, was 0.452 in 2019. This places it in the low human development category, positioning it at 182nd out of 189 countries considered. The country also experiences high levels of inequality. The index of gender inequality (GII), which can be interpreted as loss of human development, also places it in the bottom ranking in the world at 155th out of 162 countries (UNDP, 2020).

As such, it has been shaped by its context as well as the emergencies which have occurred during its duration. In the following sections, we offer a glimpse into the country's context and some of the challenges faced in recent years and outline the implications for its education system, and in particular, for learning for the most vulnerable.

2.1 The aftermath of the civil war and recent health emergencies

Sierra Leone and its education system has faced a multitude of challenges in recent decades, including recovery from conflict, natural disasters, and Ebola. These challenges have all impacted the country's education system, as well as the GEC projects in the country. The following sections briefly summarise the past and current challenges, and provide a particular focus on girls and learners with disability

The decade long civil war (1991-2002) in Sierra Leone left devastating impacts on the country's social and economic progress. Approximately 75,000 people were killed as a result of the conflict and more than half the country's population was displaced, either internally or externally (UNICEF, 2011). Much of the country's infrastructure was destroyed during the war, including schools, which left a shortage of resources and made the goal of universal basic education for all difficult to obtain. Approximately 70 percent of children did not have access to school during the war leaving behind a generation of school goers and further lessening the value of schooling within the community (UNICEF, 2011). As a result of the conflict, schools in rural and remote areas faced severe structural challenges in infrastructure, teacher availability, and resource accessibility, which affect learning outcomes (Sengeh, 2020). The post-conflict negative effects on education where compounded by more recent health emergencies summarized below.

2.1.1 Ebola crisis

The 2014 -16 Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone was the most tragic one worldwide, with the country being host to half of all cases. Strict social distancing rules were implemented as a result, including village lockdowns and travel bans, as well as the closure of all primary and secondary schools through the 2014-15 academic year (Bandiera et al, 2020). During the school closures, education radio programmes were broadcasted five days a week in 30-minute sessions during the Ebola crisis (Powers and Azzi-Huck, 2016).

Ebola took a devastating toll in the country, especially the most vulnerable groups, including youth, and especially girls in rural areas, orphans and the poorest. In Sierra Leone, the two most infected

age groups were 25–29 year-olds and 15–19 year-olds, while across West Africa, 20 percent of Ebola cases occurred in children below the age of 15 (Smith, 2021). Ebola left 12,000 children orphaned in the country and had a devastating impact on psychosocial wellbeing and health (World Bank, 2021). A study conducted during the outbreak, in mid-2015, found that symptoms of PTSD and anxiety-depression were common after one year of the outbreak, especially among those with Ebola-related experiences (Jalloh, et al, 2018).

The epidemic resulted in huge losses of learning in the country, with the overall loss of learning estimated at 780 hours per-pupil. In addition, during and after school closures many teachers' roles were diverted away from education towards disease control and/or social mobilisation (Hallgarten et al, 2020). Vulnerable learners were also more likely to suffer the negative consequence in terms of loss of educational opportunities. Approximately 4,530 more primary-age youth and 5,770 more secondary-age youth in the bottom wealth quintile dropped out of school than would have been expected pre-outbreak (Smith, 2021).

Moreover, girls from rural communities and those living in poverty are particularly at a higher risk of dropping out of school before completing their education due to school closures during the pandemic. These girls already struggle to access nearby schools and staying home increases the risk of early/forced marriage and early pregnancy. During the Ebola outbreak, school closures are thought to have played a key factor in a sharp rise in adolescent pregnancies with some parts of Sierra Leone reporting a 65 percent increase (UNICEF, 2020a). After the Ebola crisis, even after schools reopened, teenage girls found it harder to re-enrol due to their involvement in income generation (enrolment rates fell by 16% in the most disrupted villages) (Bandiera, 2020).

2.1.2 The outbreak of COVID-19

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all schools and educational institutions in Sierra Leone closed at the end of March 2020. School closures disrupted the education of more than 2.6 million children (UNICEF, 2020b). The country has been committed to using the lessons learned during the Ebola crisis to address the current pandemic and its education challenges more effectively (Sengeh, 2021).

In response to the pandemic, the Sierra Leone Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and its Teaching Service Commission (TSC) convened an Education Emergency Task Force in April 2020 to revive the country's education radio programme for remote learning which was used during the Ebola outbreak and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on children and learning (World Bank, 2021). Covering the curriculum effectively has been challenging due to limited broadcast airtime availability and limited access to radio devices in households. Radio was selected given the context of very limited internet penetration and low access to any other distance learning solutions, including printed materials. The Education Emergency Task Force aims to support coordination, response and planning during and after the pandemic through four strategic pillars: (i) communications, (ii) continuous distance learning, (iii) school reopening readiness, and (iv) operations, planning and policy (World Bank, 2020).

Taken together, the Ebola and COVID-19 outbreaks have exacerbated the burden of unpaid and domestic work for women and girls who are more likely to be caregivers increasing their risk of exposure to the virus and limiting their economic opportunities. As pregnant girls and adolescent

mothers do not tend to return to school due to stigmas, economic considerations, and lack of childcare, it is likely that COVID-19 will have detrimental effects on the education of girls.

The gendered impacts of COVID-19-related school closures, as seen during the Ebola crisis, will inevitably have an adverse impact on educational attainments and increase gender-based violence (GBV). Studies of past disease outbreaks and other humanitarian crises have shown that without targeted intervention, COVID-19 will increase risks of GBV against girls and hinder their social, economic and educational development (UNICEF, 2020a).

2.2 Education landscape in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone has made significant progress in education over the last decades. For instance, the primary gross enrolment rate (GER) was at 144 percent in 2019 (MEST, 2018). Similarly, secondary school enrolment increased to more than 50 percent for males and 100 percent for females from 2010 to 2016 (World Bank, 2020). However, the country's education system still faces challenges in terms of quality and inclusion, compounded by the previously-described crises. To illustrate, while school enrolment and access levels have improved, Sierra Leone continues to struggle with retention and school completion. Although the primary completion rate was relatively strong for the region at 64 percent in 2017 (the most recent internationally-submitted data year), this number declined to 44 percent at the lower secondary level and even further to 19 percent at the upper secondary level (UIS, 2021).

2.2.1 Education of the vulnerable learners

Poverty remains the most significant barrier to education in Sierra Leone. An estimated 36 percent of households in the poorest wealth quintile have out-of-school children, as opposed to 6 percent in affluent households. Additionally, hardly any poor rural girls (1 percent) or boys (2 percent) had graduated from secondary school in 2017, compared to 32 percent of urban wealthy girls and 42 percent of urban wealthy boys, (UNESCO, 2020).

Girls' education

The government of Sierra Leone has achieved gender parity in enrolment at the primary level. However, the gender gap is widening at the secondary school levels, with lower levels of retention of girls than boys due to issues related to inequality and poverty, including early pregnancy, early/forced marriage, and sexual harassment. An estimated 41 percent of disadvantaged girls have never attended school (World Bank, 2020). An estimated 61.8 percent of girls who drop out of school cite early pregnancy, forced marriage, gender-based violence or sexual harassment as reasons (World Bank, 2020).

Societal norms coupled with poverty and inequality, can also influence girls' education access and experience. However, education and especially women's education also can, in turn, affect societal norms. The prevalence of early marriage and childbirth is also high with UNICEF figures showing 30 percent of girls were married before the age of 18 and roughly 3 in 10 girls (30 percent) gave birth before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2020b). Once a girl is married or pregnant it is very difficult for her to remain in school. Studies have shown that each additional year of secondary school reduces the risk of child marriage by up to 10 percentage points, and that of early childbearing by 4 percentage points (World Bank, 2020). According to UNICEF, 86 percent of girls in Sierra Leone

have been subjugated to the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) (UNICEF, 2020c). It is widely practiced as part of an initiation ceremony to prepare girls for womanhood and marriage. A study from 2020 found that children of mothers who had no formal education were more likely to undergo FGM than those whose mothers were educated (Ameyaw et al., 2020).

Educational differences between boys and girls are smaller at the lower education levels and persist more strongly at higher levels. There is little difference between completion rates of girls and boys at the primary education level, with nearly 65 percent of girls (64.9) as compared to about 63 percent of boys (63.2) in 2017 (UIS, 2021). However, at lower secondary schools, completion rates stood at 42 percent of girls compared to about 47 percent of boys (47.1 percent), while at the upper secondary level about 15 (14.8) percent of girls completed in comparison to about 25 (24.6 percent) percent of boys (UIS, 2021). Across all education level, richer and urban children, especially girls, were more likely to graduate than poorer and rural ones.

Children with disabilities

Similarly, children with disabilities face large barriers to education. In general, disability status, including different levels of physical or intellectual disability, is negatively correlated with educational outcomes (World Bank, 2020). Children with disabilities are often denied the right to education. Although there is no representative national data on their completion rates, available evidence, also from other countries in the region, shows that children with disabilities are less likely to attend and complete schools than those without disability (UNESCO, 2020). In line with regional trends, poor, rural girls with disability are among the most disadvantaged in the country (UNESCO, 2020).

There is little representative data on persons with disabilities in Sierra Leone, which makes it difficult to make national-level conclusions about their educational outcomes[5]. However, the 2017 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) found that 23 percent of children aged 5 to 17 had at least one functional difficulty (SSL, 2018). In the mobility domain, walking difficulties affected 3 percent of children in Sierra Leone. Across MICS countries, cognitive and psycho-emotional difficulties were far more common, especially in conflict and post-conflict settings like in Sierra Leone, where 9 percent of children and adolescents were depressed (UNESCO, 2020). Although children with functional difficulties can be found in schools in Sierra Leone, the survey found that children with hearing or seeing difficulties had the lowest school attendance rates at 50 percent and 60 percent respectively (SSL, 2018).

According to the 2019 Annual School Census (ASC), approximately 15 percent of school aged children present a disability, however 1.5 percent of children with disabilities are enrolled in school (ASC, 2019). This indicates that a large portion of children with disabilities do not attend school.

[5] The lack of representative, national data on disability levels makes comparisons of educational outcomes between groups difficult. In addition, there are measurement issues to do with available data, which make comparisons difficult, such as when age groups distinctions in the available data do not align with those for educational outcomes. To illustrate, MICS different disability measures for children under 5 years old, those aged 5 to 17 years old, and individuals aged 18 and above. Disability prevalence falls from 16.6 percent among 17-year-olds to 0.3 percent among 18-year-olds in Sierra Leone, while the lower secondary education completion rate is defined for ages 17 to 19 (UNESCO, 2020).

Nationwide, children with disabilities are generally not catered for on the bus service, making it difficult for them to access schools (Sengeh, 2020). Barriers to inclusion for students with disabilities include issues related to physical mobility and transport but are also crucially related to a lack of inclusive teaching practices, suitable curricula and continued discriminatory prejudice and stigma (UNESCO, 2020).

2.2.2 Teaching and learning environment

Even when students are enrolled and remain in school, evidence indicates low levels of learning, with FCDO's Leh Wi Lan secondary program calculating an average student-teacher contact time of only 2 hours per day at the secondary level. Low levels of student-teacher contact are a result of overpopulated classrooms and a shortage of teachers. The situation is further exacerbated by teacher shortages and inefficient teacher deployment. This is particularly apparent at early years of primary, where the student-teacher ratio is high and the teachers at this level are more likely to have no qualifications or lower qualifications, than at other levels (Mackintosh *et al.,* 2020). The allocation of teachers to schools is not commensurate with the needs of each school particularly in rural areas. This misallocation has resulted in wide variations in the pupil-qualified teacher ratios (PQTRs) ranging from 30:1 in Western Area Urban to 84:1 in Pujehun (Wright, 2018). On average, according to 2019 data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), the national PQTR at primary level was 58.3. In general, less than two-thirds (63.7 percent) of primary teachers in Sierra Leone had the minimum required qualifications (UIS, 2021).

These factors have all contributed to poor learning outcomes demonstrated by the fact that an average student will have completed 8.9 years of schooling by the age of 18. When taking into account the quality of learning, those 8.9 years equate to just 4.5 years of quality instruction (World Bank, 2020b). A recent study of the Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) has shown that without additional actions the supply of teachers will not be enough to meet the needs of a fully qualified workforce by 2023. In particular, the supply of specialised teachers in mathematics and science will likely never be enough to meet the needs at secondary level (Mackintosh et al., 2020).

Consistent with international trends, the distribution of female teachers across sub-sectors is heavily skewed towards pre-primary grades, which are lower paid if compensated at all. The absence of female teachers at higher grades can also negatively impact students due to the lack of inspiring female role models. Research found that female teachers can inspire girls to pursue higher levels of education (UNESCO, 2020).

The challenge of providing qualified workforce is much bigger in rural communities than in urban ones. With 28 percent of the current teaching workforce being female, Sierra Leone ranks as having the 6th lowest share of female teachers in the world. (Mackintosh et al., 2020). On average, according to 2019 data, in Sierra Leone about one in three teachers were female at primary school level (29.9 percent) but almost all at the pre-primary level (99.4 percent). At secondary school level the proportion of female teachers was much lower, only about eight percent (8.3 percent) of upper secondary teachers were female in 2019 and fewer than 16 percent (15.9 percent) at lower secondary level (UIS, 2021).The gender disparity in the workforce and teacher training pipeline suggests that there is an issue in attracting females to join the teaching profession. It is also likely reflective of the lower education attainment of girls, as compared to boys (UNESCO, 2020).

2.3 Education Reform

Despite the challenges, the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) has made significant strides in expanding access to education for both primary and secondary students. In 2018 the GoSL asserted its commitment to free basic education by committing 21 percent of its annual expenditure to education and the introduction of the 'Free Quality School Education '(FQSE) initiative (UNICEF, 2021). The programme aims to make education school fee-free from pre-primary to senior secondary school. School feeding and free textbooks were also prioritised. Another aim of FQSE was to promote community awareness and anti-stigma campaigns on the capacities and rights of persons with disabilities (UNICEF, 2021). By 2020, approximately 2.6 million children and youth, about 37 percent of Sierra Leone's population, directly benefited from the programme (Sengeh, 2020). However, the ambitious five-year programme has been estimated to have a funding gap of between US$3 billion and US$6 billion (World Bank, 2020).

Additionally, the government has made steps to address the issue of the unpaid and unqualified teaching workforce. In the past, the Ministry of Finance has struggled with delayed or incomplete disbursements to local councils, negatively affecting the quality of schooling (EPG, 2020). Budget deficits meant that 39 percent of teachers in 2018 were on the government payroll, leaving the majority of Sierra Leone's teachers working as unpaid volunteers. Not receiving a salary significantly reduces teacher motivation and increases the likelihood of absenteeism. However, Teaching Service Commission (TSC), which is mandated with the management of teacher affairs to improve their professional status and economic well-being, issued a new policy on teacher development and performance, which was approved by the Sierra Leone's cabinet in July 2020. The policy covers teachers on and off government payroll and talks explicitly about addressing payroll issues and that all teachers have access to professional development opportunities, which are recognized by either additional payment or reduction in teaching hours (TSC, 2020).

Moreover, the World Bank is funding a project on 'Physical Improvements to the Learning Environment', which aims to support the construction, maintenance, and renovation of primary schools and junior secondary schools identified using ASC data, school catchment area planning, and information collected through site visits. The project will finance the construction of approximately 800 classrooms (300 primary and 500 junior secondary) to meet the immediate infrastructure needs (UNICEF, 2021).

The most recent Education Sector Plan for 2018-2020 focuses on improving quality of education and specifically addresses girls and children with disabilities. One of the biggest policy changes in favour of girls' education that led to a spike in enrolment was the 2020 overturn to the policy that previously banned pregnant girls from attending school. Additionally, the 2021 National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools places a priority on building a more inclusive learning environment. The GoSL hopes to create opportunities for vulnerable learners, such as poor girls, to pursue education through grants, scholarship and community support programmes (Sengeh, 2021). The policy aims actively enable learners from marginalised and excluded groups to enter and remain in school until completion. It notes the Sierra Leone's MBSSE has a 'duty to put mechanisms in place to enhance the capacity of mainstream schools to respond to the varying learning needs of diverse children' (MBSSE, 2021).

3 GATE-GEC Design

3.1 GATE-GEC overview and structure

GATE-GEC was launched as part of the Transition Window of the GEC programme in April 2017, running for four years with a planned closure date of July 2021. The project built on the progress made by its predecessor programme under GEC-1, which operated from 2013 to 2016. Operating in six districts (Kailahun, Karene, Kenema, Kono, Moyamba and Port Loko), GATE-GEC aimed to provide marginalised girls and children with disabilities with better opportunities to ensure they learn and transition from primary to secondary education and beyond in a sustainable way. This was pursued through a holistic project approach that targeted not only the children themselves, but also their learning environments, homes and communities, and the related government and policy contexts. In doing so, GATE-GEC sets out to address issues around low education quality, social norms and economic hardship.

GATE-GEC was a consortium project, delivered, managed and coordinated by Plan in association with Humanity and Inclusion (HI), ActionAid (AA) and the Open University (OU). The consortium continued the collaboration from the GEC-1 project, with the exception of Action Aid who has replaced the International Rescue Committee as a project partner at the beginning of GATE-GEC. The consortium originally included the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) who supported OU on the implementation of the Learning Assistant (LA) / Student Teacher (ST) component, but have subsequently left the consortium in the third year of implementation. Their responsibilities have been taken up by the Plan Sierra Leone office. Each of the four consortium members have teams based in the UK, with HI, AA and Plan operating through country offices located in Sierra Leone.

Plan was responsible for the overall project management through both the UK-based team and a dedicated hub team based in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Each consortium member was responsible for leading on specialised thematic responsibilities below. The responsibility for project delivery (including coordination of day-to-day activities and monitoring) in each district was divided amongst each of the consortium partners. The division of both the thematic and district responsibilities is outlined in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 GATE-GEC roles and responsibilities

Consortium partner	Thematic areas	District responsibility
Plan	Overall project management and oversight of the development of the teaching and learning approaches with OU	Port Loko, Karene,
AA	Focus on economic empowerment	Kono, Moyamba
HI	Focus on disability and inclusive education	Kenema, Kailahun
OU	Design of and support to LA/ST model (with implementation support provided by the Plan Sierra	N/A

	Leone office); development of Medium-Term Response Plan (MTRP) teaching and learning approaches, including the design of MyBook used at PS and JSS and training on distance education and study group catch up curriculum adaptation.	

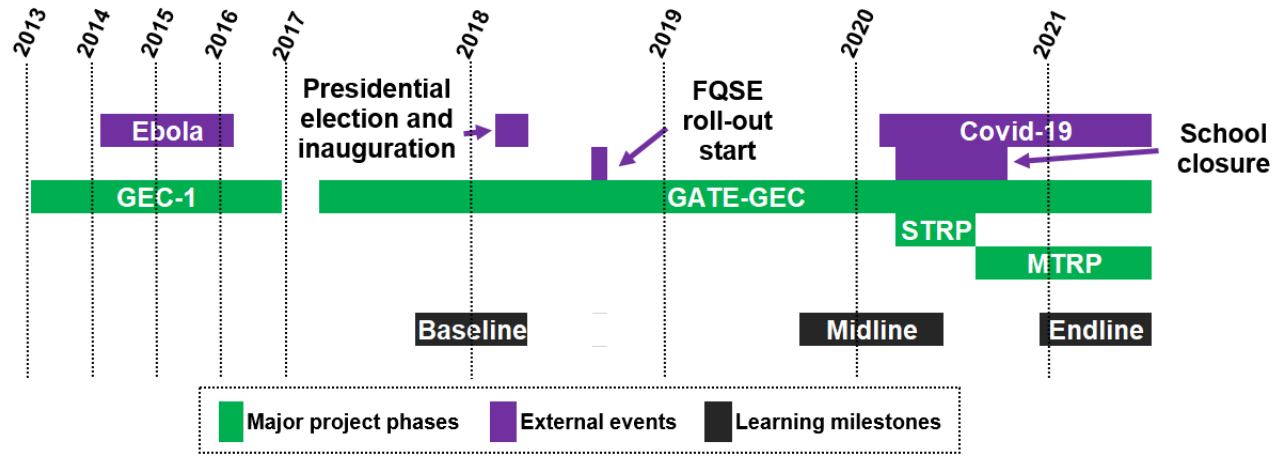
The project also works closely with key district- and national-level stakeholders, including the MBSSE, the Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW), the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MGCA), the TSC, the Sierra Leone Union of Disability Issues, TTCs, intervention schools clustered regionally, as well as district and community authorities.

3.2 Project design and adaptation

The design of GATE-GEC was informed by both the original design of the GEC-1 project as well as the subsequent changes to the project in response to the outbreak of Ebola in 2014. GATE-GEC was designed to work with the same target areas (districts, schools,) as its predecessor to continue further improve beneficiaries' learning and transition outcomes during the period 2017-2021.

The programme targeted children and their learning environments, homes and communities, and systems and policy contexts, through an intersectional approach to targeting multiple issues of marginalisation. This approach was designed in response to learnings from GEC-1 on the importance of not only supporting vulnerable populations (in particular, marginalised girls), but also to ensure the inclusion of new and indirect beneficiaries, such as boys. This approach utilised a number of different activities targeting these levels, some of which have been carried over from GEC-1 as well as the introduction of new interventions. Further details on the project's activities can be found in Section 3.4 as well as in the Project Map (Annex B).

Figure 3.1 Project timelines



Through the lifetime of the project, policy and government changes, lessons learned and recommendations, as well as external factors have necessitated project adaptation. A short project hiatus was experienced at the start of GATE-GEC in 2017 while the project re-established relations with the GoSL. A new government was elected in 2018 and introduced new policies such as the FQSE, rendering redundant the distribution of bursaries as part of programme activities. Further programme reflections and adaptations were prompted by the previous evaluation

recommendations, with the adaptations in response to the midline evaluation due to start in early 2020.

The global outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent closure of schools in Sierra Leone beginning 31 March 2020 provided a further impetus for project adaptation. School closures and increased restrictions to movement hampered the project's ability to implement activities as planned. A Short-Term Response Plan (STRP) was developed to initially cover April to August 2020, which included a Rapid Education Needs Assessment (ENA) exercise conducted in May 2020, the development of a remote learning pilot, and a series of sensitisation activities for communities within the catchment areas of project target schools.

A further set of activities was articulated in the form of the MTRP, which covered implementation from September 2020 until the close of the project in July 2021. GATE-GEC's MTRP project activities were developed both in response to recommendations from the midline evaluation, as well the context-specific COVID-19 challenges in Sierra Leone, which were informed by the project's previous experience with Ebola in GEC-1 and the ENA exercise. In addition to both adaptations and shifts in project activities as part of the MTRP, the project also expanded its reach by targeting an expanded cohort of beneficiaries. This is explained further in Section 3.3 below and in Section 5.2.

3.3 Target beneficiary population

The target beneficiary population of GATE-GEC built on the cohort of supported beneficiaries from GEC-1 ('original cohort')[6] which included marginalised girls at the JSS level and children (both girls and boys) with disabilities at the PS level. The original GEC-1 selection criteria identified three groups of the most marginalised children in the project context: children in rural locations, children who are orphaned, and children with disabilities. The following detailed selection criteria was used by community selection committees to select beneficiaries within nominated GEC-1 schools:

- Girls between the ages of 10 and 20;
- Girls living in single-parent homes;
- Girls who are mothers;
- Drop-outs from poor families;
- Girls affected by cultural and traditional barriers;
- Girls living on their own with no reliable financial support;
- Survivors of rape;
- Orphaned girls (deceased mother/father or mother and father, or unknown);
- Girls who have at least one parent with a disability;

[6] The term 'beneficiary' designates children who were the intended primary receivers of direct project activities. As such, the term here does not include other people targeted by the wider set of interventions (e.g., different types of educators, volunteers, parents/caregivers) or other children that may have had some degree of exposure to or benefit from any given aspect of the project.

- Girls in the care of low-income or unemployed homes; and
- Children with disabilities.[7]

The GATE-GEC project has undertaken an important effort to understand their project population through the annual reverification exercise, conducted at the start of each school year and designed to capture updated information about project beneficiaries who have returned to school (and therefore participated in the project). This exercise was aided by the use of unique ID cards for beneficiaries, to track the respondents' participation in monitoring activities throughout the project.

In response to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the change in project concerns and activities, the GATE-GEC project made a concerted decision to expand the population of beneficiaries reached through the MTRP activities. This 'extended cohort' of beneficiaries includes both the original cohort of supported and tracked beneficiaries as well as additional 'MTRP' beneficiaries who have been participating in and benefitting from project's holistic approach since the start of the project, but were not being tracked. The whole of the extended cohort was captured as part of the latest reverification survey which took place in October 2020.

A detailed disaggregation and analysis of the beneficiary population, including subgroups is presented in Section 5, which explores the population reached by the project.

3.4 Towards an overarching GATE-GEC theory of change

As part of the Inception Phase of our evaluation, we articulated an overarching TOC in order to develop a theory-based approach to assess the project's design, adaptation, implementation and results achieved. In this section, we describe how the GATE-GEC's theory of change (TOC) has evolved over time, beginning first with the TOC as set out in the project's proposal from 2016, as the project evolved during its implementation, and finally, as part of the TOC that described the project's adaptations as part of the MTRP (2020). Table 3.2 provides a high level description of the features of the TOCs across these three phases. Versions of the original and MTRP TOCs can be found in Annex C.

Figure 3.2 Summary of the features of GATE-GEC's theories of change[8]

		Original Design	Mid-term	MTRP
Outcome	1	Improved literacy and numeracy skills	Improved learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy for marginalised girls supported by GEC (with sub-indicator for boys with	Learning

[7] The criteria for defining a child with disabilities as applied in GEC-1 differs slightly from the now GEC programme-wide use of the Washington Group Short Set of questions, resulting in a slight discrepancy in numbers, depending on which definitions are applied.

[8] These features of the TOC are taken from the original project TOC from the proposal, the project logframe updated at midline, and the TOC from the MTRP.

		Original Design	Mid-term	MTRP
			disabilities where reported)	
	2	Completion of current cycle of education and transition to next by targeted girls and children with disabilities9	More marginalised girls transition through key stages of education, training or employment	Transition
	3	Community and stakeholders value and allocate resources to education girls and children with disabilities	Project demonstrates that the changes it has brought about which increase learning and transition through education cycles are sustainable	Sustainability
Intermediate Outcome	1	Increased attendance rates of targeted girls and children with disabilities	Improved attendance of the GEC cohort in schools throughout the life of the project	Targeted marginalised girls and children with disabilities return to school and regularly attend school classes
	2	Improvement of effective teaching practices of targeted teaching staff to improve learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy for girls and children with disabilities	Improved knowledge and demonstration of inclusive education and gender sensitive learning centred teaching in literacy and numeracy	Teachers/schools provide effective teaching practices and differentiated learning support to marginalised learners
	3	Greater self-esteem and confidence of girls and children with disabilities to participate in their education, and make choices around their transition	Improved sense of self-esteem, confidence and agency amongst marginalised girls and children with disabilities in relation to their education	Marginalised girls and children with disabilities are safer and more supported by their schools and communities

[9] Transition includes six alternatives: progress from one grade to another; progress from PS to JSS; progress from JSS to SSS; repeat a grade; enrol in alternative education programmes; or engage in formal employment (above a certain age).

		Original Design	Mid-term	MTRP
			(including feeling safe and secure)	
	4	Increased economic empowerment of targeted beneficiary households/families	Improved economic empowerment at the household level to cover educational costs	N/A
	5	Consistent level of shared learning, collaboration and influence around girls and children with disabilities	Improved attitudes and perceptions of communities and government officials around girls access and inclusive education	Consistent level of shared learning, collaboration, influence and advocacy around inclusive, gender responsive education policies
Output	1	Marginalised girls and children with disabilities and their parents/caregivers are provided support for beneficiaries to attend and learn through PSS to JSS and JSS to post-JSS		Marginalised girls and children with disabilities are provided support to enable the transition back into education
	2	Increased number of skilled PVs, LAs and STs (who support the cohort beneficiaries) to improve learning of marginalised girls and children with disabilities		Educators receive materials, training, continuous professional development (CPD), coaching and supportive supervision to equip them in providing quality learning support to girls and children with disabilities
	3	Marginalised girls and children with disabilities are support to learn in a safe and inclusive learning environment		Girls are able to learn in a safer and more supportive environment; while communities are engaged and mobilized to offer a more supportive and protective environment for girls
	4	Programme evidence and learning is shared with key educational decision makers and actors to influence the Sierra Leonean Education sector		Programme evidence and learning is shared with key decision makers and actors to influence the Sierra Leonean and wider Education sector; and promote opportunities for marginalised learners and girls

The original TOC of GATE-GEC posits that if: attendance rates are increased; teaching and learning is more effective for all students; beneficiaries have greater self-esteem and agency; households have greater economic capacity; and the consortium has increased capacity to collaborate with and influence nationally and internationally with and on behalf of girls and children with disabilities in Sierra Leone, then girls and children with disabilities will achieve sustained, improved learning outcomes and transition from primary school to JSS and from JSS to post-JSS options.

Both the baseline and midline evaluations of GATE-GEC found that the underpinning TOC of the project is valid. Focusing on the barriers identified by the GATE-GEC project and the interventions targeting those barriers, the baseline evaluation found the project theory to be robust. This was similarly echoed by the midline evaluation, which found that the project activities were appropriately designed to address the barriers underpinning the TOC assumptions.

As Table 3.2 demonstrates, with subsequent project evolution, the project's three areas of focus (outcomes) have remained intact throughout the project's lifespan. These domains are an integral part of the GEC programme and all GEC projects are required to use the three outcomes of learning, transition and sustainability as a framework.

Contributing to these outcomes, the original design of the project has articulated four distinct outputs and five intermediate outcomes. The MTRP identified four outputs and four intermediate outcomes, the notable change from the original design being the omission of an intermediate outcome on increased economic empowerment of targeted beneficiary households/families. Looking across the lifespan of the project, we can summarise the project's activities into mechanisms, according to the intermediate outcomes and outputs to which they contribute, as explored in the sections below. A summary of the project's activities can be found in Table 3.3 below; this is further supplemented by the Project Map (Annex B), which provides further details on the project's activities and interventions.

Intermediate Outcome 1, 4 and Output 1

This mechanism was based on the assumptions that student absences are due to poverty or a lack of materials and that higher rates of attendance leads to higher enrolment and improved learning outcomes. In both the original TOC and the MTRP TOC, this mechanism worked by providing targeted marginalised girls and children with disabilities and their families with material and financial support to help ensure that they were able to attend, or in the case of the MTPR, return or re-enrol back into, school. The intermediate outcome in both cases focused on attendance and enrolment rates of the GEC cohort beneficiaries, while outputs focused on the types of support that the project theorises to support attendance and re-enrolment.

Intermediate Outcome 2 and Output 2

The assumptions embedded within this set of activities are that teaching staff and school management lack knowledge of inclusive teaching methods to support quality education for marginalised girls and children with disabilities and that structured pedagogy has the greatest impact on learning outcomes.

As with the first mechanisms, there was strong continuity in this mechanism from the original design into the MTRP. Across its lifespan, the project sought to support a set of targeted educators with a range of support and training, including on disability-inclusive, gender-sensitive pedagogies, behaviour management, safeguarding and child protection, and in literacy and numeracy, in order to provide quality learning support to and a conducive learning environment for project beneficiaries. This includes through the training of PVs and head teachers as well as through the recruitment and development of a female teacher workforce as part of the LA/ST model. The relevant intermediate outcome evolved slightly throughout the project with regards to providing refinement of type of expected teaching practices (from effective teaching practices, to inclusive education and gender sensitive learning centred teaching in literacy and numeracy) as well as how it would be measured (through improved knowledge and demonstration of practices). In the MTPR, this intermediate outcome was streamlined to focus on providing training of PVs for distance and catch-up programming and utilising STs to provide additional support to female students.

The outputs contributing to these intermediate outcomes focus on increasing the number of skilled educators who are able to provide support to beneficiaries, through the provision of materials, training, CPD, coaching, and supportive supervision. Although the language shifts from the original design to the MTRP, both these outputs are related although the focus at MTRP suggests greater attention to the material support provided whereas otherwise, the output was focused on the effectiveness of the support provision.

Intermediate Outcome 3 and Output 3

There are two important embedded assumptions within this group of activities. The first assumes that facilitating beneficiaries to participate in decision-making and improving the school environment leads to improvements in their self-esteem and confidence to engage in and make decisions on their education. Conversely, the second assumption is that cultural norms and attitudes towards marginalised girls and children with disabilities, including stigmatisation, early marriage, and pregnancy, lead to lower educational outcomes and are barriers to transition.

Therefore, these activities applied a two-fold approach to supporting marginalised girls and children with disabilities to improve their self-esteem, confidence, agency and security by supporting their well-being and by creating a safer and more inclusive learning environment. There was a subtle shift in the intermediate outcome, originally focusing on the self-esteem and confidence of beneficiaries but expanded the focus on safety and security as part of the MTRP. Along with this shift, the output moved from a focus on the targeting the learning environment alone to support beneficiaries to targeting both the learning environment and communities.

Intermediate Outcome 5 and Output 4

The final group of activities are organised into a cross-cutting mechanism that supports the sustainability of project intermediate outcomes and outcomes through engagement with key decision makers and actors in the Sierra Leonean education sector. This final mechanism targets activities at the policy and programme level in order to contribute to the overall sustainability outcome. These activities are much more distinct from those in the other three mechanisms, given that they are targeted towards partnerships, collaboration, influence and learning with key stakeholders in the Sierra Leonean education sector, often at national level. As with the previous

mechanism, the activities related to this appear to have become much more targeted and explicit as part of the MTRP, where the focus has become maintaining rapid collaboration and developing coherence with government policy and other programmes with regard to the COVID-19 response.

Table 3.2 Summary of GATE-GEC Interventions

Output	Level	Description of Intervention	Notes	Roll-out Dates	Contribution to Intermediate Outcomes	Contribution to Outcomes
Output 1	Community	Establishing Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) groups provided with livelihood grants to help caregivers support children's education costs.	Through the MTRP, provision of extra cash grants, launch of income generating activities, and VSLA members' sensitisation/training in supporting beneficiaries, including positive parenting sessions.	Apr 2019 – Jul 2021	Intermediate Outcome 1 Intermediate Outcome 4	Learning, Transition and Sustainability
Output 1	Community	Distribution of bursaries to pupils. Activity discontinued soon after initial deployment with the start of FQSE in 2018 at the rest of the GoSL.	Through the MTRP, bursary distribution was reinstated to mitigate economic impacts of the pandemic.	Jun 2018 – Jan 2019; Mar 2020 – Jul 2021	Intermediate Outcome 1	Learning and Transition
Output 1	Community	Distribution of assistive devices, learning aids and/or individualised medical treatments to support children with disabilities	Further roll-out was completed during MTRP.	Oct 2018 – Jul 2021	Intermediate Outcome 1 Intermediate Outcome 3	Learning and Transition
Output 1	Community	Provision of community-level sensitisation on inclusive education by community-based rehabilitation volunteers (CBRVs).	Through the MTRP, CBRVs supported community messaging around school-returning and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).	Jul 2017 – Jul 2021	Intermediate Outcome 5	Sustainability
Output 1	School	Provision of study groups (tutorials) in literacy and numeracy by GATE-GEC trained teachers (PVs).	Through the MTRP, study groups benefitted from new teaching and learning materials and in-class support by Newly Qualified Female Teachers (NQFTs).	Oct 2017 – Mar 2020; Nov 2020 – Jul 2021	Intermediate Outcome 2 Intermediate Outcome 3	Learning and Transition

Output	Level	Description of Intervention	Notes	Roll-out Dates	Contribution to Intermediate Outcomes	Contribution to Outcomes
Output 1	School	Provision of capacity building for better school management to head teachers (HTs), School Management Committees (SMCs) (PS) and Boards of Governors (BOGs) (JSS).		Jan 2019 - Mar 2020	Intermediate Outcome 2	Learning and Sustainability
Output 1	Community School	Yearly back to school sensitisation, including school and community visits.	Through the MTRP, includes preparations for safe school reopening in consideration of the COVID-19 context.	Yearly (2018 – 2020)	Intermediate Outcome 1	Learning and Transition
Output 1	Community	Distribution of dignity kits to girls and food rations to households.	MTRP only.	Jan 2021 – Jun 2021	Intermediate Outcome 1	Learning
Output 2	School	Provision of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to PVs and Head teachers (HTs) to run study groups. Themes include subject-specific topics, inclusive and gender-sensitive pedagogies, classroom management, etc. This also includes the development of learning circles at the school-cluster level.	Through the MTRP, CPD was expanded to reach, PVs, NQFTs and additional teachers, with new teaching and learning materials and training for both in-school and distance learning support. Learning circles were resumed upon school re-opening in 2020.	Oct 2017 – Jul 2021	Intermediate Outcome 1 Intermediate Outcome 2 Intermediate Outcome 3	Learning, Transition and Sustainability
Output 2	School	Support to young women in rural areas to access a pathway to the teaching profession that includes multiyear learning activities in collaboration with TTCs and work placements in primary schools. These women are called LAs,	Through the MTRP, they received material support and NQFTs helped deliver study groups and Girls' Clubs (see below).	Oct 2017 – Jul 2021	Intermediate Outcome 1	Learning and Transition

Output	Level	Description of Intervention	Notes	Roll-out Dates	Contribution to Intermediate Outcomes	Contribution to Outcomes
		STs, or NQFTs depending on the training or completion phase they are in.				
Output 2	School	Support to CWD from itinerant teachers (ITs) through the implementation of individual education plans (IEPs) with further support from teachers, CBRVs, and families.	Through the MTRP, ITs supported PVs, CBRVs and NQFTs to engage with CWD's education and supported mental health interventions.	Jul 2018 - Jul 2021	Intermediate Outcome 2	Learning, Transition and Sustainability
Output 2	School	Support to catch-up and remote education through distance learning materials (MyBook) and telephone-based follow-up (for beneficiaries) and CPD in distance education (for project educators).	MTRP only.	Apr 2020 – Jul 2021	Immediate Outcome 2	Learning and Transition
Output 3	Community School	Roll-out of scorecards and suggestion boxes in JSS as a feedback and accountability system for school and child protection improvements.	Suggestion boxes were moved to the communities during the period of school closure. Upon schools re-opening, boxes were once again moved back to schools. Scorecarding ceased in March 2020.	Jul 2018 – Mar 2020 (scorecarding); Jul 2021 (suggestion boxes)	Intermediate Outcome 1 Intermediate Outcome 3	Learning and Sustainability
Output 3	School	Setting up accessible model schools with improved inclusive infrastructure, support by CBRVs, and teacher training.	Further roll-out.	Dec 2018 – Apr 2021	Intermediate Outcome 1 Intermediate Outcome 3	Learning, Transition and Sustainability

Output	Level	Description of Intervention	Notes	Roll-out Dates	Contribution to Intermediate Outcomes	Contribution to Outcomes
Output 3	Community	Provision of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) by community-level focal points, a hotline and referral pathways.	MTRP.	Oct 2020 - Jul 2021	Intermediate Outcome 3	Learning and Transition
Output 3	Community	Airing radio messages in communities to help address beneficiaries' increased vulnerability.	MTRP.	Oct 2020 – Dec 2020	Intermediate Outcome 3	Learning and Transition
Output 3	School	Provision of Girls' Clubs in PS to address beneficiaries' well-being and safety concerns.	MTRP.	Oct 2020 - Jul 2021	Intermediate Outcome 3	Learning and Transition
Output 4	System	Collaboration and influence around inclusive education with ministries and in the National Steering Committee.	Continued through the MTRP.	Apr 2017 - Jul 2021	Intermediate Outcome 5	Learning and Sustainability
Output 4	System	Engagement and joint monitoring of activities with national- and district-level governments.	Continued through the MTRP, including via the Education in Emergencies Task Force	Apr 2017 - Jul 2021	Intermediate Outcome 5	Learning and Sustainability
Output 4	System	Coordination with other aid programmes and the Teaching Service Commission (TSC).	Continued through the MTRP, including for distance and accelerated learning and protection interventions.	Apr 2017 - Jul 2021	Intermediate Outcome 5	Learning and Sustainability

4 Evaluation Design

4.1 Evaluation approach

The design of the evaluation has evolved since midline, both to account for the project's lessons learned from the midline evaluation as well as due to the change in project design resulting from the outbreak of COVID-19. The pandemic and the resulting school closures also put limitations on the scope of the evaluation, e.g. by making the collection of assessment data not feasible. As a result, the endline evaluation focuses on capturing beneficiary experiences and perspectives on learning, transition and well-being.

This evaluation uses an Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) approach[10]. IPE is a theory-based evaluation approach that focuses on the generation and analysis of data to examine how an intervention is put into practice, how it operates to achieve its intended outcomes, and the factors that influence these processes. IPE is a flexible approach that blends a systematic analysis of existing project monitoring data and documentation, interviews with project stakeholders (project staff across the implementation partners and key stakeholders), and primary data collected with a small group of project beneficiaries and school stakeholders to capture a rich and in-depth understanding of the project's contribution to outcomes.

Our approach is grounded in the project's 'overarching' theory of change[11] and explores the theory behind the design of activities, the progress made and results achieved by the project, and beneficiary perspectives and experiences on the pathways to outcomes. We examine key implementation factors to assess the project's theory, design, and implementation in order to draw conclusions about design or implementation successes and failures and to investigate what worked and what did not work in terms of project activities and mechanisms and how did the project generate change.

To operationalise our IPE, we developed the following tools during our Inception Phase:

1. **Project Map**: We gathered crucial information about the design of the GATE-GEC project and its adaptations to generate an overarching project theory of change. We also compiled a full list of project activities to create a project activity map, to identify the potential pathways to outcomes for beneficiaries. This allows us to articulate and interrogate the project's intended mechanisms for instigating change. See Annex B. The list of documents we reviewed to construct our project map can be found in Annex D.
2. **MEL Data Catalogue:** We collated existing monitoring and evaluation data into a data catalogue to understand what data is available to explore project design and theory, results achieved, and implementation factors. We examine project output data to contribute to our

[10] More information and guidance on IPE can be found on the Education Endowment Foundation website (EEF, 2019). Our IPE is also grounded in the UK Medical Research Council's guidance on Process Evaluation of complex interventions (Moore et al, 2015).

[11] See Section 3. This is a version of the project's theory of change developed for the evaluation, which will bring together the project's existing theories of change developed as part of the original project design and as part of the MTRP project adaptations.

understanding of outcome pathways for beneficiaries. Finally, the data catalogue also allowed us to identify particular gaps in evidence to refine our data collection tools. See Annex E.

4.2 Evaluation questions

The table below provides a summary of our evaluation framework. This contains our main evaluation questions and how they link to our core evaluation objectives and to OECD-DAC criteria. A full version of the evaluation framework, including how we intended to address each evaluation question and the relevant data sources, can be found in Annex F.

Table 4.1 Summary Evaluation Framework

OECD DAC	EQ#	Evaluation Question
Objective 1. Take stock of the GATE-GEC project (2017-2021) to examine the project's design, adaptation and intended results achieved.		
Effectiveness	EQ1	How and how well was the project designed and implemented?
	EQ2	How and how well did the project adapt its design and implementation to respond to changing needs and contexts?
Relevance	EQ4	How and how well did the project include and support marginalised/vulnerable groups, including children with disability?
	EQ5	How and how well has the project responded to the evolution of project beneficiary profiles and needs, particularly with regard to the effect of COVID-19 on retention and dropout?
Objective 2. Document and trace the experiences of the vulnerable and marginalised beneficiary groups as part of the GATE-GEC project, including their evolving needs, the drivers and barriers to learning, transition, and well-being, and how the project has generated change for beneficiaries (with attention to unique and commonalities of experience across sub-groups).		
Effectiveness	EQ3	To what degree did the project achieve its intended results, including differential results across groups?
	EQ6	How and how well has the project supported project beneficiaries to improve learning outcomes through support to improve the quality and inclusiveness of teaching and inclusiveness of the school environment?
	EQ7	How and how well has the project supported project beneficiaries to successfully attend and/or return to school and ultimately transition, through support to beneficiary well-being and for beneficiaries to feel safe and supported by their families, schools, and communities?
	EQ8	How and how well has the project created positive and lasting change for marginalised girls and children with disabilities and with what evidence?
	EQ9	How and how well do the different project activities, outputs and intermediate outcomes come together to generate outcomes for the beneficiary experience?

	EQ10	How and how well has the project addressed the major factors (drivers, enablers and barriers) to achievement and sustainability of project outcomes for different project beneficiary groups?
Impact; Sustainability	EQ11	How and how well has the project contributed to higher level effects (social, environmental or economic, both positive or negative and intended or unintended) and will they be expected to continue beyond the project?
Objective 3. Reflecting on the findings from Evaluation Objectives 1 and 2, capture lessons and recommendations from the project, particularly on how and how well it adapted and responded to changing needs and contexts.		

4.3 Data collection approach

Our data collection approach used participatory, gender-sensitive and inclusive methods to support meaningful engagement with project beneficiaries and stakeholders and to amplify the voices of beneficiaries using the highest standards of safeguarding and ethical protocols.

4.3.1 Tools

We developed two sets of tools for qualitative data collection. These qualitative data collection tools are summarised in the table below while copies of the final tools can be found in Annex G.

Table 4.2 Qualitative data collection methods

Tool	Purpose	Sample
Semi-structured stakeholder interviews	To gather detailed information from key actors in the project or those closely associated with the beneficiaries. These will primarily be used to elucidate information about project implementation, including about project design, adaptation, coherence, and efficiency.	5 group interviews with project staff (including Plan UK, Plan Sierra Leone, AA, HI, OU) 4 key stakeholders (MBSSE, TSC, and MSW) 22 school stakeholders (head teachers, PVs, and NQFTs)
Participatory Toolkit	To gather detailed information about respondent experiences and perspectives of different elements of the project and outcomes experienced.	42 marginalised girls and Children with disabilities (taking into consideration intersectional marginalisation, including disability and categorisation across subgroups, and involvement in different areas of the project).

To engage stakeholders such as project staff, key project stakeholders, and school-level stakeholders such as head teachers, PVs, and Cohort 1/2 NQFTs, we used semi-structured stakeholder interviews. Interviews were designed to last 60 minutes and examined various aspects of project implementation and process. Separate guides were developed and tailored to each of the respondent types.

We employed a toolkit of participatory research activities, which was comprised of two core activities used to facilitate 1-on-1 discussions with project beneficiaries around a semi-structured interview guide with questions designed to address different evaluation questions. The toolkit allowed our researchers to engage with marginalised girls or children with different abilities in a number of different ways (visual, audial, tactile, etc.) and contained guidance for how the activities can be adapted to meet the needs of the individual respondent or adjusted to the tone of the interview.

- **Feelings Dice:** This tool was used as an icebreaker. The tool was also used with younger children as an additional means to prompt discussion about different aspects of school life and experiences of inclusion.
- **'About You and Life at School'**: This tool allowed children to both trace their journey to school and explore the different elements of school, which act as barriers or enablers to learning. This included physical elements (such as infrastructure), school staff, and understanding social dynamics and norms amongst children and the wider school community

4.3.2 Sampling

For this evaluation, we used a non-probability sample for our qualitative fieldwork; as such, this sample was not intended to be statistically representative of the wider GATE-GEC beneficiary population. Our sample sought to identify particular cases of beneficiaries who can provide information on differentiated impacts. For data collection, we targeted the following groups:

Table 4.3 Types of respondents for qualitative fieldwork

Respondent type	Sampling criteria
Project beneficiaries	Marginalised girls and children with disabilities, including all cohort groups of beneficiaries. We included both boys with disabilities and girls with disabilities (at PS) and considered different sub-groups of JSS girls (such as girls with disability, girls who are married, pregnant or have children, types of household-head status, and SES status) The sample can be disaggregated by: district, age, gender, type of disability, household characteristics, and other forms of vulnerability. More information on the sample can be found in Annex H.
Teachers and other school staff	Teachers involved in different intervention areas, including PVs, LA/STs/NQFTs (Cohorts 1&2), and head teachers.
Project staff and key stakeholders	Group interviews were conducted with project staff, along the lines of organisation, in order to maximise the number of perspectives (and a range of expertise and service time). Key stakeholders selected on the basis of their involvement in and knowledge of the GATE-GEC project. Key stakeholders were nominated for participation in interviews by the Plan team. A full list of the stakeholders interviewed can be found in Annex I.

The basis for our sampling approach is the 2020 beneficiary reverification survey. The survey was conducted at the start of the 2020-21 school year to create a database of original cohort and extended cohort GATE-GEC beneficiaries. Our first step involved building an understanding of the beneficiary population (using the project's reverification data) by determining the distribution across sub-groups, such as: school level, sex, age, type of support received, and marginalised status (across disabilities, motherhood/pregnancy, household socio-economic characteristics, and others). This allowed us to understand both the types of marginalisation and the extent to which marginalisation occurs across the beneficiary population.

Having identified categories, sub-groups or patterns of intersectionality of interest, we utilised the purposively sampled 'clusters' to operationalise fieldwork, collecting data based on a school cluster. Our sample consisted a total of 12 clusters, or schools, including one JSS and one PS in each of the six GATE-GEC districts. Within schools, we sampled:

- JSS: 4 beneficiaries; 1 PV, 1 head teacher
- PS: 3 beneficiaries (including boys with disabilities (BWD) and girls with disabilities (GWD); 1 PV, and 1 NQFT (where applicable)

In order to select clusters (e.g. schools), we used a convenience approach by determining the feasibility of fieldwork by examining whether there is a sizable proportion of potential respondents at each cluster. We purposively selected a list of primary and junior secondary schools (and a set of back up schools) for data collection on this basis. These schools were selected to ensure a mix of different types of beneficiary sub-groups as well as to ensure all the activities carried out by the GATE-GEC project were implemented in at least one of the sample schools. The sample was reviewed by Plan's MEL team to validate our selection and account for other factors that might disrupt fieldwork. Access to schools was facilitated by Implementation Partners, with introductions to district education stakeholders and head teachers.

Within the selected schools, we generated a sample frame of potential respondents using reverification data. Priority respondents were selected on the basis of their membership in sub-groups, which had been selected for analysis. Within this sample frame, we used a mixture between randomised and convenience approach (based on their attendance) to select respondents to be interviewed.

4.4 Data collected

Primary qualitative data was collected in the six operating districts of the GATE-GEC project, Training for data collection took place 26 – 30 April 2021, with a follow up session conducted on 14 May 2021 to review and train researchers on revised tools. Data collection took place 19 – 31 May 2021, with the bulk of fieldwork conducted in the week of 24 – 28 May 2021. More information about the sample characteristics can be found below and in Annex H.

Table 4.4 Data collected, by school cluster

District	Level	School Code	Total Sample
Kailahun	PS	P11434	1 PV, 2 NQFTs, 2 GWD, 1 BWD
	JSS	J11227	1 PV, 1 head teacher, 4 marginalised girls

Karene	PS	P60209	1 PV, 2 GWD, 1BWD
	JSS	J60101	1 PV, 1 head teacher, 4 marginalised girls
Kenema	PS	P20103	1 PV, 2 GWD, 1BWD
	JSS	J20404	1 PV, 1 head teacher, 4 marginalised girls
Kono	PS	P30617	1 PV, 1 NQFT, 2 GWD, 1 BWD
	JSS	J30608	1 PV, 1 head teacher, 4 marginalised girls
Moyamba	PS	P40308	1 PV, 2 GWD, 1 BWD
	JSS	J41028	1 PV, 1 head teacher, 4 marginalised girls
Port Loko	PS	P50120	1, PV, 2 NQFT, 2 GWD, 1 BWD
	JSS	J50208	1 PV, 1 head teacher, 4 marginalised girls

Table 4.5 Sample achieved (with sub-groups)

Type of respondent	Total
Boys with disability (PS)	6
Girls with disability (PS)	12
Girls with disability (JSS)	2
Girls who are mothers (JSS)	4
Girls who are orphans (JSS)	9
Marginalised girls (JSS)	9
Head Teachers	6
Program Volunteers	12
NQFT	4
Key project stakeholders	4
Project staff group interviews	5
TOTAL	73

4.5 Data analysis

4.5.1 Analysis of secondary data (quantitative)

The quantitative data analysis focused on project monitoring data. Its goal was to deliver insights into the distribution of beneficiary characteristics, and to report on project outputs against log frame indicators, disaggregated to understand trends and distributions for relevant subgroups.

At the stage of planning the analysis, we mapped project outputs to the corresponding sources of data and summarised these data sources along with the key logframe indicators they captured, data collection time frames, level of disaggregation, and sample sizes into a data catalogue. On the basis of this catalogue, and with inputs from the project MEAL team, we identified the

appropriate data sources to use to estimate the project output indicators. As a first step, we also carried out an exploratory analysis of the beneficiary reverification data to develop an understanding of the beneficiary characteristics and their distribution across the beneficiary population. This enabled us to identify the key subgroups and attributes that we would explore in our analysis.

Datasets were cleaned prior to analysis, which included carrying out consistency checks for data quality. We used a combination of Stata and Excel to carry out the analysis. This involved generating descriptive statistics to explore differences in project progress between beneficiary subgroups and trends over time, and re-estimating project output indicators to measure progress against log frame targets. Results were disaggregated by key beneficiary characteristics including school level, gender, disability, socioeconomic status, and other indicators of marginalisation (such as parenthood, marriage and orphan status), where there was sufficient sample size to allow this.

4.5.2 Analysis of primary data (qualitative)

To analyse the primary data collected as part of the evaluation, we used computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (ATLAS.ti) to structure and interrogate qualitative data from different perspectives to answer our research questions. We developed a coding framework (see Annex J) to ensure consistency and depth of analysis and to explore different case-types.

We used a two-step approach to data analysis. In the ‘first level’ of coding we used a deductive approach, utilising our coding framework, to support the organisation of our data. We first analysed the existing project data, which includes project documentation. We then analysed the primary data collected as part of the evaluation. All of our interviews were recorded (following participant agreement) and written up as full transcriptions. We used reverification data to create attributes tables linking interview quotations with key characteristics and sub-groups. This allowed us to organise quotations into case types and for analysis of characteristics at both the individual or sub-group level. At each of these stages, the coding framework was updated as data was analysed to reflect new emerging themes. Our second level of analysis applied an inductive approach to generate further observations to answer each of the evaluation questions and by comparatively examining our data according to different types of cases or sub-groups.

4.6 Limitations

The endline provides an analysis of the progress made by the project in achieving its milestones, the successes and challenges encountered, as well the sustainability of the changes made. However, the adaptation to the scope of COVID-19, which resulted in the shift of the scope of the evaluation, also means that it has certain limitations. Additionally, the choice of any methodological approach carries some limitations.

In the following table, we have included the main points that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the evaluation’s findings and analyses. For further information about the data sources analysed, the process of analysis, and the limitations of this analysis, please see Annex A.

Table 4.6 Our approach to mitigating the limitations and risks to our evaluation approach

Limitations / risks	Our approach to mitigation
Design	
It was not possible to collect learning outcomes data, or any information from a comparison group, given the pandemic-related school closures. **Risk:** Limitation to our ability to compare the learning outcomes from baseline to endline and to report on changes to beneficiaries' learning outcomes.	The lack of primary learning assessment data resulted in a greater focus of the current evaluation on qualitative sources of information, and previously-collected MEL data. These sources were used to track the project's progress and accomplishments and to understand the changes achieved by project. However, it does mean that the evaluation cannot fill the (quantitative) data gaps from previous data collections.
Attribution of impact by the project cannot be confirmed within the scope of the research, due to the lack of representative sample and no quasi-experimental evaluation approach. **Risk:** Misinterpretation of findings presented, erroneous attribution of causality.	The limitation around the inability to use statistical methods to establish causality has been acknowledged in the evaluation Terms of Reference. By employing a mixed-methods approach and putting the emphasis on qualitative methods, we explore the role of project in contributing to stakeholders' outcomes and provide plausible explanations for the changes.
Primary research	
Restrictions on international travel meant that enumerator training and data collection in the field had to be coordinated remotely **Risk:** Lower ability to stay connected with the enumerators	The data collection was preceded by extensive virtual training to make sure that enumerators were comfortable with the GATE-GEC programme, the evaluation objectives and the tools. Additionally, in-country coordinators followed up with teams in each province to make sure that any questions were addressed. Communication during field work was achieved regularly using messaging services as well as more direct communication with the IfD team.
Sample was small and limited to beneficiaries currently in schools. **Risk**: Biased reporting	Our qualitative findings cannot be used to present a comprehensive picture of all beneficiaries but aim to highlight representative experiences. The findings will be triangulated with the analyses of the quantitative MEL data and findings from previous evaluations.
Secondary data analysis	
Unable to conduct thorough quality checks or to verify project monitoring data collected by the project MEL system.	We adopted a flexible but rigorous approach to the evaluation in order to adapt its outcomes to the availability and quality of

Limitations / risks	Our approach to mitigation
Risk: Poor quality or incomplete data limiting robustness and relevance of analysis	existing MEL data. We conducted checks to ensure that the evidence we used was reliable and fit for purpose. We cleaned and standardised the data, where required, before analysis, and omitted analysis of those indicators where a substantial proportion of observations were missing or where there were significant quality issues. Findings are caveated with relevant considerations to minimise the risk of invalid conclusions.

5 Objective 1

This section examines the first objective of the evaluation, which is to take stock of the GATE-GEC project (2017-2021) to examine the project's design, adaptation and intended results achieved. To do so, we examine the following evaluation questions:

EQ1	How and how well was the project designed and implemented?
EQ2	How and how well did the project adapt its design and implementation to respond to changing needs and contexts?
EQ4	How and how well did the project include and support marginalised / vulnerable groups, including children with disability?
EQ5	How and how well has the project responded to the evolution of project beneficiary profiles and needs, particularly with regard to the effect of COVID-19 on retention and dropout?

This section first provides an analysis of the project's beneficiary population in order to assess the project's relevance to its target populations. We then examines the project's design, implementation, and adaptation in order to provide an examination of the project's relevance and how well it was able to adapt to changing contexts and the changing needs of its beneficiaries. Although Objective 1 includes an assessment of the intended results achieved, this is explored in the following Section 6.

5.1 Beneficiary reach and composition

Key Findings:

- The GATE-GEC project reached a total of 14,069 beneficiaries across the project's lifetime across PS and JSS. This beneficiary population is comprised of a total of 11,012 direct female beneficiaries (girls, including girls with disabilities), 1,575 direct male beneficiaries (boys with disabilities) and 1,482 indirect male beneficiaries (boys).
- In 2017, the original cohort included 6,586 beneficiaries, of which 1,566 remained in 2020, which suggests that a total of 5,020 beneficiaries have left the project. While the project has not tracked the reasons for why beneficiaries left, the majority of project leavers (67 percent) left at the JSS3 level. This suggests that the reason for leaving the project is more likely due to the completion of JSS rather than drop-out in earlier grades.
- There is strong evidence that the project has successfully targeted children with disabilities; 23 percent of the project's population were children with disabilities, as compared with a national average of 1.5 percent.
- Of those students, 86 percent identified as having a moderately severe disability and 1.4 a severe disability, compared with 13 percent having a less severe disability. The greatest proportion of types of disability were difficulty hearing (32 percent) and difficulty seeing (29 percent).

- An analysis of sub-groups, including disability status, SES, orphanhood, and parenthood provides supportive evidence that the project has successfully targeted beneficiaries who can be considered as marginalised.

5.1.1 Beneficiary population

This section examines the composition of the GATE-GEC beneficiary population. An understanding of the beneficiary population derives from data from the beneficiary reverification survey, conducted at the start of each academic year (2017-2020). The survey captures data from two sets of populations: the **original cohort** of direct beneficiaries who have been tracked longitudinally throughout the project and the **expanded cohort** of initially indirect beneficiaries, who participated in and benefitted from project study groups alongside the original cohort and who were additionally directly targeted and tracked as part of the STRP/MTRP interventions.

Reverification data confirms that the GATE-GEC project reached a total of 14,069 beneficiaries across the project's lifetime across both cohorts in PS and JSS.[12]

Figure 5.1 Summary of GATE-GEC beneficiary composition based on project data (2017-2021)

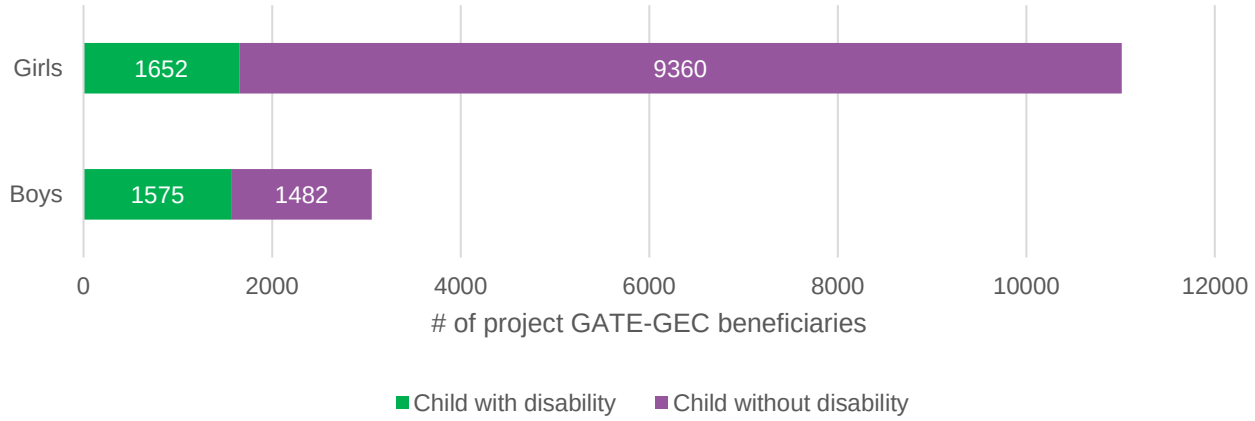


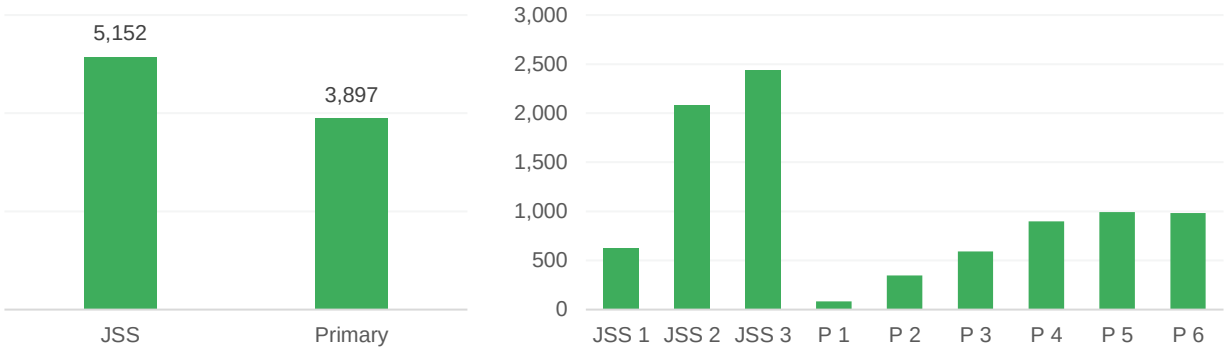
Figure 5.1 presents the breakdown of the beneficiary population. This is comprised of a total of 11,012 direct female beneficiaries (girls, including girls with disabilities), 1,575 direct male beneficiaries (boys with disabilities) and reached a further 1,482 indirect male beneficiaries (boys).

The project was designed to target a greater number of students at JSS level. The project estimates that 40 percent are at the PS level (2,618 girls and 3,057 boys) and 60 percent (8,394 girls) are at the JSS level. It is difficult to determine the overall figures of students reached at each level through the project's lifetime when taking into account transition and project attrition rates.

[12] The total figure is derived from the summation of the count of unique IDs for the original cohort of beneficiaries counted at the start of the project in 2017 with the expanded cohort counted in 2020. It should be noted that NFER's analysis differs slightly from the project's figures, with a difference of 110 beneficiaries. This discrepancy is likely due to differences as a results of data cleaning differences in the expanded cohort dataset, whereby NFER's analysis is not able to account for if entries were removed due to inaccuracies or duplicated entries under different IDs. We have adopted the project's more conservative figures as the final total of beneficiaries reached, but the subsequent analysis is based on our figures.

Focusing more specifically at a cross-section of the beneficiary population in its final year (2020), the reverification data demonstrates that the majority of beneficiaries (56 percent) of GATE-GEC are in JSS with 44 percent at PS, favouring later grades in both JSS and PS levels (see Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2 Number of total beneficiaries by school level and by current grade (2020)[13]



In 2017, the original cohort included 6,586 beneficiaries. In the final year of the project, 9,049 beneficiaries were being reached, which included 7,593[14] as part of the expanded cohort and 1,566 of the remaining original cohort.

This suggests that over time, a total of 5,020 beneficiaries have left the project. While the project has not tracked the beneficiaries who left, the possible reasons for leaving include successful transition from JSS to senior secondary school, drop-out, or moving out of GATE-GEC project schools/districts. The majority of project leavers (67 percent) left at the JSS3 level (see Section 6.2.1 where this is discussed further). Looking longitudinally across the original cohort, the proportion of children with disability increases over time and the number of PS students (where the majority of children with disability have been targeted) amongst the original cohort remained high. This further suggests that the reason for leaving the project is more likely due to the completion of JSS rather than drop-out in earlier grades and that children with disabilities have been retained throughout the project.

5.1.2 Marginalisation and relevance

The additional depth of the 2020 reverification survey allows us to better understand the characteristics of the beneficiary population, including a deeper understanding of sub-groups, albeit through a cross-section of the 9,049 beneficiaries reached in the final year of the project. The use of the 2020 cross-section of data has the additional value of being able to break down the population by school level and grade, allowing us to disaggregate sub-group characteristics by school level. This has particular value as the GATE-GEC project has had different targeting and selection criteria for PS and JSS, focusing on (but not solely targeting) children with disabilities at the PS level and marginalised girls at the JSS level.

[13] Source: 2020 reverification survey.
[14] Note that the project has reported a slightly lower figure for the expanded cohort total of 7,483.

Disability

The project was designed to target children with disabilities, particularly at the PS level but also girls with disabilities at the JSS level. Across the total project population, 23 percent were identified as children with disabilities.[15] Of the total population of 11,012 girls reached by the project, 15 percent are girls with disabilities and of the 3057 boys, 52 percent are boys with disabilities.

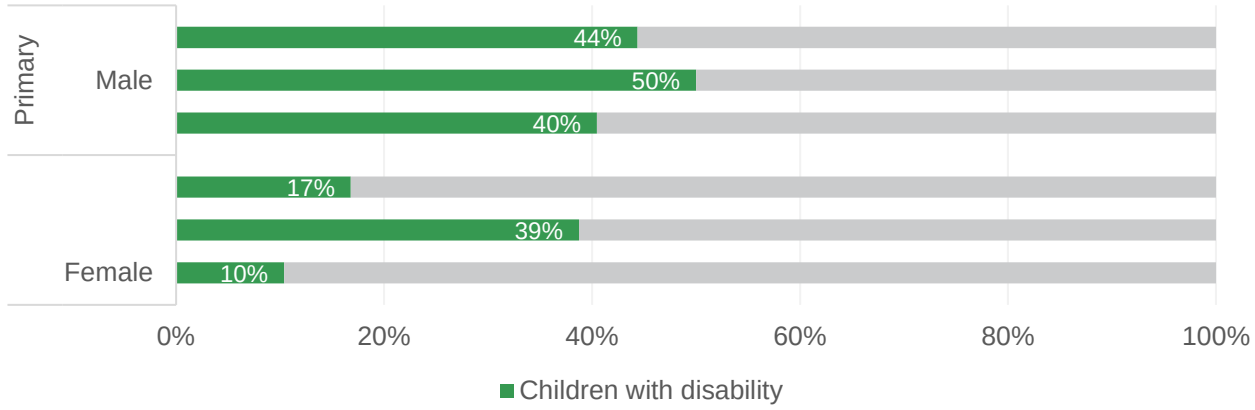
Students in the original cohort were more likely to have a disability. At PS, 98 percent of the original cohort of students identified as having a disability versus 34 percent of those outside of the original cohort. At JSS level, 40 percent in the original cohort identified as having a disability versus 12 percent of those outside the original cohort.

As reported in Section 2, the 2019 ASC found that approximately 15 percent of school-aged children (both in and out of school) present a disability, while the 2017 MICS found that 23 percent of children aged 5 to 17 had at least one functional disability.[16] However, as reported in the 2019 ASC, the school enrolment of children with disabilities is closer to 1.5 percent of the school population, demonstrating that a significant number of children with disabilities likely remain outside of the school system. These figures confirm that the project was able to successfully target students with disabilities as part of the GATE-GEC project, as the project has targeted a greater proportion of children with disabilities than are nationally enrolled in school and closer to or greater than the national population average. This is particularly true of the original cohort of beneficiaries.

The 2020 reverification survey provides greater insight into both the type and severity of disabilities in the GATE-GEC population. Across this sample of 9,049 beneficiaries, 29 percent (2,596) of beneficiaries were identified has having a disability. Figure 5.3 below provides a breakdown of the distribution of children with disabilities in GATE-GEC in 2020, by school level and gender. At the PS level, 44 percent of the 2020 population of PS beneficiaries were identified as having disabilities, with 50 percent of all male PS students targeted were identified as having a disability and 40 percent of all female PS students. At the JSS level, the overall proportion of extended cohort students identified as having disability is lower than at PS, with 17 percent overall. While 39 percent of all male JSS beneficiaries were identified as having a disability, the figure is 10 percent for female beneficiaries. Although the project appears to have been successful in targeting an increasing number of female JSS students with disabilities, the reverification survey data also suggests that the project has successfully reached a high proportion of male JSS students with disabilities.

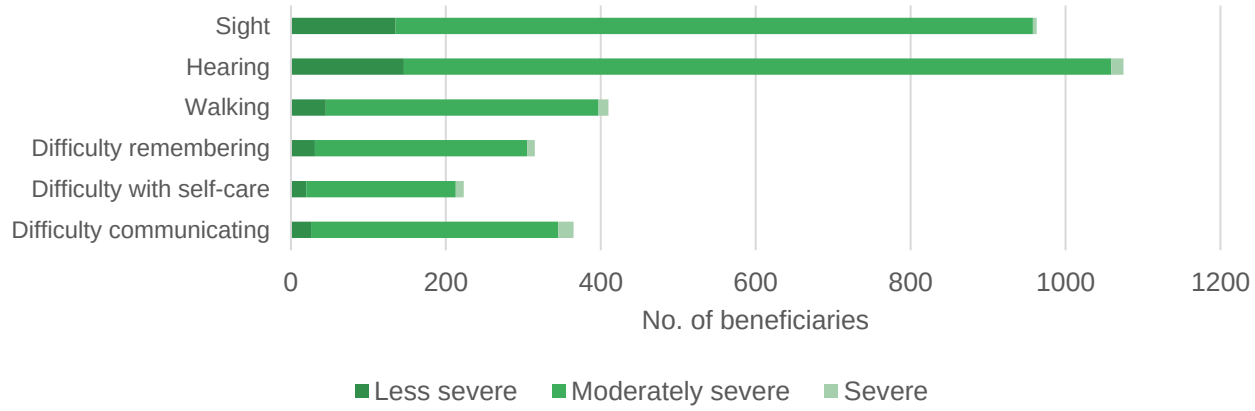
[15] This was defined using project data, building on the Washington Group Short Set of questions. We adopt the project's definition of 'disability' whereby a student identifies as having 'some difficulty' with one or more domain, such as seeing, hearing, walking ,communicating, with self-care, and remembering.
[16] However, it should be noted that these surveys may only be partially comparable to the monitoring data because of differences in definitions of disability. For instance, the methodology used by the ASC involves asking schools to report on pupil disability status, rather than the use of the Washington Group Set of questions utilised by the GATE-GEC project.

Figure 5.3 Distribution of children with disabilities by school level and gender (2020)[17]



Of those with disabilities, the majority (86 percent) were identified as having a moderately severe disability, compared to 1.4 percent with a severe disability and 13 percent with a less severe disability[18]. Figure 5.4 presents the distribution of type and severity of disability for the 2020 beneficiary group. A similar distribution of severity is observed across different types of disability. A breakdown of type of disability shows that the majority of GATE-GEC beneficiaries who were identified as having a disability (e.g. some difficulty or greater) have hearing difficulties (32 percent), followed by 29 percent with visual difficulties.

Figure 5.4 Distribution of children with disabilities by type and severity of disability (2020)[19]



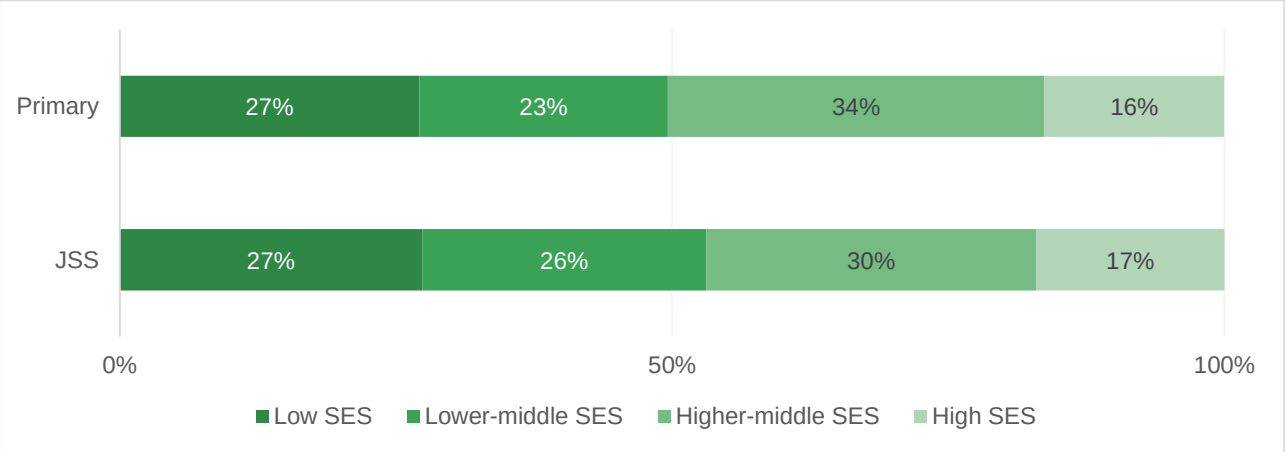
[17] Source: 2020 reverification survey. Proportions based on population size N=9049.
[18] This is based on the use of the Washington Group Short Set of Questions which utilises a scale of 1 – 4, whereby 1 = no difficulty, 2 = some difficulty, 3 = a lot of difficulty, and 4 = cannot do at all. Severity corresponds to options 2-4, whereby 'some difficulty' is categorised as a 'less severe' disability and 'cannot do at all' corresponds to a 'severe' disability.
[19] Source: 2020 reverification survey. N=2596; the survey allows for students to identify with more than one type of disability.

Socio-economic status

The 2020 beneficiary survey also allows us to better understand the socio-economic status (SES) of the beneficiary population. The survey examines a number of different aspects of SES, including parent's education level, livestock and land ownership, and levels of hunger. To examine SES, we constructed a composite SES score comprised of a weighted average of these variables to provide a more complete and complex picture of SES. Using this SES score, we allocated beneficiaries into quartiles, in order to compared beneficiaries within the population only.

The greatest proportion of beneficiaries falls within the low-SES category (27 percent) with the smallest proportion of beneficiaries from the high SES category (17 percent), meaning that GATE-GEC project has been successful in targeting children from lower SES backgrounds. As the figure below shows, this distribution is similar at PS and JSS levels.

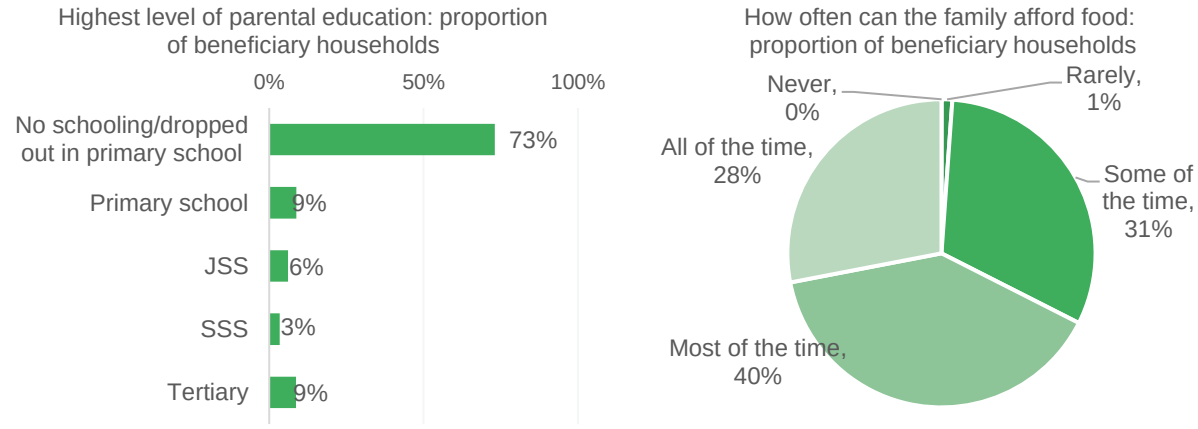
Figure 5.5 SES distribution by school level (2020)[20]



With respect to parental education, the vast majority (73 percent) of beneficiaries' parents have low educational attainment, either having dropped out in primary school or have no schooling altogether. About 54 percent of respondents reported that their households own land or livestock. In terms of hunger, roughly 68 percent of beneficiaries responded that their households can afford food all or most of the time, although this is not a precise measure of food security.

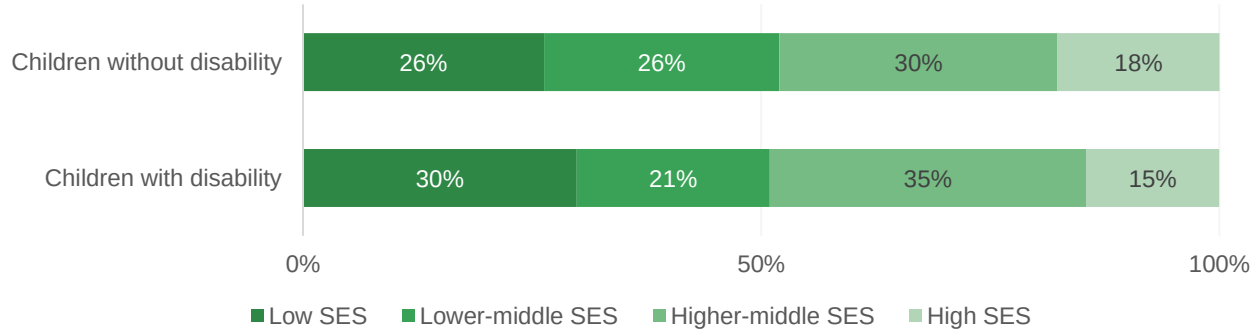
[20] Source: 2020 reverification survey. Note: Proportions based on population size N=9,049.

Figure 5.6 Parental education and household hunger (2020)[21]



With respect to SES, there were no significant differences between children with disabilities and children without disabilities. Across both groups, the greatest number (30 percent and 35 percent respectively) of children belonged to the higher-middle SES bracket, with the smallest proportion in the high SES category.

Figure 5.7 Distribution of children with disability by SES as a proportion of beneficiary population (2020)[22]

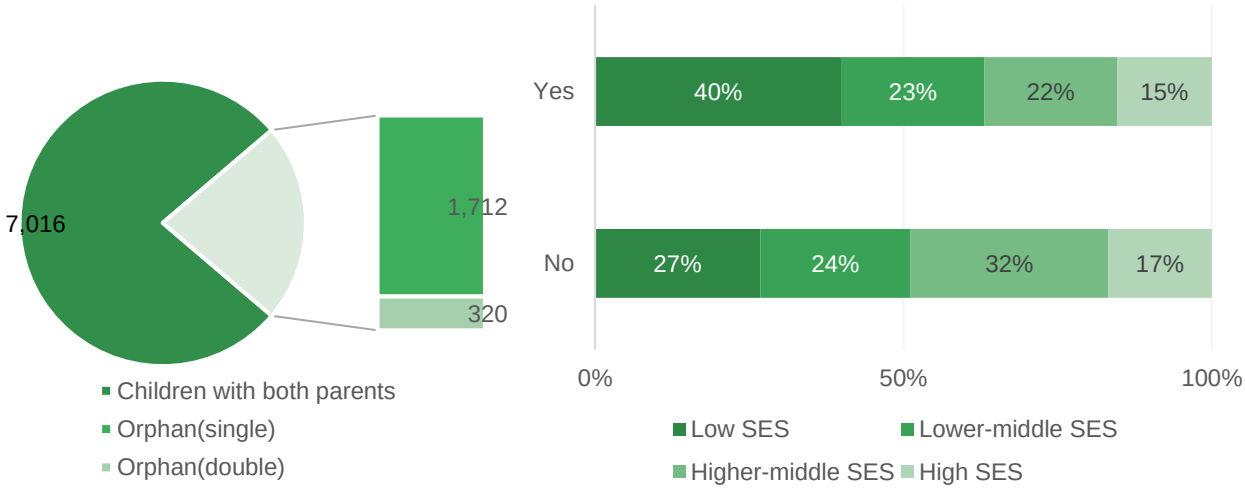


Orphanhood

We also examined the distribution of beneficiaries with regards to the characteristics of their households; in particular, we looked at the breakdown of students who were identified as being a 'single orphan' or 'double orphan' (in which both parents were deceased); these sub-groups were highlighted in the midline evaluation as being particularly vulnerable. Using the 2020 verification survey, 22.5 percent (2,032) of beneficiaries were identified as either a single or double orphan, with 84 percent of these beneficiaries considered as single orphans and 16 percent as double orphans.

[21] Source: 2020 reverification survey. Note: Proportions based on population size N=9,049.
[22] Source: 2020 reverification survey. N=9049.

Figure 5.8 Status of beneficiaries by type of orphanhood status and status (yes/no) and SES (2020)[23]



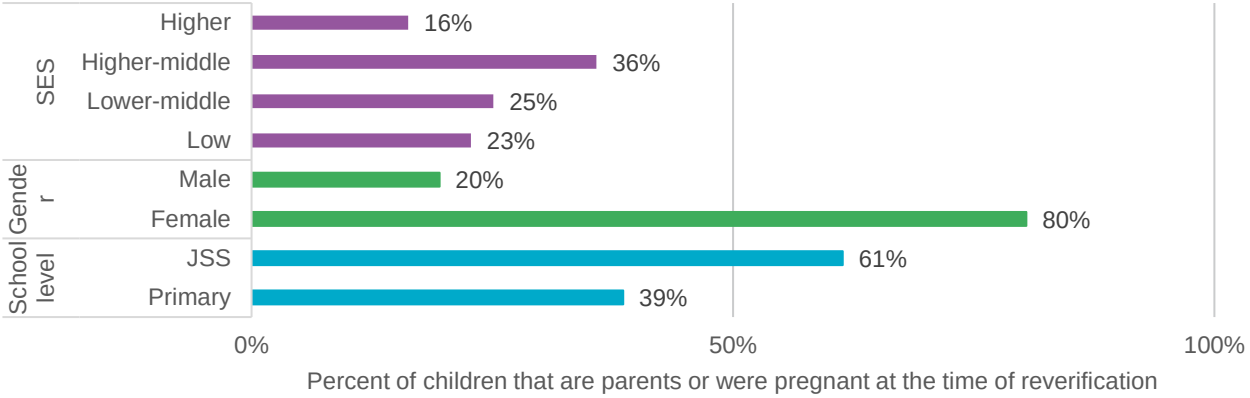
The SES of beneficiaries identified as orphans shows that 40 percent of orphans belonged to the low SES category, followed by 23 percent in the low-middle SES bracket. This proportion is notably higher than for beneficiaries not identified as orphans, indicating that there is an intersectionality of marginalisation between orphanhood and poverty. In terms of the intersectionality between disability and orphanhood, the 2020 reverification survey data showed that 23 percent of children with disabilities were also single orphans and 4 percent of children with disabilities had lost both their parents.

Parenthood and marital status[24]

Out of the beneficiary population in 2020, 2.4 percent (215) of beneficiaries were identified as either being pregnant or already a parent. There were no differences in the proportion of children who were pregnant or a parent between gender, SES and school level. Within those who were pregnant or a parent, a higher proportion were female, JSS students, and belonged to the higher-middle SES category.

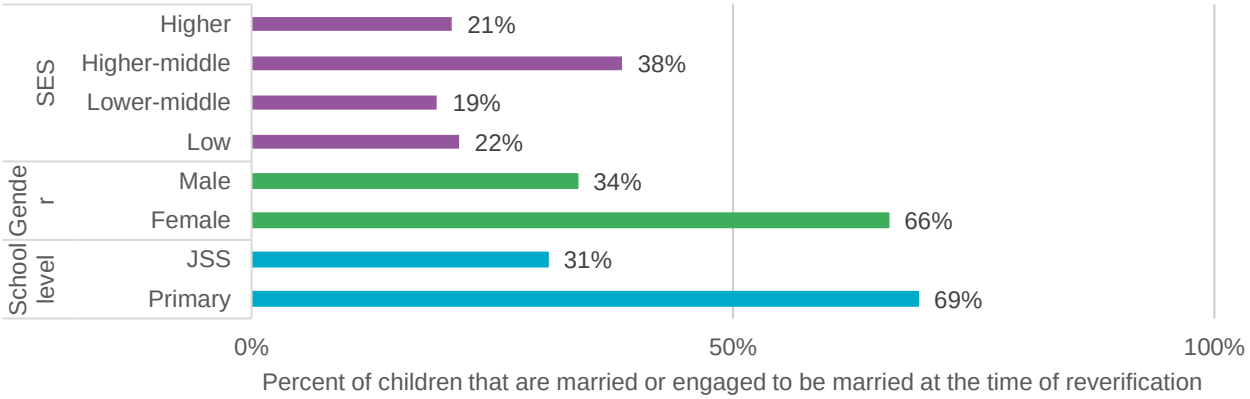
[23] Source: 2020 reverification survey.
[24] 'Parenthood' refers to beneficiaries who identified as either already a parent or who were pregnant at the time of the reverification survey exercises. 'Marriage' refers to beneficiaries who identified as either married or engaged to be married at the time of the reverification survey exercises.

Figure 5.9 Parenthood status of beneficiaries by beneficiary characteristics (2020)[25]



With regards to marriage or engagement, 1.4 percent (130) of the total beneficiary population in the 2020 reported being married or engaged. A higher proportion of PS beneficiaries (2.3 percent) report that they were married or engaged relative to JSS beneficiaries (0.8 percent), although these figures are still very low. No major differences were observed in the proportion of married or engaged beneficiaries between gender and SES. Within those who were married or engaged to be married, a higher proportion were female, PS, and belonged to the higher-middle SES category.

Figure 5.10 Marital status of beneficiaries by beneficiary characteristics (2020)[26]



Looking across the sub-groups such as children with disabilities, by SES status, and with regards to household status (orphanhood) and parenthood status, we find that the project appears to have continued to effectively target marginalised students, which confirms the findings from midline and baseline. This is particularly true of children with disabilities, whereby the project has been able to reach a higher proportion of children with disabilities than the national average.

[25] Source: 2020 reverification data. N=215 (only includes beneficiaries who responded 'yes' to being a parent or being pregnant).
[26] Source: 2020 reverification data. N=130 (only includes beneficiaries who responded 'yes' to being married or engaged to be married).

5.2 Project design, implementation, and adaptation

Key Findings:

- The design of GATE-GEC has continued the progress made by its predecessor programme, GEC-1, through both support to educators and students and attention to intersectionality. The design of GATE-GEC has also learned important lessons from GEC-1 by including a greater focus on inclusive education, engagement and ownership, and beneficiary monitoring.
- GATE-GEC's focus on intersectionality, and subsequently safeguarding and child protection, has strongly differentiated GATE-GEC from other programmes in Sierra Leone. This has contributed to its ability to engage national stakeholders.
- The consortium design of GATE-GEC has the advantage of allowing each member to contribute a thematic expertise. However, the structure also posed challenges to the implementation of district-level activities where priorities competed, such as in the delivery of thematic activities versus monitoring data collection.
- The original design of the GATE-GEC project was carefully informed by an understanding of beneficiary needs following the outbreak of Ebola. GATE-GEC successfully target beneficiaries' needs, in response to the outbreak of COVID-19. However, with the outbreak of COVID-19, the project was required to make a concerted decision to not implement important project adaptations focusing on financial needs and barriers; these remain an important persisting barrier for beneficiary communities.

5.2.1 Project design and implementation

The design of GATE-GEC continued the progress made by its predecessor programme, GEC-1, through both support to educators and students, attention to intersectionality; it also learned from important lessons to strengthen its focus on inclusive education, engagement and ownership, and beneficiary monitoring

GATE-GEC was designed to continue the work of its predecessor project, GEC-1 (2013-2016), which was interrupted by the Ebola crisis in 2014. GATE-GEC was designed in recognition that some of the main barriers to education identified under GEC-1 continued to persist; as one consortium member put it, GATE-GEC was designed to 'get back on track and take [GEC-1 aims] forward'. In addition to a focus on support to literacy and numeracy (through the continuation of study groups and their expansion to PS, the provision of CPD for PVs, and the LA/ST component), the project continued its focus on awareness-raising and capacity-building activities around intersectional barriers, including on gender, inclusion, well-being and safeguarding. The relevance of these interventions was confirmed in the baseline evaluation of GATE-GEC, which captured evidence of the persistence of demand-side barriers to education following Ebola, in particular the negative effects on families' health and socio-economic situations.

The design of GATE-GEC has also evolved since GEC-1, informed by key learning. This includes the introduction of new interventions as part of the GATE-GEC design, such as itinerant teachers, assistive devices, model schools, support to VSLAs, and the introduction of scorecarding exercises. As identified in the GATE-GEC proposal, the increased focus on inclusive education

and community/household engagement was in response to the heightened conditions of marginalisation following Ebola. This created a need for more targeted, in-depth interventions as well as greater 'ownership' amongst recipients and communities over interventions in order to support sustainability. The project was further designed to support sustainability and ownership through increased efforts to engage stakeholders, in particular, the Ministry of Education at both the district and national levels.

A final and important learning from GEC-1 has been the project's improved its capacity to monitor and follow the progress of project beneficiaries (including marginalised girls and children with disabilities, and LA/STs) through the use of unique identification numbers and cards and annual (re)verification exercises. A consortium member cited this as a stand-out factor that facilitated an understanding of the project's linkages with these beneficiaries.

The focus on intersectionality, safeguarding and well-being strongly differentiated GATE-GEC from other programmes in Sierra Leone and contributed to its ability to engage national stakeholders

This evaluation has also found that the design of GATE-GEC included unique elements that differentiated it from other programmes in Sierra Leone. Table 5.1 below provides a brief comparison of GATE-GEC to four other notable programmes in Sierra Leone.

Table 5.1 Comparison of notable education programmes in Sierra Leone

Programme / Donor	Focus	Key differences to GATE-GEC
Leh Wi Lan – Sierra Leone Secondary Education Improvement Programme **FCDO 27**	Large-scale teacher CPD and learning materials/curriculum focus to improve literacy and numeracy learning achievement for boys and girls in secondary schools nationally. Making schools safe for girls, providing support to reduce school physical and sexual violence.	Focuses on secondary education only. Addresses supply-side barriers, with a focus on pedagogy. Initially not specifically centred on gender and inclusion, but aspects have been built in as former UNICEF's Girls Learning and Disability Inclusion (GLADI) was incorporated. Does not include community approaches to education.
Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient (EAGER) **GEC / FCDO 28**	To improve learning and transition outcomes for out-of-school adolescent girls who have never been in school or who have been out of school for two or more years and	Addresses demand-side barriers. Targets out-of-school girls and does not specifically target children with disabilities and their inclusive education needs.

[27] FCDO, 2021a.
[28] FCDO, 2021b.

	do not have basic literacy and numeracy skills	
Support to Adolescent Girls Empowerment in Sierra Leone (SAGE-SL) FCDO29	Delivering improved sexual and reproductive health (SHR) support and strengthened livelihoods to empower adolescent girls, including out-of-school girls	Addresses demand-side barriers. Not specifically education-focused.
Revitalizing Education Development in Sierra Leone (REDiSL) **World Bank 30**	Works to: improve learning environments; establish monitoring systems for educational interventions and outcomes; and provides support to education sector management and efficiency.	Focuses on supply-side barriers and large-scale education-system reform.

In our examination of these key programmes, we identified the following differentiating characteristics of the GATE-GEC project:

- GATE-GEC had a presence in both primary and (junior) secondary schools;
- GATE-GEC aimed to address both supply and demand-side barriers to education, with efforts targeted at the structure/system level as well as at the household and community level;
- GATE-GEC utilised an intersectional approach, with a focus on gender and inclusion, with targeted attention to the educational needs of children with disabilities and a focus on GESI, safeguarding, and child protection.
- GATE-GEC included an approach to addressing supply-side barriers through the LA/ST component, which targeted intersection barriers to education.

In interviews, project staff emphasised the importance of intersectionality as a strength and differentiating quality of the GATE-GEC project, with the resulting activities on safeguarding and child protection as a notable consequence of the focus. These perceptions contributed to the project and implementing partners' reputation for their work on safeguarding and inclusion and subsequent engagement with national stakeholders on these issues. We elaborate on this further in Section 6.3.2.

While the GATE-GEC's consortium structure provided the strength of each members' thematic expertise, it also posed challenges at the district implementation level

GATE-GEC was implemented through coordinated efforts of several consortium members, each who contributed thematic expertise but shared the responsibility of implementing all activities in different districts (see also Section 3.1). This allowed the project to draw strength from different

[29] FCDO, 2019.
[30] World Bank, 2020c.

areas of expertise and utilise a cross-sectional focus. However, this also posed challenges to project management, where partners had to adjust to changing or competing priorities. For instance, while implementation was aligned through the use of a unified work plan and consortium-level meetings, the day-to-day activities and staff deployment was at times difficult to coordinate as new activities, or activities designed and led by other partners, were introduced at the district level. In particular, these challenges were highlighted in the implementation of thematic activities versus monitoring activities. As one consortium member illustrates,

> *[…] sometimes staff could be overwhelmed. You know, you meet in the middle of collecting data, or maybe are re-verifying beneficiaries, maybe they come in with "Oh, we have GESI training […]".[…] you will be in the middle of distributing bursary items, then a data collection issue comes in. You know, it is sometimes chaotic. Though we have our plans. But it's not easy. […]. Sometimes coordination is a challenge. (Consortium member)*

This same issue was highlighted in the baseline evaluation, which noted 'disparities between districts regarding their capacity to organise and implement activities' and provided a recommendation that the project improve its communication and coordination procedures, particularly to reach district level staff. While this was addressed by the project, the persistence of this challenge suggests that this is simply an inherent and on-going challenge to consortium work. Consortium partners also emphasised that all partners were ultimately committed to the same goal and mitigated these issues through improved communication, greater autonomy for planning, and stand-alone knowledge exchange. As one respondent reported,

> *As a consortium (…), we are working towards the same goal, but we are all leading in different areas, and within that space, you have different agendas. So, you know, at times, you do have challenges within that space, but overall I think we've managed to work well together across the consortium. (Consortium member)*

5.2.2 Project adaptation and the evolution of beneficiary needs

The table below summarises how interventions were designed to target particular barriers that the project identified were faced by beneficiaries. The table is based on our analysis of the project proposal and the results of the baseline and midline evaluation exercises as well as the ENA.

Table 5.2 Project interventions and responses to barriers faced by beneficiary sub-groups

Barrier	Barrier description	Sub-groups affected	GATE-GEC Response	When the barrier was identified
Home, Community Levels				
Hunger	Household has gone without food for many or most days in the past year	All groups	Short-term bursaries, VSLAs Support to SMCs and BoGs to develop action plans with parents/community to address hunger issue	Baseline and midline evaluations; further validated by ENA

Barrier	Barrier description	Sub-groups affected	GATE-GEC Response	When the barrier was identified
Safety	Travel to and from school	Children with disabilities, double orphans and mothers feel less safe traveling to / from school	CBRV support programme including verification, screening and assistive device support Targeted awareness-raising through CBRVs Training provided to school stakeholders and community focal points on safeguarding/protection and strengthening reporting mechanisms and referral pathways Inclusive education mainstreamed and strengthened through PVs, LA/STs	General lack of support and safety identified in project design; validated in baseline and midline evaluations
	Doesn't feel safe at school	Children with disabilities feel less safe at school		General lack of support and safety identified in project design; validated in baseline and midline evaluations
Parental / caregiver support	High chore burden	Prominent for girls; mothers and married beneficiaries also have a high chore burden; those living without both parents, those living in a female-headed households, those from households that find it difficult to afford girls' schooling, and children with a different language of instruction also have high chore burdens;	Collaboration with UNICEF nationwide campaign around girls' education Shared learning with the FCDO girls' empowerment programme Community/ youth accountability mechanisms through scorecarding Positive parenting training through village agents	Project design; further validated by baseline, midline and ENA
	Doesn't get support to stay in	Low SES households (i.e. children from households that are	Study Groups PVs and CBRV support Itinerant teachers	Project design;

Barrier	Barrier description	Sub-groups affected	GATE-GEC Response	When the barrier was identified
	school and do well	unable to meet basic needs, of that have gone to sleep hungry for many days in the past year); children with disabilities; single orphans		
School level				
Attendance	Low attendance (attends half the time or less)	Double orphans; mothers; children with disabilities; and children whose primary caregiver has no education	Economic support through VSLAs and bursaries	Project design; further validated by midline evaluation
Teachers	Teachers don't make the student feel welcome	Children with disabilities feel less welcome by their teachers	CPD for PVs, HTs and LA/STs Study groups Training for PVs and head teachers on inclusive education Mainstreaming and specific inclusive education activities (including CRBVs and model schools)	Baseline and midline evaluations
	Teachers treat boys and girls differently in the classroom	Most sub-groups agree (~20-25 percent); half of all female students with disabilities agree that girls and boys are treated differently	Mainstreaming and specific inclusive education activities (including CRBVs and model schools) Training and support to PVs and HTs Recruitment and support to female LA/STs GESI training, and gender-responsive pedagogy training	Baseline and midline evaluations
	Teachers often absent	All groups	School management training for school heads Community/ youth accountability mechanisms through scorecarding	Project design; baseline
	Different language of instruction from mother tongue	All groups	CPD for PVs, HTs and LA/STs Study groups	Baseline and midline evaluations

Barrier	Barrier description	Sub-groups affected	GATE-GEC Response	When the barrier was identified
Confidence	Confidence in literacy	High proportion of double orphans and mothers lack confidence, followed by children with disabilities	CPD for PVs, HTs and LA/STs Study groups Girls' Clubs	Midline evaluation
	Confidence in numeracy	Lower confidence amongst double orphans (50 percent), followed by children with disabilities	CPD for PVs, HTs and LA/STs Study groups Girls' Clubs	Midline evaluation

The original design of the GATE-GEC project was informed by an understanding of beneficiaries' needs following the outbreak of Ebola

The project's original design was developed through the careful consideration of beneficiaries' needs following the outbreak of Ebola. The project placed emphasis on the use of study groups to support learning as well as community-based activities to allow households and communities to sustainably take ownership over the prioritisation of education. Furthermore, the project increased its focus on safeguarding and child protection, taking into account the ways in which students' feelings of safety, well-being and confidence factored into their opportunities for learning and transition. This holistic approach to supporting beneficiaries was also extended beyond the original cohort of GEC-1 beneficiaries by broadening students' participation in activities such as study groups to ensure that project benefits went beyond the named project beneficiaries.

Both the baseline and midline evaluations validated the project's design in terms of the appropriateness of the interventions and activities in targeting the key barriers to learning and transition.

In response to the outbreak of COVID-19, GATE-GEC continued to successfully target beneficiaries' needs, even as they evolved from the project's original design

With the outbreak of COVID-19 and school closures in March 2020, the project launched its STRP, which included an ENA to better understand the changing needs of beneficiaries, in order to design the medium-term response to COVID-19. The ENA exercised provided the project with a better understanding of beneficiaries' experiences of and responses to school closures. The ENA revealed that beneficiaries found it difficult to engage in studies at home after school closures with limited time, support from families or educators, resources and materials, and with many chores.

Hence, the project adopted a two-pronged approached to support students to stay connected to learning, with an increased focus on beneficiary physical and mental well-being and material support to ensure that children remained safe and healthy, as well as the provision of learning

materials, contact from educators, and the development of a curriculum for catch-up learning to support students to stay connected to schools and return upon the re-opening of schools.

To support students to engage in learning during school closures (and for future school closures), the project distributed radios as well as bursary packages including stationery (pens, pencils, sharpeners, notebooks) and school bags. The project also introduced telephone-based follow-up carried out by the NQFTs and ITs, to support girls' return to school and to identify particularly vulnerable individuals at risk of drop-out. Finally, the project developed the MyBook resource for learners, in order to support study group catch up sessions upon school re-opening as well as to mitigate against future school closures through its additional purpose to support remote learning.

Similar support was provided to STs (Cohort 3) and their PSMs to stay connected and continue learning, with the provision of solar chargers for their tablets and radios to continue with their learning in and outside of TTC education. To further support the learners, the project also introduced revised training topics for PVs, NQFTs (Cohorts 1 and 2), and other educators. CPD also expanded to a whole-school approach during MTRP, thereby including additional educators within GATE-GEC supported schools. These trainings prepared educators to deliver both remote learning and in-school study groups catch up sessions using the MyBook resource.

Therefore, despite the contextual and programmatic changes, GATE-GEC's pandemic response was able to preserve the project's focus on tackling barriers to education. Despite adjustment to project activities, the project's existing focus on GESI, safeguarding, well-being, and community sensitisation allowed for an expansion of these activities as part of the MTRP.

To mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on beneficiaries' health and safety, the project adopted a differentiated approach to ensure that different sub-groups were supported through contextualised activities. The project recognised that children with disabilities and especially girls with disabilities were more vulnerable to social exclusion and violence and less able to access support. The project thus increased monitoring and support to girls with disabilities through increased visits by the Inclusive Education District Officers and project staff in the community. The project also provided additional training for CBRVs, head teachers, PVs and NQFTs on psychological first aid and survivor-centred support. The CBRVs were further used for community sensitisation on issues such as protection risks and distribution of household labour.

To support beneficiaries' anxieties and feelings of isolation, the project placed a strong emphasis on MHPSS and PFA. The project started engagement with caregivers through VSLAs on key themes including sensitisation on MHPSS to combat stigma associated with disability as well as working with community members to recognise and address barriers to reporting that a survivor may experience due to their gender, disability, race, age or other identities. The project also sensitised the community on a range of ways to raise and/or report concerns which were the further communicated through radio, community sensitisation, phone calls, posters and VSLA groups. The project also worked on strengthening referral pathways and linkages between schools and community-based protection actors and formal / national services. Finally, a number of initial trainings and ongoing refresher trainings on PFA, survivor-centred support, and facilitation skills for safe spaces were provided to NQFTs and PVs. Similarly, NQFTs were provided additional training so that they could better engage in safeguarding and disclosures within their telephone encounters

with beneficiaries. The project also worked with communities to raise awareness around girls' rights, what abuse is and how and where to report. Community groups were trained on community-based child protection to further strengthen awareness around girls' rights and responding to VAG.

With the outbreak of COVID-19, the project made a concerted effort to prioritise and adapt its activities. As a result, important activities focusing on financial needs were unable to be implemented, leaving persisting barriers for beneficiary communities

Consortium member interviews emphasised the disruption brought to the project's flow by the pandemic response, with the need to quickly respond to the crisis by pivoting, adding, or adjusting interventions. This necessitated collaboration from all partners to keep learners engaged. As one consortium member mentioned, 'Everybody was part of the process [of adaption after COVID-19 outbreak]'. Interviewees stressed that areas such as social protection, safeguarding, and learning and educational support continuation (either remotely or face-to-face) as key continuing features, which were complemented by new social protection activities. The interviews are consistent with other primary and secondary data analysed at endline that reinforce that in the design of the MTPR, the project maintained a bottom-up approach focused on addressing needs and tackling barriers, an approach already privileged by GATE-GEC before COVID-19.

Respondents across the consortium highlighted the challenges faced in relation to meeting fund-level guidance for the design of the MTRP, which required significant and rapid reprioritisation of activities and adaptation by all partners. Interviewees reported that this came at the cost of the participatory decision-making and resulted in the project struggling to arrive at a unified consortium response, given the competing priorities of each organisation. As discussed in Section 3, with the MTRP the most notable omission in the revised ToC was the omission of a target on economic empowerment. The reduction of activities in this area is a result of the project's necessary shift to address emergency needs.

However, the midline evaluation highlighted and provided recommendations for the project to accelerate and strengthen its support for income generating and livelihood activities, notably for support to VSLAs to initiate income generating activities and for SMCs/BOGs to address reported hunger concerns amongst students. These activities, and the opportunity to target poverty and financial barriers, were the most affected by COVID-19 and the necessary shift in project activities. Their persistence may be a threat to the longer-term sustainability of project impact, as addressing these barriers remains an integral part of the validity of the project's TOC.

However, overall, all national stakeholders interviewed in Sierra Leone reported positive perceptions when they were specifically asked about GATE-GEC's pandemic handling. Furthermore, their responses rated GATE-GEC's efforts towards catering. As these stakeholders put:

> *I will say they responded swiftly and accurately. They provided everything. (National stakeholder)*.
>
> *When we went for monitoring, we came to realise that the issues of COVID-19 were addressed, the needs of the people were addressed. (National stakeholder)*.

6 Objective 2

In this section we address the second evaluation objective: to document and trace the experiences of vulnerable and marginalised beneficiary groups, including their evolving needs, drivers and barriers to learning, transition, and well-being, and how the project generated change for beneficiaries (with attention to unique and commonalities of experience across sub-groups). To do so, this section responds to the following evaluation questions:

EQ3	To what degree did the project achieve its desired effects, including differential results across groups?
EQ6	How and how well has the project supported project beneficiaries to improve learning outcomes through support to improve the quality and inclusiveness of teaching and inclusiveness of the school environment?
EQ7	How and how well has the project supported project beneficiaries to successfully attend and/or return to school and ultimately transition, through support to beneficiary well-being and for beneficiaries to feel safe and supported by their families, schools, and communities?
EQ9	How and how well do the different project activities, outputs and intermediate outcomes come together to generate outcomes for the beneficiary experience?
EQ10	How and how well has the project addressed the major factors (drivers, enablers and barriers) to achievement and sustainability of project outcomes for different project beneficiary groups?
EQ8	How and how well has the project created positive and lasting change for marginalised girls and children with disabilities and with what evidence?
EQ11	How and how well has the project contributed to higher level effects (social, environmental or economic, both positive or negative and intended or unintended) and will they be expected to continue beyond the project?

EQ6 and EQ7 focus on the outcomes of learning and transition respectively, and EQs 8 and 11 examine both the outcome of sustainability and the higher-level effects and lasting changes instigated by the project. EQs 3, 9 and 10 are cross-cutting across the outcomes, and examine the project's intended results, mechanisms, and effectiveness in addressing major factors as related to each key project outcome.

The findings are organised according to the three project outcomes of learning, transition, and sustainability. The following sections examine the three outcomes in turn, first reflecting on the project definitions and measures for each outcome and summarising the findings from the previous baseline and midline evaluations. We then explore the project's effectiveness in achieving the outcome through an analysis of project results as measured through project MEL data, organised by outcome pathways. Finally, we use primary data to explore the experiences of the beneficiaries themselves by reflecting on primary data.

6.1 Learning

Key Findings:

- The findings from the baseline and midline evaluations demonstrated mixed results from learning assessments as compared to the control group, but validated the importance of targeted support for marginalised girls and children with disabilities, with subgroup characteristics inked to lower learning outcomes. While learning targets were not met, which was primarily attributed to delays in implementation, the midline evaluation found that beneficiaries held positive attitudes towards the impact of ongoing activities on learning.
- Children with disabilities were supported to participate in classrooms through the provision assistive devices, model schools and itinerant teachers. Monitoring data confirms pilot activities were delivered, as planned, to a relatively small proposition of the overall beneficiary population. Where received, student responses indicated improvements in their mobility and ability to participate in classrooms. In order to facilitate further scale up or replication, it is necessary to collect further evidence on the effectiveness of these interventions in meeting the needs of girls and children with disabilities.
- Study groups were a key intervention for all sub-groups, including marginalised girls and children with disabilities. Monitoring data demonstrates that study groups were functioning well, with high rates of attendance and students reporting positive perceptions of PV teaching skills and support. This was further validated through qualitative data collection, which consistently found that students, head teachers and PVs highly value study groups as a positive learning space for students, which gave PVs an opportunity to apply the skills and techniques gained during continuous professional development (CPD).
- Monitoring data and student and school stakeholder perspectives both validate that the teaching practices and methods of PVs had improved as a result of CPD activities. GATE-GEC met almost all output targets relating to CDP to improve teaching quality, demonstrating high levels of PV engagement in CPD activities and improved student perceptions of teaching quality. During interviews, students, PVs and head teachers all provided positive examples of gender sensitive, inclusive, and participatory teaching methods used to engage students in study groups. PVs' described how CPD boosted their confidence and knowledge to support diverse groups of learners, and to promote inclusive attitudes towards girls and children with disabilities
- The triangulated project MEL data and qualitative evidence demonstrates the improved opportunities to learn as a result of project activities. The revisions to the evaluation design and scope in light of COVID-19 preclude the ability to draw definitive conclusions on the causal pathways to learning outcomes.

6.1.1 Defining and measuring learning

In line with GEC guidance, learning was measured at baseline and midline by exploring changes in literacy and numeracy skills across the beneficiary population. By administering EGRA, SEGRA, EGMA and SEGMA assessments to a representative sample of students across treatment and comparison schools, progress was measured using a quasi-experimental approach to determine pre- and post-intervention test scores, and determining attributable change using difference-in-difference analysis. Learning scores were complemented with mix of qualitative data collected through FGDs and KIIs which explored the perceptions of the beneficiaries, PVs, parents / caregivers, and other stakeholders.

As explained in Section 4, the approach to the endline evaluation was significantly refined to account for the barriers to data collection associated with widespread school closures. A quasi-experimental approach was not feasible under the circumstances, therefore the endline evaluation placed a greater focus on examining the perceptions and experiences of learning across beneficiaries, educators and stakeholders, triangulated with MEL data and past evaluation findings.

The findings from the baseline and midline evaluations demonstrated mixed results from learning assessments as compared to the control group, but validated the importance of targeted support for marginalised girls and children with disabilities

Baseline findings demonstrated that learning levels across project beneficiaries and control group students were mixed, with high levels of proficiency among the more basic literacy and numeracy skills, which become progressively poorer in the more advanced literacy and numeracy skills. The baseline also found that that children with disabilities performed as well as or better than children without disabilities in learning assessments.

At midline, the difference-in-difference analysis of learning assessment scores found that the project narrowly missed its targets for achieving improvements to learning scores as compared to control schools. The midline presents several possible explanations for these results, which include a ‘downturn’ in test results as beneficiaries adjust to project interventions and changes in government policy such as FQSE or the delay in the implementation of some interventions which would have supported learning, Other explanations for these results include a possible measurement error, to do with the sample identified for assessments and the dosage of project support received, or to do with the comparability of the selected control groups. Another potential explanation lies in the suitability for the selected learning assessments to detect the types of changes to learning outcomes produced by the project’s interventions. As we have not re-analysed the evaluation data from baseline or midline, we are unable to provide further judgement on the accuracy or comparability of the learning outcome measures.

While learning assessment scores were lower than anticipated, qualitative evidence reflected positive attitudes of the impact ongoing project activities had on learning and demonstrated progress at the output and intermediate outcome levels. High transition rates observed at midline also suggest that a certain standard of learning outcomes was achieved, as a prerequisite for students to be able to progress through grades, in particular at grades Primary 6 and JSS 3 where students are required to pass an exam to progress to the next level. Finally, for sub-groups, the midline evaluation found that at the JSS level, a number of characteristics, including having a

disability, or being a single or double orphan, was related to lower learning outcomes, validating the importance of targeting marginalised students and especially girls.

Table 6.1 Summary of previously reported findings and results against Outcome 1

Document Source	Reported results / learning findings
Baseline Evaluation	• Barriers and enablers to learning identified in qualitative evidence include: poverty and affordability of education, hunger, the use of English as the language of instruction, high chore burdens, lack of household support, distance to school, lack of sanitation facilities in schools, a lack of access to appropriate learning materials, and a shortage of qualified and trained teachers and in particular female role models. • Baseline learning levels were mixed, with project beneficiaries and control group respondents both demonstrating proficiency in basic literacy and numeracy skills, but poor proficiency in more advanced skills. • Children with disabilities scored as well or higher than children without disabilities. • Baseline found that girls had greater difficulty in numeracy skills.
Y1 Annual Report	• Monitoring data showed that 82.1 percent of the respondents felt that their ability to read and understand (literacy) had improved since joining the study group, while 78.5 percent felt their ability in mathematics (numeracy) had improved since joining the study group, • Respondents also demonstrated high confidence and enthusiasm for study groups, with 69.1 percent reporting that they enjoyed study groups because of the opportunity to practice what they have learned, and 67.9 percent reporting that they are able to ask questions on things they didn't understand in class.
Y2 Annual Report	• Monitoring data found that 98 percent of beneficiaries interviewed felt that their literacy skills improved based on their confidence and ability to 'read and understand', while 96 percent felt that their ability in mathematics had improved. • Study group observations indicate improved teaching practices amongst PVs, including incorporating inclusive pedagogical techniques.
Y3 Annual Report	• Internal qualitative monitoring data provided many examples of beneficiaries performing well in exams and 100 percent of PVs reporting learning in the study groups had improved. • Analysis of project reverification data for 2017-2019 found that 40 percent of the sample had a slight dip in test results in the 2018 reverification, which then increased in 2019.

Midline Evaluation	• Numeracy and literacy results indicated that scores were lower at midline than anticipated (targets not met). The project has highlighted several methodological limitations to the learning results. • Several possible explanations were provided in the report, of which the possible 'downturn' in results appear as everyone adjusts to the new interventions, or that the introduction of FQSE by the government and subsequent removal of bursaries as a project activity might have affected the economic empowerment of the households.

6.1.2 Outcome pathways and results

The GATE-GEC TOC identifies multiple pathways to improved learning, including through the introduction of better teaching practices, creation of dedicated learning time for children, and provision of contextualised and individualised support to marginalised girls and children with disabilities. We have identified three pathways, and different packages of interventions, through which the project works to produce changes in the outcome of learning:

1. **Improving the quality of teaching and learning** through the provision of CPD for PVs with a focus on subject-specific training on pedagogy, literacy and numeracy, and the creation of study groups. PVs are expected to take these forward through their work with beneficiaries in study groups.
2. **Individualised and inclusive education** support with a focus on children with disabilities, including through support provided by itinerant teachers and CBRVs, the development of model schools, the provision of assistive devices, and the training of educators in inclusive pedagogies.
3. **Improved school management** by providing CPD and training to head teachers and enablement and capacity building support to SMCs and BoGs.

A further component, which included the recruitment and training of and support to female LA/STs, was designed to support greater quality and more inclusive teaching and learning which would be sustained beyond the life of the project, and improve learning outcomes. This intervention and the relevant results are described in greater detail in Section 6.3 (sustainability).

Outcome pathway 1: Supporting quality teaching and learning

In this section, we focus on two of the key activities conducted by GATE-GEC which aimed to improve the quality of teaching and learning:

- **CPD for PVs** to support ongoing improvement of teaching skills and classroom practices, primarily for use in study groups (but intended to also be more widely applicable)
- **Study groups** which provide children with additional dedicated learning time in supportive environments

In addition, the project took steps to pivot these interventions following the outbreak of COVID-19, including piloting activities to support and train educators to deliver remote learning in the event of

future school closures, as well as to provide materials to support students to catch up on learning. These activities are discussed in greater depth in Section 6.3 on sustainability.

Project monitoring data shows the level of PV engagement in CPD activities largely met or exceeded targets, and students perceived PV support to have a positive effect on learning

The provision of CPD activities, delivered between 2017 and March 2020[31], sought to address supply side barriers to education associated with poor quality teaching. The training aimed to equip PVs to manage structured and activity-based study groups, monitor the learning progress of students, respond to individual learner needs, and to transfer these skills to regular classrooms. In addition to teaching skills and approaches, training also covered topics such as professional ethics to address issues of teacher absenteeism, punctuality and attendance recording.

The project engaged a total of 1,506 PVs through GATE-GEC activities, falling just short of the target of 1,550[32]. As demonstrated in Table 6.2, all other output targets were reported as met or exceeded up until the onset of COVID-19. This provides a strong indication that PVs are participating in CPD activities as expected. Evidence also provides a good indication that this is having a positive effect on teaching quality, with beneficiaries reporting positive perceptions of PVs teaching skills, and PV reporting positive use of key teachings skills during coaching / observation sessions (see Table 6.2).

Table 6.2 Summary of teaching output targets achieved – Year 3[33]

Indicator	Target	Achieved
2.1 # of PVs engaged in the GATE-GEC project	1550	1506
2.4 % of GEC beneficiaries reporting positive perceptions of PVs teaching skills and support in the classroom	85%	100%
2.5 % of PVs recorded to have attended teacher learning circles on a quarterly basis	50%	56%
2.6 % of PVs recorded to have attended at least one coaching observation session in a quarterly basis	50%	68%
2.7 % of PVs reporting positive use of at least 3 (three) key teaching skills during coaching/observation sessions	75%	76%

Project-implemented beneficiary surveys further highlighted the value of PV support, with over 80 percent of the 170 beneficiaries surveyed in 2019 reporting that PVs had helped them to understand things they did not understand in class, with 85 percent reporting PVs helped improve literacy skills, and 82 percent in numeracy skills. Similarly, in 2020, over 90 percent of the 288

[31] CPD activities continued in an adapted format in 2021, which is discussed in more detail in Section 6.3.
[32] The Year 3 Annual report attributes this minor shortfall to staff turnover, in addition to a lack of beneficiaries at specific grade levels in certain schools, meaning PVs at those grade levels automatically become 'inactive' within the project database.
[33] Source: Year 3 Logframe

beneficiaries surveyed reported that study groups were supporting their learning, and 99 percent felt that PVs in study groups were supportive.

While it is not within the scope of this study to assess the effectiveness of the training provided to PVs, or to confirm the impact this has on learning, the MEL data shows that beneficiaries associate the role of PVs with improved learning. This is further supported by qualitative findings, which are presented in Section 6.2.3.

Study groups were a valuable intervention that reached a wide range of beneficiaries, and fostered stronger participation and improvements in literacy and numeracy understanding

Study groups achieved broad reach by targeting the expanded cohort of beneficiaries throughout the life of the project. This activity addressed demand-side barriers identified by the project by addressing chore burdens, increasing confidence and self-esteem, and improving literacy and numeracy skills. Study groups also aimed to address supply-side barriers relating to large class sizes which can prevent teachers from providing individualised support to struggling students. Study groups aimed to overcome these barriers by providing dedicated time for additional study support, overseen and facilitated by skilled PVs who have been trained in inclusive and gender responsive pedagogies.

The project was successful in meeting output targets at the Year 3 reporting phase and estimates that targets during the MTPR for study group attendance were also met, as outlined in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3 Summary of study group output targets achieved – Year 3 and MTRP[34]

Indicator	Target	Achieved
1.2 Average attendance rates (%) of GATE-GEC cohort in study groups	85%	94.1%
MTRP 2.3 % of GATE-GEC beneficiaries attending study groups	80%	95% (estimated)

Project MEL data and reporting found study groups to be operational and functional, with high rates of students reached and high levels of attendance. Findings include:

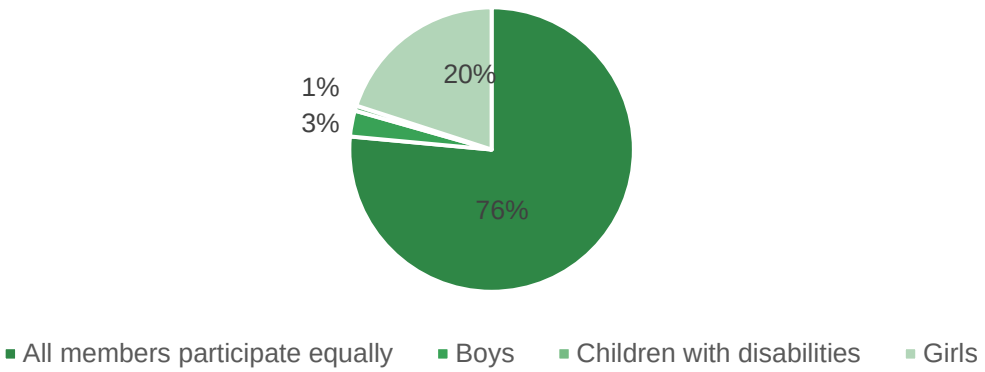
- Of the 9,049 students re-verified in the 2020 reverification survey, nearly all (99 percent) of project beneficiaries reported that they had received study group support since 2017.
- Similar rates of support were received by children with disabilities (98 percent) and girls (99 percent)
- Study group monitoring data, attendance spot checks, and study group observations found average attendance rates of above 90 percent[35]

In addition to the reported high rates of attendance, beneficiaries reported high levels of participation and positive views on the ability for study groups to create spaces for girls and

[34] Source: Year 3 Logframe and Y4 MTRP output framework reporting
[35] Study group monitoring form n = 568. Study group observations n = 207.

children with disabilities to participate. In 2019, 76 percent of beneficiaries surveyed reported that all members of study groups are able to participate equally, with 20 percent reporting that girls participated more than boys (Figure 6.1). Of the 288 students surveyed as part of the MTRP beneficiary survey, 72 percent of beneficiaries reported that teachers included all students 'very well', while 18 percent said 'quite well'.

Figure 6.1 Beneficiary perceptions of who is most able to participate in study groups (2019)[36]



Finally, findings from the 2019 and MTRP beneficiary surveys indicate that by attending and participating in study groups, the vast majority of students felt that they were supported by teachers. In the MTRP beneficiary survey, 97 percent of the 288 beneficiaries reporting that they felt positively about their teachers in the study group and 81 percent felt the teacher was very supportive.

Further, findings from the surveys showed that students felt that they could ask a question if they did not understand something, that attending the groups supported their learning, and that they helped them to feel more confident about and able to improve their performance in numeracy and literacy skills. In the 2019 beneficiary survey, 96 percent and 92 percent of beneficiaries perceived an improvement in their literacy and maths performance respectively.

[36] Source: 2019 Beneficiary survey (n=170)

Figure 6.2 Beneficiary responses of whether they perceived improvements in their learning through study groups (2019)[37]

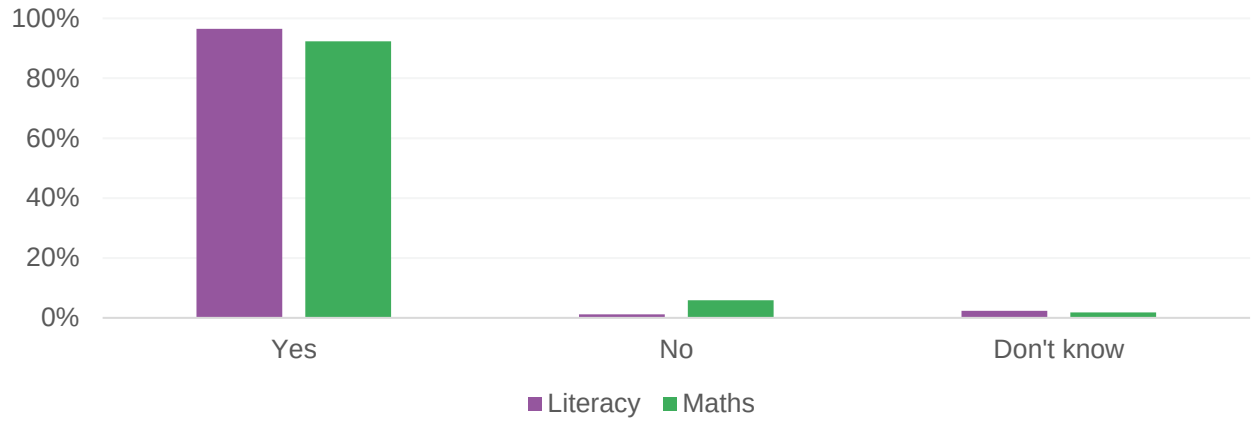
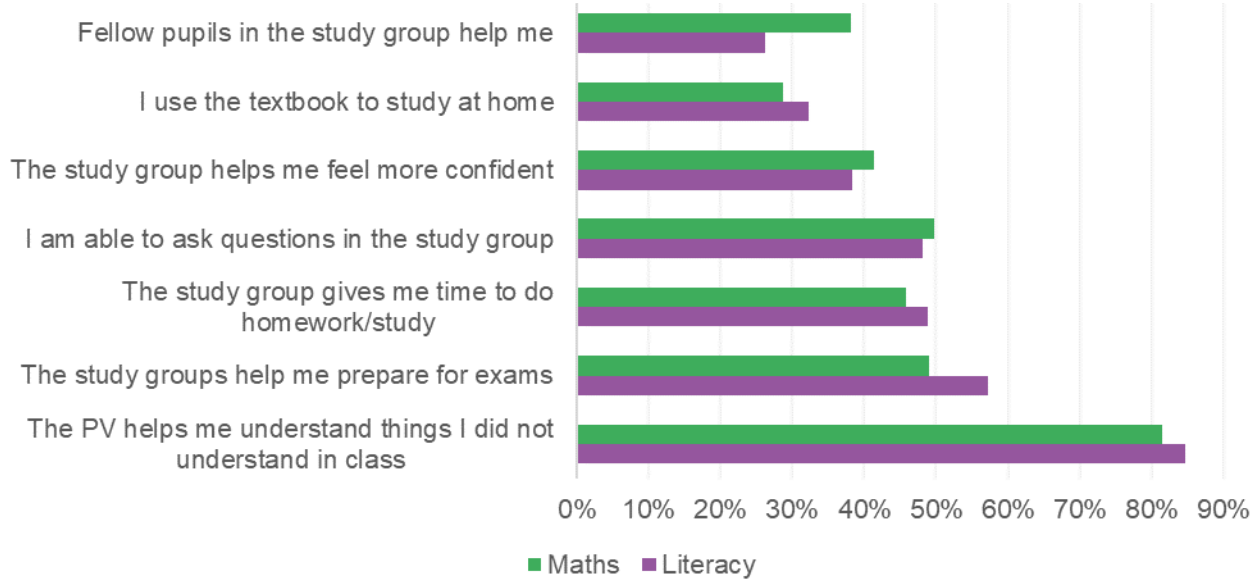


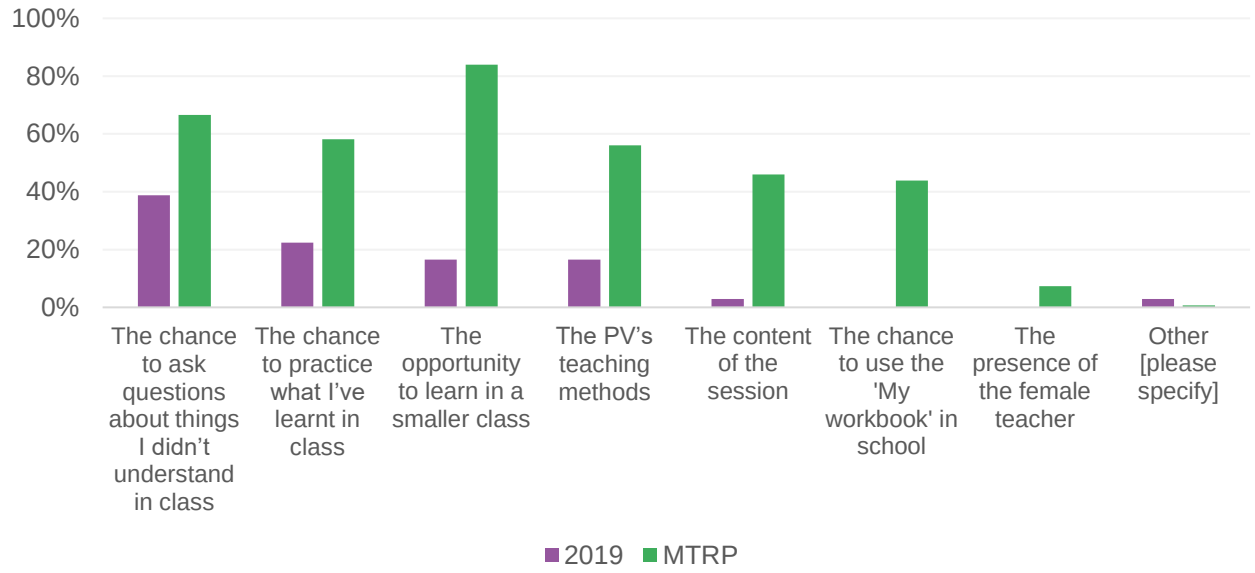
Figure 6.3 Beneficiary perceptions of factors that helped improve learning through study groups (2019)[38]



Following the onset of COVID-19, GATE-GEC continued with study groups as a core intervention upon school reopening. The MTRP beneficiary survey found that over 97 percent of the beneficiaries felt that study groups were still supporting their learning in both literacy and numeracy. In addition, 84 percent felt that the opportunity to learn in smaller classes was one of the key features of the study groups that they enjoyed the most.

[37] Source: 2019 Beneficiary survey (n=170)
[38] Source: 2019 Beneficiary survey (n=170)

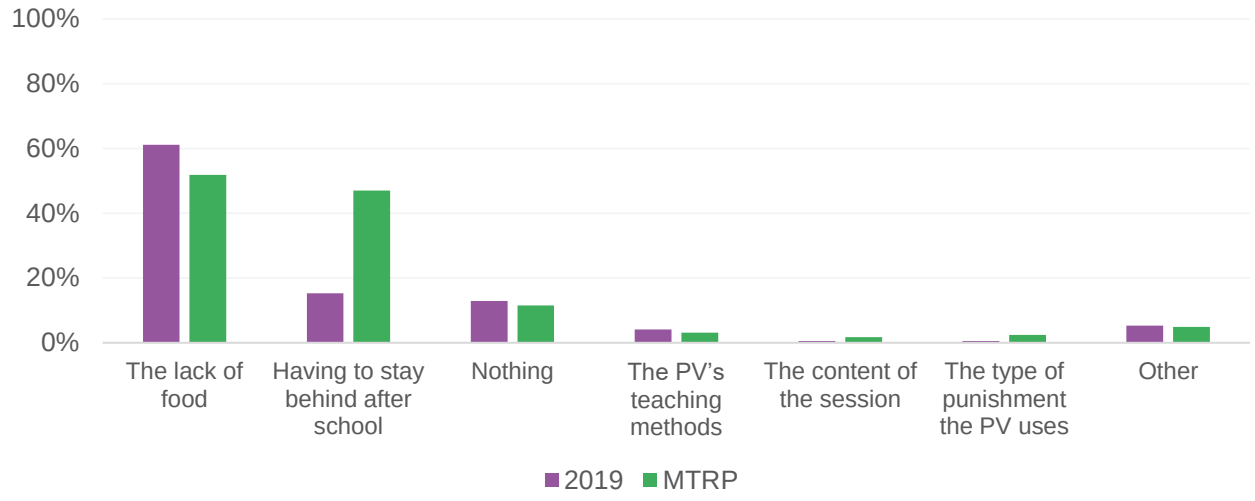
Figure 6.4 Beneficiary views on the most preferred elements of study groups before and during COVID-19[39]



While MEL data provides several positive indications that study groups delivered valuable opportunities for beneficiaries to improve confidence in literacy and numeracy skills. At the same time, food availability and hunger continued to be a potential challenge to regular attendance and participation. Over half of the beneficiaries surveyed both before (61 percent) and after (52 percent) the pandemic felt that the lack of food in study groups was the aspect that they enjoyed least (Figure 6.5). This, when considered together with the midline evaluation finding that a number of participants identified hunger and lack of food as a key barrier to attendance, highlights that hunger remained an ongoing issue. Study groups extended the school day for participants, which could exacerbate the feelings of hunger and impact concentration levels during sessions. The project recognised the barrier of hunger within the original design and implemented economic support interventions in response to this. As a result of the continued and exacerbated economic challenges created by COVID-19, the project took steps as part of the MTRP pivot of activities to distribute additional financial and resource support that included food distribution. This is discussed in greater detail in Section 6.2 (Transition).

[39] Source: 2019 Beneficiary survey (n=170), MTRP Beneficiary survey (n=288). Note: the MTRP beneficiary survey allowed for multiple response; for the 'what did you enjoy most' question, the options 'the chance to use the 'My workbook' in school' and 'the presence of the female teacher' were not offered as options in the 2019 beneficiary survey

Figure 6.5 Beneficiary views on the least preferred elements of study groups before and during COVID-19[40]



Outcome pathway 2: Supporting individualised and inclusive education

GATE-GEC had a strong focus on improving access, transition and learning outcomes for children with disabilities through the provision of activities including:

- **Assistive devices** provided to children with disabilities
- **Itinerant teachers** to support school management and to address the needs of children with disabilities in schools and classrooms
- Conversion of selected schools into disability-friendly **model schools**

The project met targets to provide assistive devices, itinerant teachers, and model schools to support children with disabilities

The available data confirms that the project met delivery targets associated with the provision of support to children with disabilities through assistive devices, itinerant teachers, and model schools. This data was not collected with the intention of measuring the effectiveness of activities in meeting the specific needs of children with disabilities, which would ordinarily be collected as part of the external evaluations assessment against intermediate outcomes, but was outside of the revised scope of this evaluation. However, the project MEL data provides some insights into the extent of activities delivered. Overall these activities targeted a relatively small proportion of the overall beneficiary population, which reflect the pilot nature of these activities.

- **Assistive Devices**: Assistive devices were provided to a selection of students whose needs were identified as part of GEC-1; therefore, only beneficiaries from the original cohort would have received assistive devices. According to HI monitoring data, the project met its target of assistive device distribution and treatment over the life of the programme (600), covering 292 girls with disabilities and 305 boys with disabilities, while three children were referred for

[40] Source: 2019 Beneficiary survey, MTRP Beneficiary survey

specialist treatment for epilepsy. The 2020 re-verification survey provides self-reported results of the distribution of assistive devices, with 20 percent of original cohort children with disabilities reporting that they had received an assistive device through the project, with no difference by gender, in terms of proportion of children with disabilities who report that they received assistive devices (see Figure 6.5 and 6.6). In terms of severity of disability, those with 'severe' disabilities were more likely to report receiving an assistive device (Figure 6.6).

Figure 6.6 Original cohort children with disabilities who reported receiving an assistive device[41]

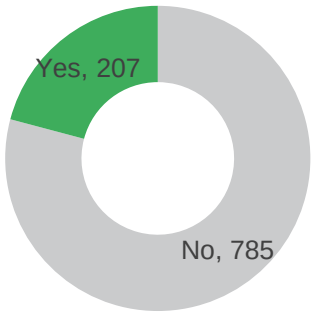
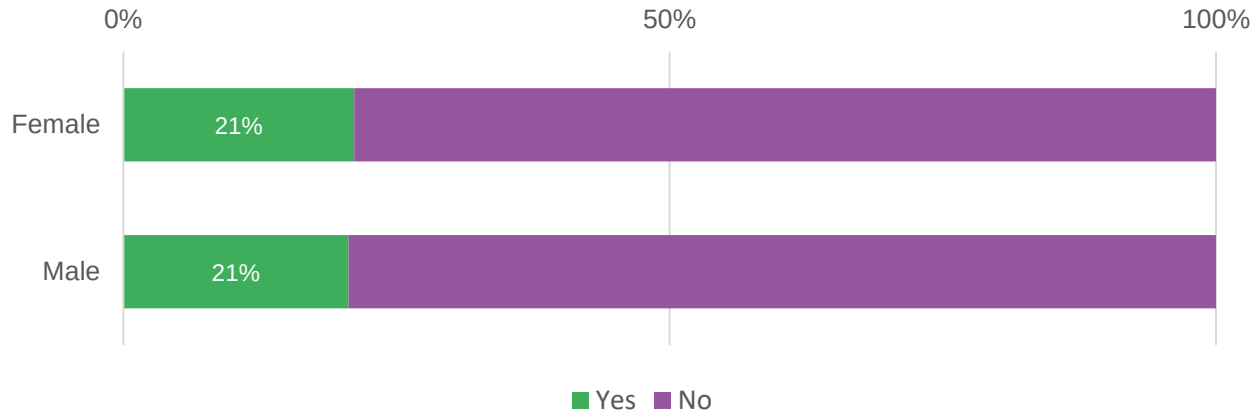
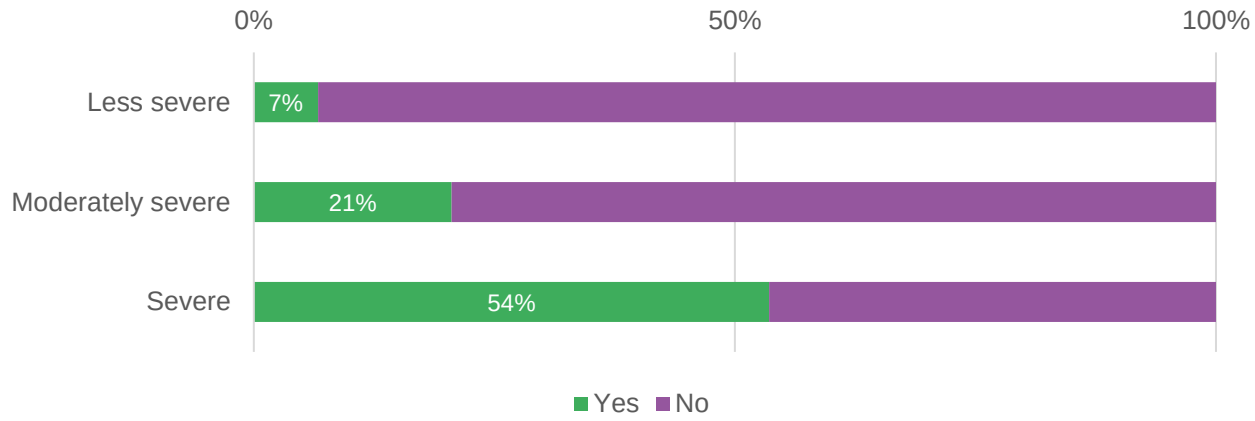


Figure 6.7 Original cohort children with disabilities who reported receiving an assistive device, by gender[42]



[41] Source: 2020 re-verification data (n=992). N.B. Beneficiaries asked what type of support they received over the previously in the 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 school year. Note: Above estimates excludes non-cohort beneficiaries as well as children with no disability.
[42] Source: 2020 re-verification data (n=992). N.B. Beneficiaries asked what type of support they received over the previously in the 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 school year. Note: Above estimates excludes non-cohort beneficiaries as well as children with no disability.

Figure 6.8 Original cohort children with disabilities who reported receiving an assistive device, by severity of disability[43]



- **Itinerant teachers**: The itinerant teacher activity was designed and implemented as a pilot activity, initially incorporating two itinerant teachers across 16 schools and expanding to five itinerant teachers across 40 schools in 2019. Less than two percent (1.4 percent) of the project beneficiaries reported receiving support from itinerant teachers during the 2020 reverification. This likely reflects the limited beneficiary awareness of the role, given their direct relationships with PVs and school management. This also reflects the small scale nature of the pilot intervention which targeted only 40 schools out of over 400 GATE-GEC schools. This intervention was intended as a pilot, which would inform a larger roll out of the intervention if COVID-19 adaptations had not required a significant restructure.
- **Model schools**: The project supported the adaptation of 11 existing schools into inclusion-friendly model schools which aimed to demonstrate to communities and government the potential to include children with disabilities within the mainstream education system. A total of 402 (4.4 percent) beneficiaries attended these model schools according to 2020 reverification data, of which 174 (6.7 percent of the project children with disabilities population) were reported to have some form of disability. Most of these schools (7/11) were JSS.

Outcome pathway 3: Activities supporting school management

The project implemented and met targets to provide training and support to SMCs and BoGs, and those trained were more likely to have a school development plan in place

With the start of the World Bank-funded FQSE programme, most primary schools in Sierra Leone set up formal SMCs. The 2019 BoG SMC profiling tool surveyed a sample of BoGs and SMCs across 400 GATE-GEC schools.

All PS in the sample (217) reported having a SMCs as of March 2020, of which the 47 percent reported having received training. Of those trained, 63.7 percent reported they had been

[43] Source: 2020 re-verification data (n=992). N.B. Beneficiaries asked what type of support they received over the previously in the 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 school year. Note: Above estimates excludes non-cohort beneficiaries as well as children with no disability.

adequately trained on the topic of School Development Plans (SDPs). Of the schools in the sample, 48.4 percent of the sample reported having an SDP, with a greater proportion of trained SMCs having an SDP (57.8 percent) than those who had not received training.

Similarly, 97.8 percent of the 182 JSS reported having an active BoG. While less than half of these BoGs (41.2 percent) reported having received training, 47.3 percent of all JSS in the sample were found to have an SDP, with 53.5 percent of trained BoGs having an SDP. For both primary and JSS, those who have received training are more likely to have an SDP in their school.

Monitoring data does not provide further insight into the content of the SDPs or whether the plans were implemented in practice. The project MEL data also did not cover school and SMC progress against the goals set out within their SDPs.

6.1.3 Beneficiary experiences of learning

Beneficiaries and school stakeholders were able to describe improvements in teaching practices and methods used by PVs to effectively engage with students and identify their needs

Several school stakeholders, including PVs and head teachers, described how CPD activities helped to improve teaching practices and implement inclusive approaches to teaching and classroom management which helped them adapt to diverse student needs, in particular for marginalised girls and children with disabilities. PVs felt they were better able to recognise and adapt to the needs of children, including supporting children with disabilities in practical terms. This included ensuring those with hearing or sight difficulties were seated at the front of the class, or providing additional and individualised support to struggling learners or learners with specific learning needs:

> *[the training] has helped us to include every student in the class not to be left behind in terms of understanding […] After you identify [children with disabilities] you need to help them with their needs to be at the same pace with other children. That is the concept of inclusive education. (Head teacher, JSS)*

> *Time back you will see children sitting idly and you cannot tell what is their problem and don't even care about them but today when I entered a class, I will make sure I look around if I see anyone in a sad mode while teaching I will come to ask you quietly what is your problem so that you will part of the class. (Head teacher, JSS).*

> *I use to sit at the back of the class but they discovered that I have problem with my eyes, so they took me to the front row and now there is a big difference, through the help of my teachers I have received the glasses that helped me see properly. (PS student with disability).*

Beneficiaries commonly described how the approaches and teaching styles taken by PVs were supportive, engaging, participatory and fun. This included facilitating group work and discussions, organising competitions to motivate students, using drama and performance to support learning, and encouraging students to share experiences and ideas. The style of teaching used by PVs in study groups was often preferred to methods used in regular classrooms:

> *In the class we sit individually but in the study group we sit in groups so that we help each other and share ideas. (JSS student)*
>
> *The difference [between normal class and study groups] is great because in the study group we work with peers, share ideas and present on the blackboard but during normal school hour comparison is not allowed. (PS student)*

PVs also felt these approaches were more effective for learning. One example provided by a PV explains: 'by working together as a group it helps a lot because they learn from themselves more than they can learn from the teachers, they do group work they do role plays' (PV, JSS).

Other professional improvements were also noted, for example two head teachers observed improvements in time management and punctuality and one noted that teachers were more open and responsive to mentoring support and feedback:

> *Teachers did not feel good before about [me supervising them], through this training they have accepted that you can go through their lessons notes, scheme of work, and all the preparations made for the children (Head teacher, JSS).*

PVs and NQFTs provided examples of using resources available to them to support teaching, such as local materials like sticks to demonstrate to children basic mathematics equations, or adopting methods such as storytelling and singing to keep students engaged. However, responses from two students appear to hint that teacher absenteeism may still be a challenge in some schools, noting there can be instances where there is no teacher in class:

> *If there is no teacher in class I sit down and study (JSS student)*
>
> *Sometimes where we don't have a teacher in class we make jokes (PS student)*

In both cases, the respondents appear to be referring generally to teachers in school and not specifically to project trained PVs, which may indicate such issues as a barrier to learning in wider school settings.

Improvements in knowledge and pedagogical practices helped to shift attitudes towards marginalised children, in particular children with disabilities, which has the potential to support both improved learning and the wellbeing of students

Beneficiaries and stakeholders not only provided examples of changes in teaching styles and practices, but also described a gradual positive shift in educator attitudes towards and acceptance of children from different backgrounds and with diverse needs, in particular children with disabilities. PVs noted that the training they received allowed them to see children differently and with greater potential, to help students understand their value, and to ensure they are treated fairly and equally:

> *Before this time, children with disabilities will even decide to stay home because of their conditions, but now through the help of the project, different pieces of training were received, we tell them your status does not determine your future […] you are also useful members in society. (PV, PS).*

> *Children with disabilities should not be condemned. They can do more if supported. Children with disabilities has been scorned before this time but with this project, they are now living in peace with their colleagues. We also give them leadership roles such as school prefects etc. the provocation has stopped because of this knowledge. We put our training into practice. (Head teacher, JSS).*
>
> *I have asked [children with disabilities] to feel free, they belong, they are human beings, they are not extra people. So that has been my advice to even most of their colleagues and we sometimes pay attention to them higher than others because we don't want them to be marginalized. (Head teacher, JSS).*

PVs and head teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to quality teaching, inclusive education and child safeguarding, and stressed the importance of supporting marginalised students not only to improve their learning, but also to increase their feelings of belonging:

> *In the GEC project, encourage every girl to participate in all the activities so that we cannot leave them behind. They can also feel belonging […] They are vulnerable and if we marginalized them, they will feel condemn into the system. So, what we do is we involve them in the system so that they will also feel belonging. (Head teacher, JSS).*
>
> *[W]e were told we need to teach marginalized girls. I am happy about that because I know girls should be supported to be at the same level as boys. That was why I was excited to take part (PV, PS).*

Beneficiaries themselves provided examples of this commitment and the dedicated support from PVs, particularly in the context of study groups, highlighting that children with disabilities in particular often receive additional support, attention, and encouragement:

> *We don't receive the same support, because the teacher pays special attention to us the disabled children […] the study group has helped me a lot more especially by improving my reading skills. (PS student with disability).*
>
> *My teacher helps me out most of the time by encouraging me to endure despite having a problem with my sight […] to me, the study group has created more impact […] when we are taught with subjects in the school during the study groups our PVs revised everything for us to understand (PS student with disability).*
>
> *All the teachers give us equal treatment in such a way that no one is left behind and we are all encouraged to participate in during the extra lessons, during the study group sessions the PVs avoid the use of chains on us instead they encourage us to participate. (PS student with disability).*

Study groups provided positive learning spaces for marginalised girls and children with disabilities and gave PVs the opportunity to apply the skills and techniques gained during CPD and training, which improved student confidence and opportunities for learning

Interviews with school stakeholders and beneficiary interviews echoed the positive perceptions of study groups reflected in project MEL data (Section 6.1.2), with most respondents describing the encouraging learning space these groups provided to children in comparison to regular

classrooms. The learning environment within study groups was reported as more conducive to learning, less noisy and overcrowded than regular classrooms, meaning students were able to concentrate and ask for support when needed. The lower student-teacher ratio was reported as more conducive to quality teaching and allowed PVs to pay closer attention to individual students, to identify those who are falling behind, and to ensure all students within the classroom are able to keep up, which was more challenging in larger classes:

> *The program has helped us to think and see the needs of these children. [This was] absent before now because at the normal teaching, you will not know who is understanding and who is not understanding […] but with that small [class] size, you can […] identify them and assess them quickly and with that, you can be able to come to their aid and solve their problems […]. We find out that, with this process, the children can learn better and it really improve on their learning ability, and as I stated earlier, they are doing well now, they can now read so we appreciate the program for that. (Head teacher, JSS).*

The enhanced learning environment in study groups, combined with the support and engagement from PVs helped to increase student confidence and opportunities for learning. Beneficiaries described how PVs in study groups ensured there was understanding across all students, and the smaller groups gave many students greater confidence to ask questions when they were struggling to understand a particular subject or topic:

> *The teachers make sure we understand before they proceed. (PS student)*
>
> *I am shy when I am in the classroom but not in the study group because we are not many. (JSS student)*
>
> *Whenever I do not understand anything I will let the teacher know and they will explain to me. (JSS student)*

Across all schools, beneficiaries and school stakeholders felt study groups helped to improve their understanding of various subjects and increase confidence and self-esteem. In some cases, students specifically reported improvements in reading, writing and spelling, while others referred more broadly to the opportunities study groups provided to check their understanding of various subjects without fear of judgment or reprisal, which in turn increased their confidence in the classroom:

> *[The study group] allows us to learn more about the basic core subjects which we may not understand during our normal classes. (JSS student)*
>
> *Those slow learners have improved by asking questions in class as compared to the previous years. They now take in all activities in a class by interacting with everyone. (PV, JSS).*

In addition to improved confidence in specific subjects, study groups were also perceived to improve overall feelings of self-esteem and confidence. As outlined above, both beneficiaries and school stakeholders described how study groups offered a space for PVs to apply methods to help students to engage and participate. It enabled students to speak up, talk publically, make friends, and foster a greater sense of belonging. Some stakeholders argued this had the potential to have a

mutually reinforcing effect, in which student's learning and confidence improves as a result of additional focused support, which in turn better equips them to participate and contribute in class, and demonstrate to other teachers and students their abilities and potential. This was particularly highlighted as being beneficial for children with disabilities and vulnerable girls, and school stakeholders themselves felt more confident and willing to support diverse groups of children as a result of training and workshops provided by the project.

Ultimately, several beneficiaries and school stakeholders felt that time in study groups helped to improve or accelerate learning and improve student grades, especially in literacy and numeracy: 'I have higher grades in test exams now because of the study group' (JSS student);

> *Their grades have increased greatly indicating improved performances in classwork as well as in promotional exams. Such progress in their grades applies to all categories of student: boys, girls and [those with disabilities]. (PV, PS).*

It is not clear whether these positive gains were always transferred to the wider classroom and views on this were mixed. Some felt their increased confidence helped them to speak up in regular classes, while others still found it difficult to ask questions or felt they would be ignored, shouted at, or made fun of by either teachers or other students in regular classrooms – a concern which was more often expressed by children with a disability. As noted above, teachers highlighted that the smaller class sizes were more conducive to providing differentiated and focused support to students. It is likely that wider structural barriers, such as large class sizes, continue to exist and may hinder teachers' abilities to transfer such skillsets to regular classrooms.

Wider contextual barriers to attendance and participation in regular classrooms, such as distance to school and hunger, remained relevant also to study group attendance

While collected views of study groups were overwhelmingly positive, beneficiaries expressed that barriers to attendance and participation in study groups remained. Beneficiaries and school stakeholders identified distance to school as a barrier to regular attendance in both regular classrooms and study groups, which can be exacerbated for children with disabilities:

> *I don't attend the study regularly… I can't walk back to the study group when school over. I stay far away and returning to the group when I have returned home was a very difficult task for me because of my foot problem. (JSS student).*

In line with previous evaluation findings and project MEL data, beneficiaries reported that hunger was also an ongoing barrier to effective learning. This may be exacerbated for those staying in school for longer periods in order to attend study groups, many times without food, which could affect concentration and thus learning. Although respondents were not specific about this, we anticipate that this has been exacerbated by the outbreak of COVID-19. Two school stakeholders also stated that there was not always sufficient buy-in from parents and caregivers, which could undermine attendance at study groups.

Findings described in Section 6.1.2 demonstrated that despite these barriers, beneficiary attendance in study groups remained high and that beneficiaries and stakeholders alike placed high value on the study groups. The available evidence therefore suggests that although

attendance in study groups has remained high during the project's lifetime, these contextual barriers remain relevant, and may persist beyond the life of the project.

Beneficiaries, who received assistive devices or attended model schools, identified valuable improvements to the school environment, their ability to participate in classroom learning activities, their mobility within and outside of school

Although beneficiary reflections on the provision of assistive devices, or changes to the school environment were not frequent, a few students commented on improvements in this regard. Some students reported receiving eye glasses or medicine which helped them to see or hear better during lessons, while others stated they hoped to receive assistive devices in the future, particularly to help them travel to school.

A small number of JSS students attending model schools commented on the state of the school building, referring to some improvements in infrastructure such as painting, installing lights, glass windows, toilets, ramps, and roofs. These were positively perceived, as one beneficiary described 'my school has been renovated. Doors have been fixed, painted very well. I feel happy about this' (JSS student). Others noted they were able to move around school more easily.

These beneficiaries also stated that continued work and adaptations are still needed in terms of facilities, and making schools more accessible, such as provision of tap water. For example:

> *Yes, it has been painted and we have light, our windows have been changed and they have constructed another toilet… I feel very happy because our school looking nice now than before because we have a better toilet facility now…. yes, I will like them to build another school, so it can be our Senior Secondary school […]. And we do not have tap water, the distance we cover to go and fetch water is too far and also we don't have a market and also a bus for transportation from our home to school. (JSS student)*

6.2 Transition

Key Findings:

- Evidence from baseline, midline, and project reporting demonstrates that the project maintained high transition rates across all years of the project, with beneficiaries expressing positive experiences of transition, and an increased proportion of beneficiaries being promoted versus repeating a grade over time.
- Monitoring data shows that activities aimed at sensitising communities to education and child protection issues, and at providing opportunities for students and community member's to feed into school improvement plans, were delivered and output targets met. Qualitative evidence suggests these interventions built upon existing positive community attitudes, by providing means with which to send children to school, and the knowledge, awareness and skills to support them while they are learning, in particular for children with disabilities.
- The project took steps to address economic barriers, shifting from short term bursary support towards more sustainable VSLAs and livelihoods grants. The progress of these activities were affected by COVID-19 at a pivotal moment, when ongoing efforts to set up VSLAs and livelihoods grants were due to be fully rolled out. Beneficiaries and stakeholders highly valued the economic support provided by the project, which addressed barriers in attendance and transition by maintaining the motivation to send children to school, and reduced the financial burden of schooling on families.
- Despite project support and the government FQSE policy, economic challenges have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and remain one of the most frequent barriers to transition identified by beneficiaries. This is often more pronounced for particular subgroups, in particular those with disabilities, orphans, or those supported by a single parent family or extended family.
- The focus on safeguarding and wellbeing was expanded in recognition of the increased vulnerability facing many students during the pandemic, this focus was strengthened by drawing on lessons learned from the Ebola crisis. There is promising evidence that students felt safe and could identify who to report challenges or concerns to, and that head teachers, PVs, and NQFTs felt more confident in their abilities to support students with safeguarding issues, suggesting that the project provided them with the knowledge and tools to monitor the safety and wellbeing of students. It is too soon to know the extent to which these activities had an impact on student learning and transition.

6.2.1 Defining and measuring 'successful transition'

The project defined 'successful transition' as following one of six transition pathways:

1) Progression to the next grade
2) Transition from PS to JSS
3) Transition from JSS to SSS

4) Grade repetition
5) Enrolment in alternative education programmes
6) Gainful employment

This definition builds on the GEC recommendations set out in the GEC MEL guidance documents, with the inclusion of 'grade repetition', a decision which was justified by both the baseline and midline evaluations due to the systematic nature of repetition within the Sierra Leonean education system, meaning that repetition is normalised and not necessarily associated with 'failure'.

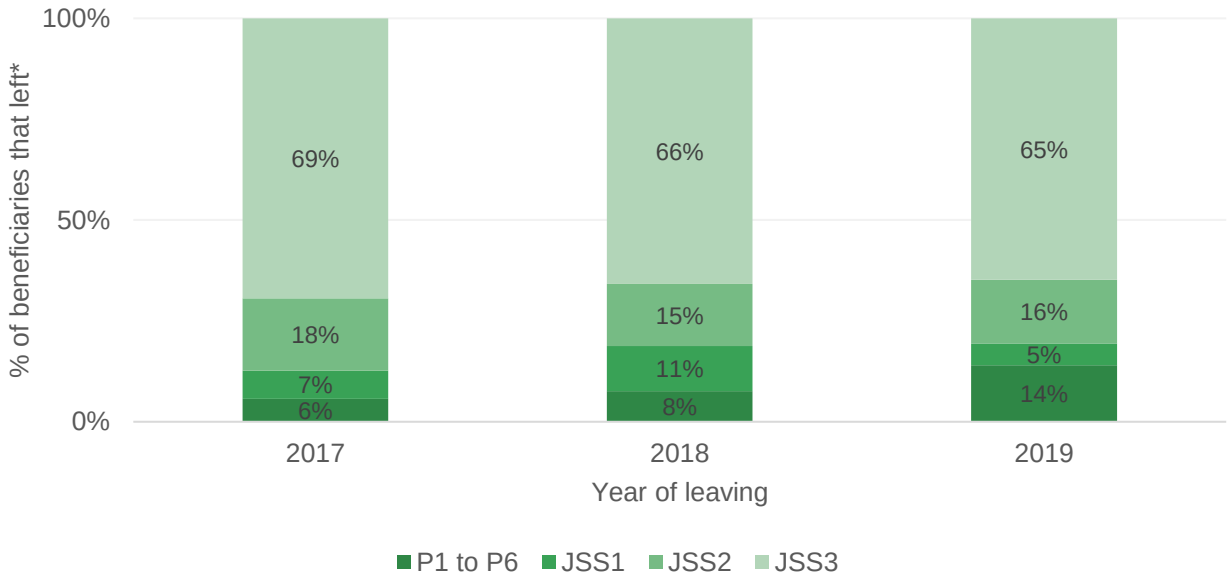
Baseline, midline, and project monitoring data demonstrate that the project was successful in maintaining high transition rates throughout its lifetime

The baseline found that GATE-GEC targeted students experienced similar transition pathways and faced similar barriers to those of the control group. At midline stage, transition rates were found to be high at 95 percent across intervention students and 98 percent in control students. The high rate of transition was in part attributed to the classification of grade repetition as a successful transition pathway. The most common reason for a JSS intervention child to be out-of-school was due to motherhood or pregnancy, followed closely by a lack of money to pay for schooling costs. Contrary to the expected outcome, disability was not found to be a barrier to transition in the midline evaluation sample, in both intervention and control groups.

The data collected as part of the reverification process also provides insight into transition. Longitudinal analysis of reverification data from 2017 to 2020 showed a gradual fall in the number of original cohort beneficiaries. This trend is to be expected as beneficiaries are intended to transition out of the project. Further analysis of beneficiaries that left the programme in each year between 2017 to 2020 showed that more than 65 percent of those who left were in JSS3 in their last year in the programme. This suggests that transition into senior secondary could play a large part in beneficiaries leaving the programme (Figure 6.9) although the data does not provide further insight into what proportion of leavers completed JSS3 and successfully transitioned whether to SSS or other education programmes or employment.

It is also difficult to disentangle the reasons for attrition among lower grades. Analysis by gender and disability showed that over 90 percent of beneficiaries who left were girls and children with no disability. However, it should be noted that this is largely reflective of the composition of the JSS3 cohort in each of these years. The number of boys and children with disability in JSS3 was much lower than girls and children with disability in each year and was too low to draw valid inferences on differential attrition rates between gender and disability status.

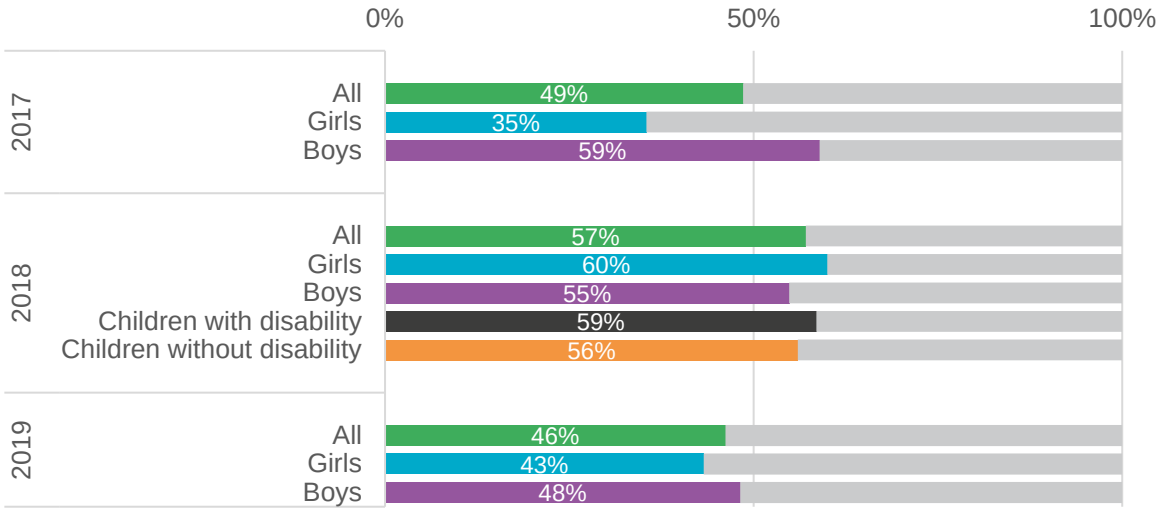
Figure 6.9 Proportion of beneficiaries that left the programme, by last reported school grade (2017-2019)[44]



In terms of transition from primary to JSS, on average, 50 percent of the PS6 cohort in each year transitioned to JSS and remained part of the GATE-GEC project in the following years. This likely underestimates the PS to JSS transition as others may have transitioned but left the project (e.g. moved elsewhere). Overall transition rate improved between 2017 and 2018, but fell again amongst the 2019 cohort. Further analysis by gender showed that girls were less likely to transition than boys initially, with the proportion of girls that successfully transitioned 24 percentage points lower than the boys' transition rate in 2017. This gap however reduced over time, with girls even showing slightly higher transition rates than boys in 2018. There were no substantial differences between the transition rates of children with disability and those with no disability.

[44] Source: 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 reverification data. Note: Proportions are based on the number of beneficiaries that left in each year. N=2,822 in 2017; 1,634 in 2018, 856 in 2019.
* In this figure, we define 'left' as beneficiaries whose unique IDs do not appear in subsequent reverification datasets

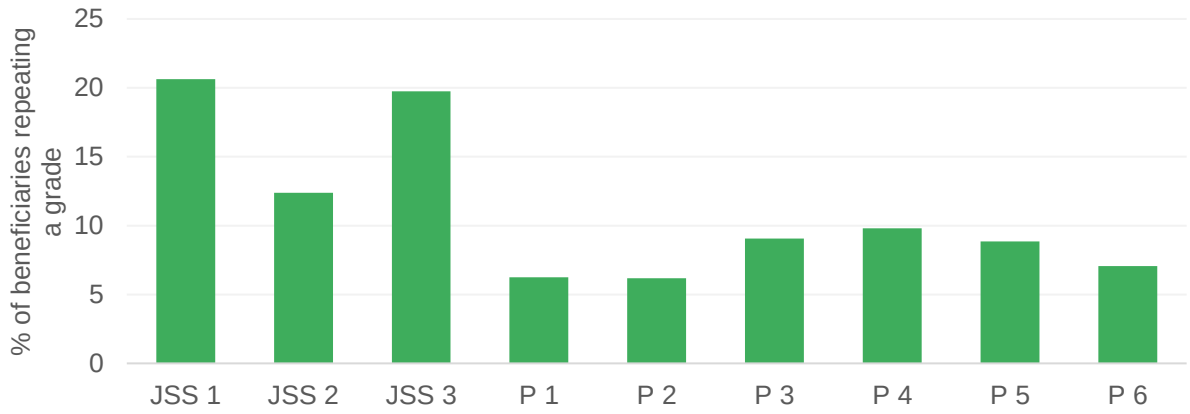
Figure 6.10 Proportion of PS6 beneficiaries that transitioned from primary to JSS, by gender and disability (2017 to 2019)[45]



The 2020 reverification data provides some further insight into transition with the inclusion of new questions on drop out and promotion. The data shows that less than 1 percent of those captured by the survey were out of school at the time while 2 percent of beneficiaries responded that they had ever dropped out of school. Of the surveyed population of 9,049 beneficiaries, 85 percent reported that they had been promoted to the next grade. Differences in promotion rates were very small (less than 2 percentage points) between gender, children with disability and SES. A higher proportion of those who were repeating a grade were in JSS1 and JSS3, likely due to the increased academic challenges associated with moving from PS to JSS1 and exam requirements in JSS3.

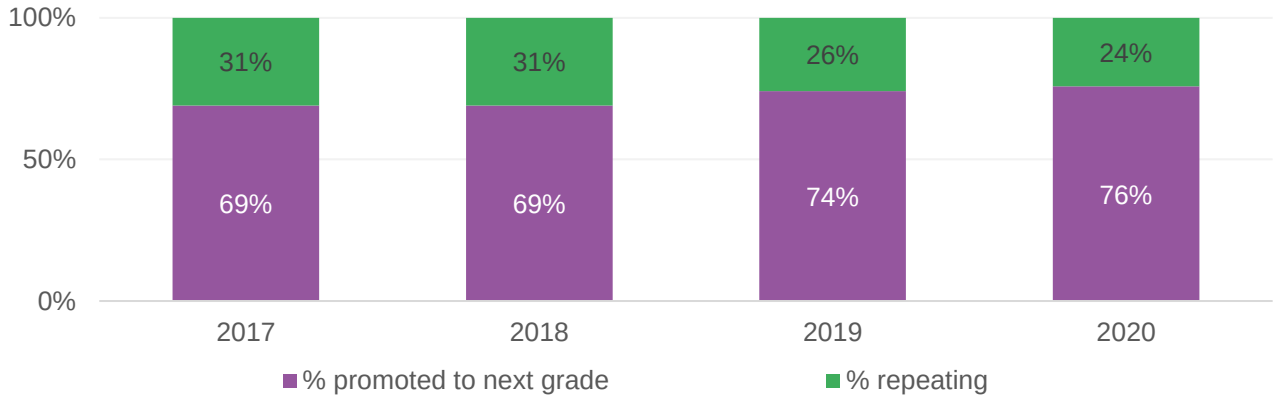
[45] Source: 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 re-verification data. Note: Transition rates are estimated as a proportion of total beneficiaries in the PS6 cohort in each year. N = 210 in 2017, 219 in 2018, 184 in 2020. Insufficient observations to disaggregate transition rates by disability for year 2017 and 2019,

Figure 6.11 Proportion of beneficiaries repeating a grade, by grade (2020)[46]



Over time, the percentage of those repeating a grade amongst the original cohort of beneficiaries has slightly decreased and those promoted to the next grade has gradually increased. Between 2019 and 2020, 76 percent of beneficiaries in the original cohort had been promoted to the next grade as compared to 69 percent at the start of the project. Further analysis by gender and disability shows that though girls stayed in school, they were less likely to be promoted to the next grade in comparison to boys over the five year duration of the project. This gap gradually narrowed overtime from 2017 to 2019, but has increased again in 2020, with 73% of girls promoted compared to 81 percent of boys.

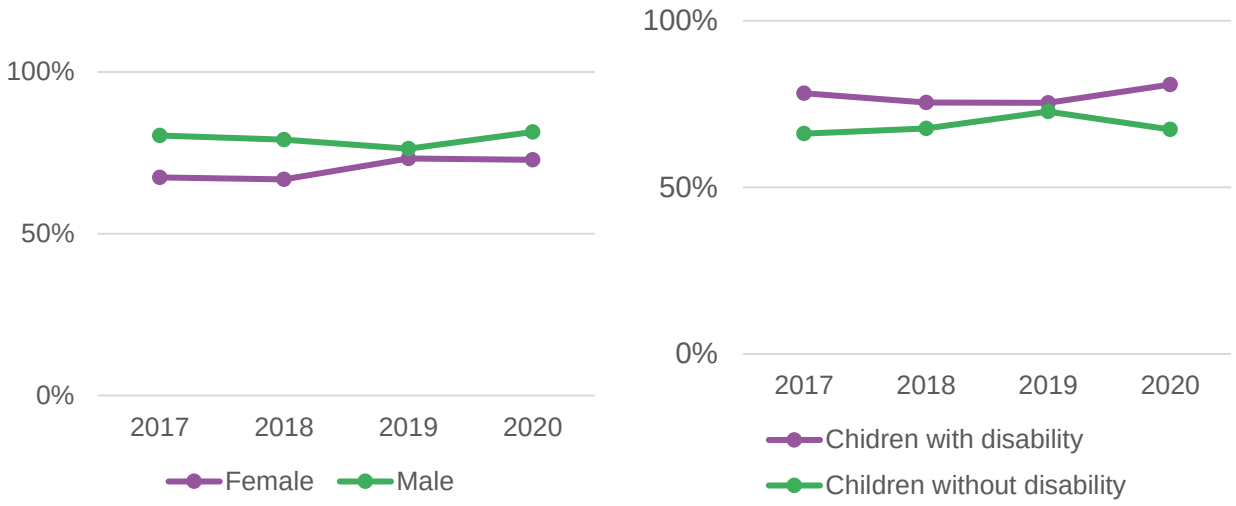
Figure 6.12 Promotion rates amongst original cohort beneficiaries 2017-202047



[46] Source: 2020 re-verification data

[47] Source: 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 re-verification data. Note that the estimated proportion for 2020 is based on the number of beneficiaries in the original cohort (N=7,462)

Figure 6.13 Promotion rate for original cohort beneficiaries by gender and disability status[48]



The table below further summarises the key findings from previous project reporting.

Table 6.4 Summary of previously reported findings and results

Document Source	Reported results / transition findings
Baseline Evaluation	• Perceived enablers of transition include: financial support; encouragement and support from caregivers; individual confidence, motivation and determination; delaying early marriage and pregnancy. • Qualitative and quantitative evidence demonstrated that schooling was viewed as important to both students and caregivers and that formal education is considered the most important pathway for career progression, particularly for children with disabilities. • Quantitative evidence found that many children appeared confident, determined and motivated, and revealed no difference in perceived barriers to transition between students of different ages or between those with or without disabilities.
Y1 Annual Report	• 69 percent of the verified cohort (n=4,544 out of 6,585) had not been promoted from their previous grade. • 91.4 percent (n=192 out of 210) beneficiaries in P6 had not transitioned from PS to JSS.
Y2 Annual Report	• 69 percent (n=3,066) of beneficiaries verified were successfully promoted up a grade, while 31 percent of beneficiaries (n=1,372) reported repeating a grade.

[48] *Source: 2017, 18, 19 and 2020 re-verification data*

	• 75 percent (n=587) of children with disabilities were promoted up a grade and only 25 percent (n=191) report repeating a grade during the year.
Y3 Annual Report	• 74 percent (n=1,881 of 2,543) of children were promoted to the next school year and 26 percent of children report repeating a grade.
Midline Evaluation	• 95 percent of the intervention sample successfully transitioned, while 98 percent of the control sample successfully transitioned. Grade repetition was slightly higher in intervention schools. • 77 percent of primary girls/boys interviewed reported they would like to keep studying in the next school year. Girls expressed similar positive attitudes around transition, compared to boys. • Primary girls in Kenema and Kailahun had the lowest successful transition rate, although still high at 92 percent. • Loss of a parent was mentioned as a barrier to staying in school by JSS students in Port Loko. Participants in a household members focus group discussion in Port Loko also said that single mothers found it the most difficult to send their children to school. • Membership in a study group was not found to have a notable impact on successful transition rates.

6.2.2 Outcome pathways and findings

Creating an environment that is not only conducive but also supportive of girls and children with disabilities' education was identified as a mechanism towards achieving learning and transition objectives. The project aimed at increasing the transition rates within GATE-GEC supported schools and affiliated communities using three pathways:

1. **Providing economic support** to beneficiary families through VSLAs, bursaries, and distribution of packages during the MTPR to help overcome the economic barriers that may lead to families removing girls and children with disabilities from schools.
2. **Creating awareness and accountability in the community** through CBRVs, scorecarding, and support to SMCs/BoGs and VSLAs to raise the importance of educating girls and children with disabilities and addressing negative stereotypes, and back to school messaging, awareness raising, and using NQFTs to keep in touch with girls following school closures to support students to return to school after the outbreak of COVID-19.
3. **Enhancing the safety and wellbeing of students** by utilising the efforts of CBRVs and school community platforms such as SMCs and BoGs to create a culture of community accountability to safeguard and protect girls and children with disabilities. During the MTRP, additional activities were put in place in response to COVID-19, including PFA and MHPSS activities, support to village agents to engage VLSAs in positive parenting dialogue, and the introduction of girls clubs.

Outcome pathway 1: Provision of economic support

GATE-GEC implemented two core activities which aimed to address economic barriers to education:

- **The provision of bursary support** including basic school resources and financial support to pay for school fees
- **Support to VSLAs** which aimed to provide additional financial capacity building and support to families which could be used to cover education-related costs in a sustainable manner

Bursary support was an important short-term intervention, designed to address economic barriers to enrolment and transition before the activities were phased out in 2018

Bursary support was introduced as part of the GEC-1 project and continued in the first year of the GATE-GEC project in response to the identified economic barriers to enrolment and transition. Bursaries were made up of various educational resources, including uniforms, school bags, core textbooks and school equipment, and financial support for school fees where relevant. Bursary support was intended as a short-term solution to address economic barriers, which provided students with the necessary resources to access and attend school. The intervention was designed to be gradually phased out in favour of more sustainable solutions (i.e. VSLAs), initially planned to be completed by the end of Year 2.

In 2018, the GoSL's introduction of FQSE led to the early discontinuation of bursaries in order to comply with the Ministry approach, requiring all tangible support to be channelled through the MBSSE. In response to this, GATE-GEC budget was reallocated to scale up existing activities. Both baseline and midline evaluations reported that economic challenges remained a consistent barrier for many households, with over 70 percent of caregivers with children at PS and JSS level reporting that they found it difficult to afford school fees. Even following the implementation of FQSE, the project reported gaps and delays in the government provision of school fees and school resources to government schools.

As a result of the discontinuation of bursary provision, no specific targets were set for this activity. However, the 2020 reverification data provides some insight into the proportion of original cohort beneficiaries who reported receiving bursary support from the programme (Figure 6.14). A high proportion of students reported that they had received bursary support over the course of the project. Of the total sample of original cohort beneficiaries surveyed in 2020 (1,566), 85 percent reported they had received bursary support, over 90 percent of children with disabilities within the cohort reported having received bursary support. Bursaries were distributed to students across all reported SES categories, but the proportion of students from low and lower-middle SES receiving beneficiaries was higher than those from higher-middle and high SES categories.

Figure 6.14 Original cohort beneficiaries who have received bursaries (2017-2020)[49]

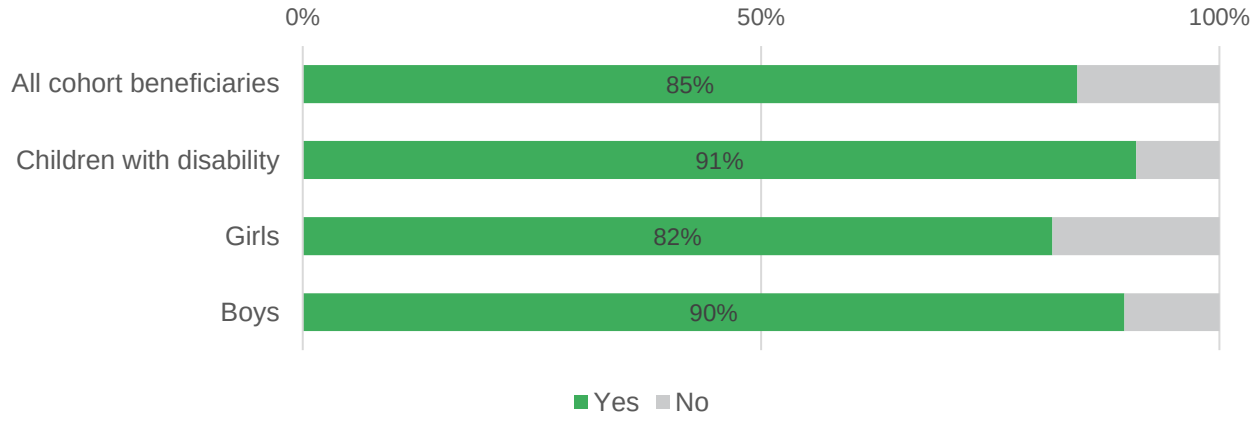
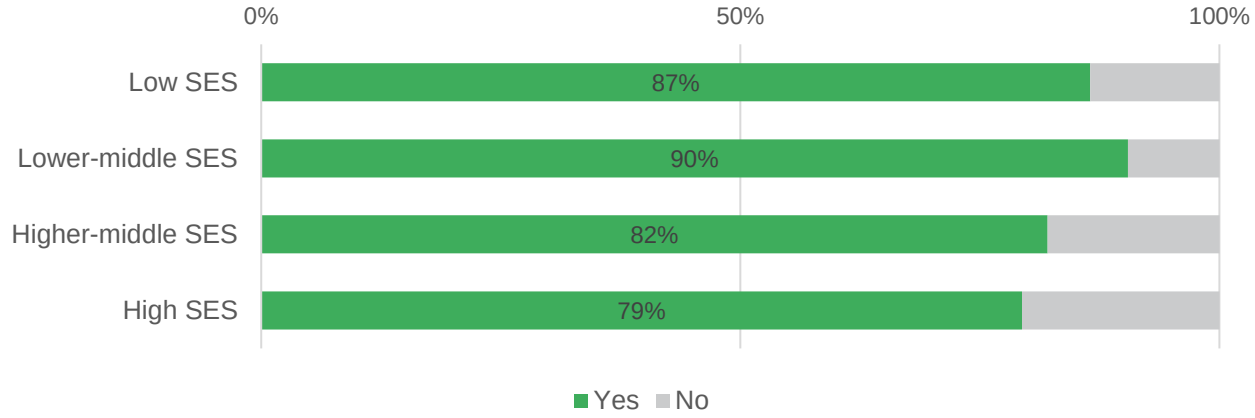


Figure 6.15 Original cohort beneficiaries who have received bursaries by SES category (2017-2020)[50]



Distribution of material support was reintroduced as a necessary emergency measure during the COVID-19 pandemic

The emergency situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 led to government approval to provide emergency support to schools and communities, allowing the project to provide additional support as part of the STRP and MTRP. Decision to provide immediate subsistence and material support to the families of project beneficiaries was made with evidence from the project's ENA, in which beneficiary households reported a loss of income and facing economic hardships. This support included the distribution of food, learning materials, and dignity kits to project beneficiaries.

[49] Source: 2020 re-verification data. N.B. Beneficiaries asked what type of support they received in the 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 school year. N=1587.
[50] Source: 2020 re-verification data. N.B. Beneficiaries asked what type of support they received over the previously in the 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 school year.

At the time of analysis, the activities were still underway and the project had not yet reached its targets set for the distribution of bursaries, dignity kits, food rations and resource materials. The MTRP distribution survey conducted by the project found that food packs had been provided to over 80 percent of beneficiaries, dignity kits to over 60 percent of girl beneficiaries, and school supplies to over 80 percent of project beneficiaries as of April 2021. The project has further confirmed that it had distributed MyBook – a newly developed school supply and learning material (described in more detail in Section 6.3) - to 94 percent of project beneficiaries.

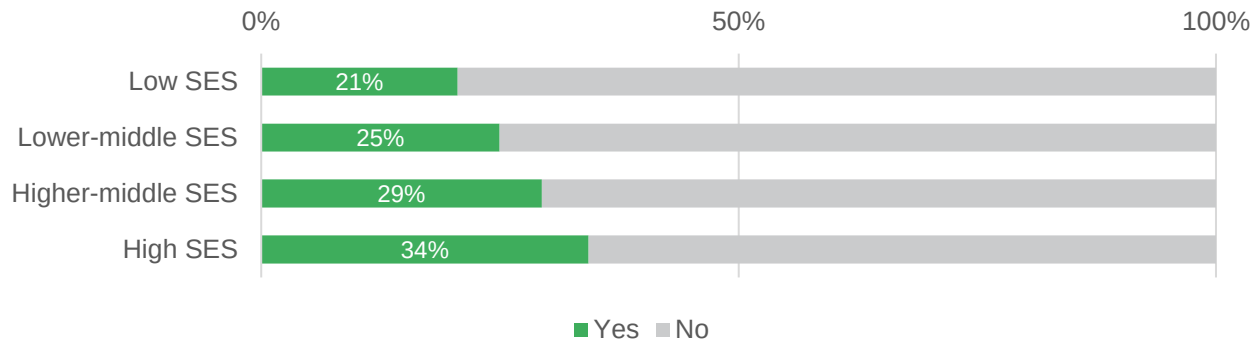
The MTRP survey carried out by the project team with 288 beneficiaries showed that 98 percent of respondents were satisfied with the material support received and that distributions were sufficient, useful and of quality. The distribution had a higher coverage of the JSS beneficiaries (85 percent) compared to primary school beneficiaries (74 percent). Of the 29 percent total children with disabilities population of the beneficiaries, 23.3 percent were provided with food items as part of the MTRP support. 60 percent of all girls supported by the project received the dignity kits with 61 percent of all JSS girl beneficiaries and 58 percent of all PS girl beneficiaries. Of the girls who received dignity kits, 13.3 percent have a disability, compared to 21 percent of girls with disabilities in the population.

VSLAs, designed as a longer term solution to address economic barriers, were implemented as planned

The VSLA component was a core mechanism intended to address financial and economic barriers to education, facilitating the transition away from bursaries towards a more sustainable and long-term approach to achieving economic empowerment. VSLAs targeted economic barriers associated with transition, in particular increased costs relating to JSS and SSS such as school fees and equipment, in addition to the increased opportunity costs of education at secondary level.

When asked in the 2020 reverification survey, 27 percent of the beneficiary households reported membership in VSLAs; 21 percent of beneficiaries from the lowest SES classes reported family membership in the VSLA, as compared to 34 percent of the highest SES categories. A total of 200 grants were received by GATE-GEC VSLAs, exceeding the logframe target of 160.

Figure 6.16 Breakdown of the VSLA membership by SES (2020)[51]



[51] *Source: 2020 re-verification data*

The midline evaluation confirmed that project had successfully set-up VSLAs in the targeted communities, but was not able to determine if these were used by the community to financially support the education of children. The project has since surveyed 222 VSLA members to understand how the community were participating and spending the money loaned from project established VSLAs, of which 56 percent reported having utilised a loan for their children's education. Of those parents, 96 percent reported using loans to buy children shoes and 88 percent reported using part of the loan for their child's uniform. Other reported uses included paying for exercise books (71 percent), textbooks (45 percent) and stationary supplies (57 percent).

Only half of the parents who reported using loans for educational expenses were from GATE-GEC beneficiary households, suggesting that VSLAs as an intervention had reach beyond the beneficiary population. VSLAs remained active during the pandemic. While there were challenges in delivering activities due to social distancing laws, VSLAs also served an additional purpose as a body through which the project was able to disseminate key health and back to school messaging.

Outcome pathway 2: Community awareness and accountability

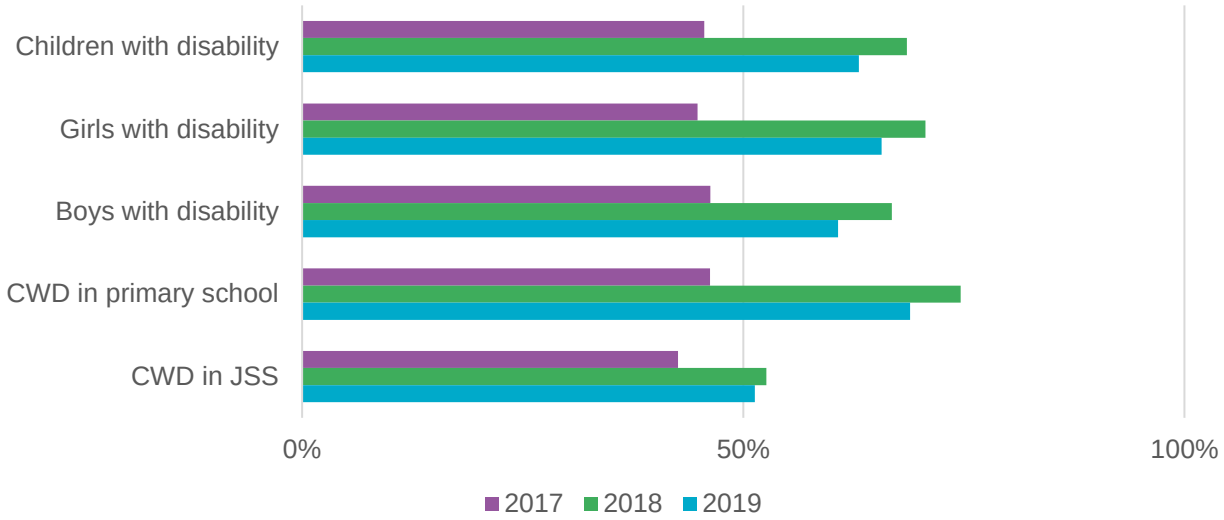
The project implemented activities aimed at increasing community awareness and accountability of education

The project sought to addressing negative community attitudes towards education and provide students with opportunities to inform school improvement plans through activities such as providing information to VSLAs (discussed above), using CBRVs to provide community engagement, the use of scorecarding, and support to SMCs and BoGs (see Section 6.1.2).

The project trained a total of 138 CBRVs (meeting its target) and supported them to raise awareness and engagement within the communities to reinforce inclusion messages and strategies, sensitise the community on the rights of all children to access education, and address child protection concerns. CBRVs worked with Inclusive Education District Officers to provide support to beneficiaries and their families to identify and address additional needs, such as ensuring that assistive devices provided to students are functioning, building parents understanding on how they can support their child's learning, and supporting parents in re-enrolling children in school during MTRP.

Reverification data collected in 2020 recorded that 37 percent of the children with disabilities received support, with 39 percent of boys with disability receiving the support compared to 35 percent of girls with disability. Longitudinal analysis shows an increase in the proportion of children with a disability receiving CBRV support between 2017 and 2018 with a slight reduction in 2019. Across all years, a similar proportion of girls and boys with disability were supported by CBRVs (Figure 6.17). A lower proportion of children with disabilities in JSS received the CBRV support compared to the share supported in PS. While the available data provides some insight into the potential reach of the project at a high level, the data provided does not provide insight into the effectiveness of CBRVs or how this support was perceived by the beneficiaries or their families.

Figure 6.17 CBRV support received, analysis by gender, disability and school level (2017-19)[52]



Scorecarding and suggestion box activities were introduced to ensure the community and students have the opportunity to feed into school improvement plans with a particular focus on raising safeguarding issues and how to resolve them. The project met its target of setting up scorecarding activities and suggestion boxes in all GATE-GEC schools.

Based on data from the study group monitoring form in 2018-19 that surveyed 568 beneficiaries, 46.7 percent were aware of a suggestion box. 94 percent of beneficiaries who were aware of a suggestion box were in JSS. Of those aware, just over half (53.2 percent) either used it or knew of someone else who had, and 26.4 percent used it themselves. 14.3 percent of those of those who used it were children with disability, compared to 9.7 percent of those who had not, which suggests that children with disabilities were more likely to have used the suggestion box.

Among other stakeholders surveyed through study group monitoring forms in 2018-19, 26 percent of 50 parents/caregivers who responded (study group monitoring form for parents) said that they were aware of the scorecarding process that allowed children to put their comments in a school suggestion box. Majority of those (77 percent) who were aware were parents/caregivers of JSS students. 35.6 percent of 100 PVs surveyed were aware of the process, 92 percent of whom were in JSS.

The midline evaluation further highlighted that these activities ensured students voices and opinions were heard, but had less evidence that these translated into action plans. It is noted that there may be a time lag before awareness of student opinions translates to action and the impact of school closures may have affected the speed of progress. Community attitudes and accountability is further explored in Section 6.2.3.

[52] Source: 2017-2019 Reverification data. Note that the above figures only includes children with disability.

Outcome pathway 3: Support for Well-Being and Safety

Safeguarding processes, trainings and activities were enhanced in recognition of the potential effects of COVID-19 on student safety and wellbeing

The GATE-GEC focus on safety and wellbeing has been present since the initial design, most notably as part of the CPD package for PVs and LA/STs, CBRV support, and improving school management processes through SMCs and BoGs. Activities were further extended in recognition of the impact of school closures on the safety and wellbeing of beneficiaries, in particular girls and children with disabilities who were at greater risk of gender based violence (GBV), early pregnancies and forced marriages, leading to a higher risk of drop out. In response to this, activities were broadened to ensure CBRVs, head teachers, project staff, PVs and LA/STs (who were at this point NQFTs) were effectively trained to support and safeguard girls and children with disabilities during the pandemic.

The project built on lessons learnt during the Ebola crisis by implementing PFA and MHPSS activities which supported beneficiaries to address worries around COVID-19 and feelings of isolation. A number of initial and refresher trainings on PFA, survivor-centred support, and facilitation skills for safe spaces were provided to NQFTs and PVs. Similarly, NQFTs were provided additional training so that they could better engage in safeguarding and disclosures during telephone encounters with beneficiaries. Additionally, the project created directories of MHPSS actors in each district to ascertain the availability of referral actors (Mental Health Nurses, Community Health Workers, Community Health Officers, etc.) which provided information on the development of a multi-disciplinary referral pathways.

The project successfully trained 484 project stakeholders on PFA. The MTRP beneficiary survey found over 97 percent of survey beneficiaries knew who to contact in an instance where they needed help regarding their safety or mental wellbeing, while 26.7 percent of beneficiaries reported they have at some point spoken to an MHPSS focal point. Of these, all were either satisfied (45.5 percent) or very satisfied (55.5 percent) with the support. A higher proportion of girls (28.4 percent) reported accessing MHPSS compared to boys (20.3 percent).

Within the communities, community groups were trained on Community-Based Child Protection to further strengthen awareness and responses to girls' rights and GBV. Communities were sensitised and trained on a range of ways to raise and report concerns, which was further communicated through radio programmes, community sensitisation activities, phone calls, posters and via VSLA groups. The project printed and distributed government COVID-19 prevention and response posters developed by the National Emergency Operation Centre in 593 PS and JSS, 135 Health Units, and 138 communities. The project also trained 30 project staff and 141 CBRVs on the prevention and control of COVID-19 in the community, prevention and response to child protection issues and GBV, and PFA basic skills. Furthermore, phones and megaphones were provided for CBRVs to conduct sensitisation activities. To further safeguard children with disabilities, the project provided grants to Disabled People's Organisations to support advocacy in the communities around inclusion, education and protection support for children with disabilities.

One of the key findings from the ENA was that girls in primary school age group were at higher risk of permanently dropping out of schools during school closures due to early marriage or pregnancy.

To mitigate this, the project introduced the girls' club initiative, facilitated by trained NQFTs, to ensure young girls received support to build confidence and resilience as well as awareness around GBV.

6.2.3 Beneficiary experiences of transition

The project's MEL framework recognises the need to qualitatively explore transition from the perspective of the beneficiaries, including their own understanding of 'successful transition', their motivations and aspirations, their ability to influence or choose preferred transition pathways, and whether the transition options available to them are safe. The remainder of this section aims to explore these experiences in more detail.

Beneficiaries viewed transition in terms of in-school transition and expressed strong aspirations to complete education to, at least, secondary level and improve life chances

Similarly to midline evaluation findings, most of the beneficiaries interviewed expressed their understanding of transition in terms of in-school progression, and ultimately completion of SSS, college or university. The value placed on education was most frequently associated with enabling the realisation of career goals in a wide range of professions including nursing, banking, legal work, joining the military, and teaching. This was consistent across both PS and JSS levels, as well as across all six districts. In some cases, beneficiaries felt they would need to adjust life goals if they were unable to complete their education and expected they would engage in other forms of work such as farming or petty trading. In one case, they expected this to be a temporary option to help fund further education:

> *[I]f encountered financial constraints that may stop my desire to finish school, at the moment I'm learning some form of trading with my aunt, I may embark on petty trading. I can save some money to continue my education again if that was the problem. (JSS student)*

While beneficiaries strongly associated transition with educational success and achievement of career goals, they also discussed the intrinsic value of education and transition. For example, some felt that transitioning to the next grade helped them to achieve personal growth and maturity, will enable them to be more independent and adequately support families and communities in the future, and will earn the respect and admiration of the community. One beneficiary explicitly stated that her parents have impressed upon her the value of education in order to avoid being taken advantage of: '[M]y parents are very much supportive of me and are always advising me to take my studies seriously so that when I become educated no one can take advantage of me'. (JSS student)

Several beneficiaries referred to specific role models who inspired them or who they deemed to be successful, which provides some further insight into perceptions of successful transition. Those that they looked up to were often well educated, respected in the community, paid a salary, or known for helping the poor and vulnerable. These role models ranged from family members, teachers, people within the community, television personalities, and several mentioned the First Lady Fatima Bio as an important role model. One beneficiary reflected on a well-educated and

successful family member who has a strong level of control and autonomy despite being a young woman:

> *Interviewer: Do you have somebody that you are admiring?*
>
> *Respondent: Yes. My Aunty is a Barrister. She is young but she can control elderly people. I want to be like her if possible, even more than her. (JSS student).*

Beneficiaries described positive or neutral experiences of transitions, although financial support remained a primary concern regarding future opportunities

When asked about their own experiences of transition, most project beneficiaries at both PS and JSS level provided positive examples of moving up a grade, or moving from PS to JSS. Beneficiaries reported feeling happy to have transitioned and felt that they were making progress towards personal and career goals. There were very few instances of beneficiaries reporting major challenges when moving to a new grade and they were often confident that they would be able to complete their education and gain future employment or achieve personal goals. It is worth noting, as set out in Section 4.6, that interviews were only conducted with students who were currently in school and by definition had been able to successfully transition in the past or had been able to return to school following a previous drop-out. It may therefore be expected that perceptions and aspirations around transition would be more positive.

However, despite the introduction of FQSE, financial barriers remained a key concern for many of the beneficiaries interviewed, a finding which is consistent with both baseline and midline evaluations. While most stated that they believed they were capable of achieving educational goals, several highlighted financial support, access to school resources (such as books), and availability of food provided by either project or non-project sources were key enablers to successful transition. The importance of financial support was mentioned by beneficiaries across all districts, levels of education, and socio-economic backgrounds, and many felt that if this was removed they would be unlikely to complete their education.

A smaller number of beneficiaries found the transition to a new level of education challenging because of the increased difficulty of subjects, or because they had not fully grasped literacy or numeracy skills before progressing. Beneficiaries also anticipated this might be a problem for future transition – to remedy it, most mentioned they overcome this by studying hard, and study groups were also identified as an important source of support (discussed further below).

In two cases, beneficiaries specifically highlighted the social implications of not transitioning along with their friends – one mentioned that she was impatient to progress to the next grade so that she could join her friends at JSS, another felt she would have lost her friendships had she not successfully transitioned. One school stakeholder further highlighted how repetition could ultimately impact motivation and increase the risk of drop out and how study groups were addressing this issue:

> *Before now, when they go through their exams and some of them if they could not make it then they decide to drop out of school because when they see their colleagues been promoted to another class and they are still in the same class, some of them will decide that I am not going to school again, but the study groups help them to be*

promoted to another class and also helps them to promote to the next grade. (School stakeholder, JSS).

Similarly to both baseline and midline findings, there were no clear differences between the perceptions of children with or without disabilities with regard to experiences of transition, or aspirations of beliefs around future transitions. However, as discussed below, while children may not explicitly view disability as a barrier to transition, they are likely to experience certain barriers more acutely than those without disabilities.

One of the main divergences from midline report findings was the prevalence of beneficiaries who discussed early pregnancy and marriage as a barrier to transition. At midline, pregnancy or motherhood was found to be the most common reason for a JSS student to be out-of-school, but only two beneficiaries interviewed explicitly identified marriage or pregnancy as a potential barrier. The first expressed concern that her father may decide to insist on her marrying, while the second recognised pregnancy is a potential barrier, but not one which she expects to affect her directly. It is possible that the lack of reference to marriage and pregnancy as a barrier is due to the sample consisting of only in-school girls or due to the national policy change overturning the ban on pregnant girls returning to school (see also Section 2). Some school stakeholders reported a significant reduction in the numbers of students dropping out due to pregnancy while interviewed NQFTs highlighted the importance of girls' clubs in educating girls about their rights and the potential risks to their safety and wellbeing.

While attendance was reported to be high, beneficiaries noted several ongoing potential barriers, notably economic, often exacerbated by disabilities or household background

When asked specifically about whether they had attended school in recent weeks, most of the beneficiaries interviewed stated that they were attending regularly. However, several provided examples of specific challenges or barriers which could impact on attendance, or contribute to being late to school or being unable to concentrate in class. These included challenges with travelling to school, not having access to food before or during school, or having to complete chores before school.

Travel to school was regularly identified as a challenge, across primary and junior level, and across all districts. Beneficiaries noted both long distances (10 miles in one case) and challenging terrains which caused them to be late, made it difficult to concentrate in class, and caused them to feel upset. In some cases, students explained that if they are running late they would skip school in order to avoid being punished. Those with sight, hearing or walking disabilities reported struggling with relatively shorter distances to travel. Almost all students who described this as a challenge noted they have not received any support to help them safely transport to school. In one case, a student mentioned asking motorbikes for assistance to take them to school, which could present a risk to their safety: 'I only ask for assistance from bike riders who I often beg to bring me to school.' (JSS student with disability).

As discussed in Section 6.1, lack of access to food both during and outside of school was a concern for those who expressed being affected by hunger during the school day. This issue appears to particularly impact those who are orphaned, live with a single parent, or are living with

an extended family member. This challenge also appears to impact those at secondary level more than those at primary:

> *There was a time last year I was alone because my mum travel[led], there was nothing to eat. Luckily for me [the] GEC project supplied food items to us, I was feeding on the supply when my mum returned from her trip. (JSS student from a single parent family)*

> *I only absent myself from school if I don't have lunch at all and if am late for school, I would be afraid of the punishment so I won't come to school (JSS student, double orphan).*

Finally, household chore burdens ahead of school were mentioned by a small number of beneficiaries as a potential barrier to attendance and participation, as this can cause them to be late for school, to be tired during class, or to reduce the time available to study outside of school. This again appears to mostly affect those who are from single parent families or living with extended family and with grandparents in particular.

These are known barriers and throughout the GATE-GEC lifetime, the project put in place measures to address these barriers both directly and indirectly. This included the provision of economic support through bursaries and VSLAs, engaging with SMCs/ BOGs and PTAs to mitigate risks at the communal level, and working with the community through CBRVs to address barriers at the community level. The findings presented here suggest that the identified barriers associated with hunger, distance to school, and chore burdens remain continuously relevant and are likely to remain a barrier beyond the life of the project.

Project beneficiaries felt supported by families, communities and schools; while school stakeholders felt they could work collaboratively with communities

Project beneficiaries reported feeling supported by their families and community, including by parents/caregivers, siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles, grandparents, friends and wider community members. Support was wide-ranging and included helping them with school assignments, providing breakfast and/or lunch when possible, providing school resources or supporting with finances, and providing general encouragement to motivate them to attend school and take their studies seriously. Most beneficiaries reported that families were supportive of, and saw the value in them being educated. In some cases, this support is explicitly noted as integral to their ability to complete schooling. In general, when asked, beneficiaries did not feel there had been any major change in the level of family support, and noted that families were supportive before the project was being implemented. This is in line with both baseline and midline findings, which found generally high levels of family support and value placed on education.

Stakeholders discussed the importance of engaging with the community, in terms of efforts to work with the community to shift attitudes around the value of education and in particular the views and preconceptions around children with disabilities and vulnerable girls. Examples of this included educating community members not to use inappropriate and offensive language to describe children with disabilities, educating them about the rights of vulnerable children to access education, encouraging parents to send their children to school, and helping them identify ways to support vulnerable children in the community.

Some stakeholders felt that community engagement improved due to the provision of resources, bursaries or loans by the project. This support was perceived to reduce some of the burden on parents which may prevent them from sending children to school, and providing them with the means to support children's education.

Stakeholders felt the additional engagement with communities has helped to change the attitudes of parents who were increasingly recognising the right to education for all students, regardless of background of ability. At the same time, while many beneficiaries reported that their families are supportive, most stated this was the case before they were supported by the project.

While support within families and communities was mostly reported to be positive, there were some reports of challenges. School stakeholders in one PS referred to parents being unwilling to allow children to attend extra classes, while some students described family support as being inconsistent – this seemed more frequent with those who were from single parent families, or those living with extended families.

Stakeholders were confident that safeguarding protocols improved over the project's duration and helped in preventing risks to learners' transition, while most beneficiaries felt they could speak to a trusted teacher or family member when they had concerns

Safeguarding-related activities were part of the project's efforts to prevent risks to learners' transition, such as early pregnancy. School stakeholders for the most part felt that safeguarding protocols evolved and improved over the programme's duration and that protocols shifted from a reporting approach to a more proactive counselling approach. They described how this enabled them to reach out and check in on students' safety and wellbeing, encourage them to speak up about issues or concerns in a non-judgemental space, or provide children with information to support them to make positive life choices. Stakeholders felt this helped students to understand and identify risks to their safety and wellbeing, and reduced instances of pregnancy which could lead to school drop-out or delayed transition. This also reduced unethical behaviour by teachers by highlighting the consequences of their actions, and ensuring they are held accountable:

> *I observed that the pregnancy rate has reduced drastically as compared to the previous years. They are determined to educate themselves with the help of the safeguarding principles we give to them through the help of GEC… From the sensitization, they received from GEC they now have the awareness of teenage pregnancy that will lead them out of school. (School stakeholder, JSS).*
>
> *[B]efore now, all these things like pregnancy occur regularly. But the training always reminded me of the consequences of unethical behaviour […] teachers before now were in the habit of having a sexual relationship with pupils but with the project, teachers are afraid of committing any crime. (School stakeholder, JSS)*

In general, interviews revealed good awareness of the safeguarding processes among school stakeholders, relating to the wider range of issues covered by the project. Almost all of the beneficiaries knew who to approach if they had a concern about their safety or well-being, and most stated they would speak to a teacher if they had any challenges, worries or concerns, and most felt that they would be listened to and the issue dealt with. Beneficiaries also stated that

family members and friends were a source of support in such instances, although in some cases they felt their issues would not be taken seriously. At the same time, some beneficiaries were unsure about whether they have been provided with specific information about safeguarding and child protection; however, it is possible children struggle to recall when asked about specific support they received in the past, or that the language used by the interviewer around safeguarding and child protection was challenging for children to interpret clearly.

School stakeholders mentioned challenges to implementing safeguarding procedures stemming from organisational inefficiencies. To illustrate, while one head teacher felt that the approach to safeguarding within their (JSS) school had improved, they stated that there were no changes to the wider support mechanisms and local processes surrounding child safeguarding in their region and that the child protection referral process was slow and not always effective.

In a small number of cases, children with disabilities reported issues of bullying or name calling by other students, or felt that some of their teachers did not treat them fairly. In these cases, respondents generally referred to 'teachers' very broadly, without reference to specific teachers or project trained PVs. For example, one student with a foot injury reported feeling ignored or shouted at by teachers when they spoke up in class, although she notes there has been some improvement:

> *Interviewer: how do the teachers treat you? Do you think their behaviours have changed?*
>
> *Respondent: No. He shouts at me*
>
> *Interviewer: Why did he shout at you?*
>
> *Respondent: He always shouts at me and I feel too bad. He used to shout at me that I'm a fool.*
>
> *Interviewer: You said earlier that some teachers shout at you. So, tell me do all of them treat you badly?*
>
> *Respondent: Not all of them some of them have changed for a little better. Because when I don't understand, they would take me to an isolated place and teach me to understand. The behaviours of some of the teachers have changed for the better. Some of them treat me nicely. (JSS student with disability).*

In another case, an unintended consequence of a PV's commitment to address issues of bullying led to the use of negative discipline techniques as punishment:

> *I will always talk to [my PV] because he is the one that will always help me in school and when someone takes advantage of me, he will always stand for me. He used to tell words of courage that I should be patient and try to see that I become educated and that will be good for me. Whenever a student offends me, [my PV] will beat that student. (PS student with disability)*

6.3 Sustainability

Key Findings:

- In line with baseline and midline findings, attitudes towards the education of marginalised learners, and commitment from the community to financially support their learning, was found to be strong. VSLAs were designed as a key long term mechanism to support the financial sustainability for enrolment and attendance, and this activity was successfully mobilised and well received by community and national stakeholders. However, economic constraints remain a concern and disruptions to VSLA and livelihood activities as a result of COVID-19 pose the greatest threat to the sustainability of impact at the community level
- At the school level, educators expressed a strong commitment to professional development and continuing to deliver newly acquired pedagogical practices which are inclusive and gender sensitive. Similarly, school stakeholders (including PVs and head teachers) expressed commitment to continue with study groups, either officially or unofficially, and hoped to extend the benefits to the wider school. Although commitment is present around both study groups and CPD opportunities, there is a risk to sustainability as they require financial commitment for stipends for PVs, and the provision of learning materials and food for students in study groups.
- The design and implementation of the MyBook tool offers an opportunity to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and protect against future school closures**.** The tool can be used in-person during study group and catch-up sessions, or remotely as a homework resource or remote learning during future school closures. PVs, NQFTs, and head teachers were provided training to use MyBook remotely (via telephone), or in person in study groups. While it is too soon to know the impact of these activities, the provision of a 'training of trainers' model to educators and government stakeholders offers some protection against future periods of school closures more widely.
- Through strong government engagement, the success of the LA/ST model's impact on young women has the potential for systems adoption and scale**.** The LA/ST model appears to have had a demonstrable impact on the lives of interviewed NQFTs, and enabled them to provide girls with guidance and support, and to influence life decisions. GATE-GEC has undertaken engagement efforts with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) and Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) to extend the LA/ST model beyond the scope of the project.
- GATE-GEC's engagement and alignment with education decision makers offers a strong opportunity for sustainable impact at the systems-level for its inclusive education pilots, the LA/ST model, and curriculum-aligned resources such as MyBook and CPD materials. Although is too early to identify if these activities will be further adopted, the close coordination and discussion with government stakeholders is promising.

6.3.1 Defining and measuring sustainability

This section explores the sustainability of the GATE-GEC project, with regards to whether and how the net benefits of the project will, or are likely, to continue. For GEC projects, sustainability itself is a dedicated outcome, to which projects work to demonstrate that the changes it has brought about in learning and transition through education cycles are sustainable. GEC projects are expected to work towards changes at three levels (school, community, and system) in order to ensure sustainability, whereby sustainability is assessed in the project's evaluation using a progressive scale that moves from latent to established[53].

However, the endline evaluation examines sustainability in a different way to that of previous evaluation waves, which reflects changes to guidance from the FM and with project adaptations in response to the outbreak of COVID-19. These changes are articulated in the GATE-GEC Sustainability Plan, which outlines and explains the key innovations and interventions that the project believes will contribute to lasting change.

This is reflected in the updated evaluation question and approach to understanding project sustainability which collates evidence from evaluation primary data collection and project documentation against the likelihood of and threats to sustainability.

Table 6.5 Summary of previously reported findings and results against Outcome 3 and sustainability more generally

Document Source	Reported results / transition findings
Baseline Evaluation	• Community level: rated 2 (emerging). There is evidence of community-level awareness of and financial commitment to education was high; however, households reported that in spite of this, only 50 percent of households were engaged in saving money for education and only 15 percent reported that they were able to meet all of their education costs in the year prior. • School level: rated 2 (emerging). There is evidence that efforts to improve teaching and learning practices are welcomed by educators, including support for the increase in female teachers, as well as enthusiasm and confidence of children for project interventions. However, there were still gaps in the retention of girls and for involvement of school management and community involvement in activities. • Systems level: rated 1 (latent). Although GATE-GEC is aligned with MEST policy, the limited involvement of MEST as part of GEC-1 necessitated efforts to first build this relationship before further

[53] The progressive model for sustainability includes: latent (develop knowledge and changing attitudes); emerging (changes in behaviour); becoming established (critical mass of behaviour change), and established (changes are institutionalised).

	engagement could happen. However, the project demonstrated strong engagement at the district level.
Y1 Annual Report	• Over 80 percent of community FGD participants acknowledged the importance of prioritising ways of paying for education. • Amongst primary caregivers of children interviewed, almost 95 percent agreed that children's educational costs should be prioritised. • High absence and leaving rates were anecdotally reported by key informants, indicating that still much work needs to be done to address systemic barriers to attendance and transition beyond household-level intentions. • Project has begun to engage MEST stakeholders and coordinate with other programmes, but disseminating learnings and holding events has not yet commenced.
Y2 Annual Report	• The introduction of FQSE has meant that the project was not permitted to provide bursaries and can instead devote resources towards supporting a greater number of VSLA and livelihood groups as well as strengthening SMCs and BOGs and support to teaching and learning. • The project has made progress towards supporting VSLAs and through community awareness through the work of CBRVs. • Project continued to support improved teaching and learning through engagement with head teachers, CPD for PVs, strengthening the work of BOGs and SMCs, and support to LA/STs. • Project has engaged with MBSSE officials through their participation in GATE-GEC trainings and in carrying out joint monitoring visits.
Y3 Annual Report	• Project has continued its efforts to support VSLAs and conduct community sensitisation activities as well as in strengthening continued professional development and trainings and school governance systems. • Project has worked closely to engage TSC to bring awareness to the LA/ST component and to support the adoption of STs and NQFTs into the government teacher payroll upon their graduation. The project has also successfully engaged MBSSE on inclusive education through HI's involvement in the development of the national Inclusive Education Policy. Finally, the project successfully completed a joint monitoring activity with MBSSE.
Midline Evaluation	• Community level: rated 2 (emerging). Community level engagement has improved since baseline, but not yet enough to improve the score to 'becoming established'. There is continuing evidence that caregivers financially prioritise education; however, similar to baseline, only 15 percent of households report that they can cover the costs of education. While VSLAs have been supported by the project, there was not yet evidence that all VSLAs are yet self-

	sustaining or have improved the ability for households to afford school fees. There was also scope for improvement for improved involvement of beneficiaries in the making decisions on their education. • School level: rated 2 (emerging). Project continues to progress on its planned activities related to improved teaching and learning practices, with growing commitment at school and MBSSE level. However, there is still a large financial barrier to continue school level activities through the provision of stipends to volunteers. SMCs and BOGs are not yet fully functional to support stipends and STs still require further support to be enrolled in the government payroll. • System level: rated 2 (emerging). The project has improved its engagement with national stakeholders and therefore met its target for systems level. These efforts include the planning of a joint monitoring trip, contributions to training materials for SMCs and BOGs, input into the teacher training curriculum review process, review of the Education Sector Plan, and HI's involvement in the Inclusive Education Policy.

6.3.2 Outcome pathways

The GATE-GEC project has embedded sustainability mechanisms throughout its activities and at all levels:

1. **At the household and community level**, the project recognises that poverty remains a major barrier to learning and transition. The project includes efforts to address economic barriers at the outset and a gradual decrease in financial dependency. This is accompanied by a set of activities to support attitude change and therefore financial commitment to education. These activities aim to improve attitudes and perceptions on investing in children's education and include awareness raising amongst school and community members (including through VSLAs) and support to scorecarding activities.
2. **At the school level**, the project sought to ensure that improvements to teaching quality are sustained through support to improved school management and teaching practices through activities such as scorecarding, teacher training (CPD), and the development of distance learning and study group adaptation programming. The project has fostered a positive learning environment through improved attitudes towards marginalised girls and children with disabilities, improved safety and well-being, and the use of positive role models through support to NQFTs, who in turn are able to support girls.
3. **At the systems level**, the project aimed to support greater coordination with and cohesion amongst stakeholders at the systems level, through engagement and sharing learning with other education programmes in Sierra Leone and through engagement with government officials.

Efforts to support economic empowerment and attitude change at the community level have been described under the transition outcome section (Section 6.2), while efforts to support improved teaching quality through CPD and improved school management have been also described under the learning outcome (Section 6.1). Efforts to support a positive learning environment, including through itinerant teachers and model schools also have been described in Section 6.1; in this section we provide a description of the project's efforts to support LA/STs through the LA/ST component, develop a distance learning and catch up programme, and coordinate with government stakeholders.

The LA/ST component effectively provided women in rural communities with a structured pathway into the teaching profession and a means to be a positive role models for girls

The LA/ST component aimed to support a greater number of women to become teachers. GATE-GEC built upon the LA/ST model that was developed as part of GEC-1 to provide young women, who resided in the rural communities targeted by the project and had previously not completed secondary education, with a structured pathway into the teacher profession as primary school teachers. LA/STs played a unique role in the GATE-GEC project, as both a direct beneficiary (through direct engagement through learning support, placements and material support) as well as a project-support actors who in-turn support teachers and beneficiaries in GATE-GEC schools. Previous studies completed by the OU (Crisp, Safford and Wolfenden, 2017; Crisp and Safford, 2018) have found that having female teachers provided both young girls and boys with a positive role model to help them stay in school, altered community perceptions of young women more broadly, and encouraged greater community support for the teachers and for education.

The LA/ST component involved a three year training programme, with an additional one year for preparation to enter college. Young women were selected by their communities for the programme and begin as LAs, in which LAs are provided with work placements in primary schools and study materials, tutorial sessions and support from tutors, and revision camps to study English and Maths modules ahead of taking their TTC entrance exam after approximately one year of study. As part of their training and involvement in GATE-GEC schools, LAs also received inclusion, safeguarding and child protection, and psychosocial support training to help them work with children with a range of needs.

Once LAs passed their TTC entrance exam, they became STs and continued to work in primary schools while taking distance-learning and residential TTC courses. STs received study materials and tablet-based resources developed by OU, as well as support from Practice Study Mentors (PSM) for study and exam preparation. Upon completing the three year TTC training course, STs would be eligible to sit their final TTC examination to become qualified teachers. In the project, these are referred to as NQFTs**,** although their status as teachers is not assured until they are admitted into the State's civil service payroll.

Three cohorts of LA/STs have been supported by GATE-GEC; the first two cohorts began under GEC-1 but have been supported as part of GATE-GEC; the third cohort was initiated as part of GATE-GEC. A fourth cohort is intended to start following GATE-GEC closure with separate funding from Plan Canada and Dubai Cares.

Cohorts 1 and 2: Cohorts 1 and 2 were initiated under GEC-1 and were supported by other donors. At the start of GATE-GEC, a total of 476 STs from Cohorts 1 and 2 were still undertaking TTC studies. These STs undertook their final National Council for Technical, Vocational and other Academic Awards (NCTVA) exam in August 2019; however, delays in the release of exam results meant that results were not received until 2020. The project set a target for 85 percent of those still enrolled to pass; the pass rate was 51.3 percent, although an additional 31 percent passed with references, and were able to re-sit the subjects that they failed on the first attempt. The project has engaged with the TSC to advocate for STs to be added to the civil service payroll as teachers upon passing their exams.

With the outbreak of COVID-19, and in light of the fact that Cohorts 1 and 2, now NQFTs, had not yet been added to the civil service payroll, the project undertook a series of exercises to provide NQFTs with support and engagement. A total of 465 of the 476 NQFTs were contacted through a reverification exercise conducted in Quarter 15 and were recruited to provide support to GATE-GEC as part of the MTRP. Of that total, 455 were provided with training to support the project to conduct remote monitoring of project beneficiaries (namely girls), as well as on child protection, safeguarding, and how to manage safeguarding disclosures and stress. In addition, 228 of the Cohort 1 and 2 STs were supported to attend and re-sit their NCTVA exams. 373 NQFTs were further provided training to support girls' clubs and in the use of learning materials to support study groups in PSS at the start of 2021.

Cohort 3: At the start of GATE-GEC, the project directly supported the enrolment of approximately 250 new LAs in Port Loko, Karene, and Moyamba districts. LAs were supported to complete studies and 231 sat marked assignments as part of their studies, with a pass rate of 95 percent and achieving the output target set. All 231 LAs undertook TTC entrance exams in March-April 2019, where the remaining 19 women have left the LA/ST programme due to moving out of implementation districts, switching career paths, or have passed away.

With the outbreak of COVID-19, TTCs and primary schools closed, halting ST placements, study sessions with PSMs and the postponement of a residential study session and module 3 exams which had been scheduled for April 2020. The ENA conducted by the project revealed that STs were affected by school closures, in particular, it was found that the impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods and lack of resources was a major barrier to studying. As a result, the project provided 227 STs with stipends, further materials to support study during TTC closures including radios and solar chargers to support tablet-based studies and connectivity, as well as masks, gloves and sanitiser and to attend TTC residential activities in September 2020. STs were surveyed in February 2021 as part of the MTRP; the survey found that 201 of 202 respondents (99.5 percent) reported that they intended to continue as teachers. As of the time of this evaluation, STs were preparing to write their final NCTVA exams scheduled for late 2021. Plan is pursuing additional funds to provide support to Cohort 3 STs. Project partners confirmed during report drafting that a fourth cohort will continue with separate funding from Plan Canada and Dubai Cares, an important step in the sustainability of this intervention.

Advocacy Efforts: To support the LA/ST component, Plan has engaged MBSSE, TSC and TTCs through a steering group committee, which met every six months. OU were active in advocacy efforts for the LA/ST model with the aim of strengthening policies around the development of a

female teacher workforce through targeted support. These efforts included in-person meetings with the TSC in 2019 and through the dissemination of learning and evidence of the impact of the component. MBSSE have expressed support for the model and have recognised both the value of the model to support a greater number of female teachers as well as rural-based teachers. However, the model is thought to be costly and therefore faces a barrier in terms of government uptake. The first demonstration of willingness for uptake is if MBSSE advocate the TSC on behalf of the project to support the recruitment of the trained NQFTs into the government payroll, as delays in recruitment can serve as a deterrent and cause drop out of the profession. In early 2021, GATE-GEC was able to organise and conduct a joint monitoring activity with project stakeholders (MBSSE, TTCs representatives, and TSC) in Port Loko and Karene, in which STs and NQFTs were featured. In a subsequent steering committee meeting, TSC committed to recruiting 1000 teachers for the 2021-22 academic year, with the intention of prioritising female teachers in rural areas.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project adapted activities and provided resources to ensure students could stay connected to learning and increase the likelihood that they would return to school

In response to school closures, the project initiated a number of activities to support both remote learning and study group-based catch up learning for beneficiaries. The design of the activities was closely informed by the ENA exercise conducted at the start of school closures, which found that:

- Beneficiaries found it difficult to find time to study at home after school closures. Children with disabilities, orphans and girls who were mothers found it particularly difficult to study on their own without any support from PVs due to increased childcare and chore burdens during the pandemic. These findings were similar to that of the midline evaluation which found that prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, girls (regardless of their characteristics) faced a high chore burden. Forty-two percent of girls were found to be involved in some kind of house chore for at least quarter day or more, with the exception of girls with disabilities, of whom 20 percent were reported to spend at least quarter of the day on house chores.
- Even where children did find time, there was limited support available to them from the community or their parents due to resource and capacity constraints, namely parents' low educational attainment.
- Where there were educational opportunities for remote learning, such as government-led radio broadcasts, not all beneficiaries were able to benefit from the content. The ENA exercise revealed that the majority of GATE-GEC beneficiaries did not have access to radios to partake in government radio lessons.
- The project beneficiary survey and ENA also showed that those who could access radio lessons found it hard to follow the lessons.

In response to these findings, the project undertook the distribution of key items to support both students and educators. The project also developed and distributed a workbook (MyBook) to support both home learning and to support students to catch up on lost learning during study groups, alongside training for educators.

Bursary Items: The project distributed bursary items, which included pens, pencils, school bags, sharpeners, notebooks, to all 2277 original cohort beneficiaries and radios to 1889 of these students. Radios were further provided to 919 teachers, while assorted stationery materials were provided to 194 teachers in 55 schools in all GATE-GEC districts to develop accessible teaching and learning aid for 339 children with learning difficulties and behavioural challenges. According to the MTRP beneficiary survey, beneficiaries found the school items sufficient, appropriate and useful (100 percent). Nearly all (99 percent) of beneficiaries who received MyBook found it sufficient and all (100 percent) found it appropriate and useful. STs and PSMs were also provided solar chargers for their tablets and radios to continue with their learning in and outside of TTC education. Radios were distributed to 664 STs and 69 PSMs. The project also provided all STs with learning materials to help them with their TTC course work.

MyBook: MyBook was designed as a dynamic tool designed to 'future proof' against any further periods of school closures as a result of COVID-19 or otherwise, while also providing PVs, NQFTs and head teachers with a tool that can be used in after school study groups or adapted for regular classroom teaching. Students are able to use the tool for homeworking, while guidance and training aims to enable educators to support students at a distance via telephone support, or in person during study group sessions. This not only enabled children to continue learning during school closures, but also provided those who were already falling behind *before* the pandemic, and who had faced a loss of learning *during* the pandemic, to catch up on the foundational skills.

The project successfully distributed MyBook to 94 percent of beneficiaries, with 1472 distributed by Plan, 4545 by AA and 2528 by HI. Training in the use of distance learning and study group adaptation was provided for project staff, PVs, head teachers, and NQFTs. Trainings used a 'Training of Trainers' (ToT) model where consortium leads, field staff, MBSSE staff, district supervisors, TSC staff, and a select number of school-based staff (one head teacher, one PV, and one NQFT from each school cluster) were trained, and a cascading of the training to the remainder of the school staff would take place subsequently. ToT Training was conducted in mid-February 2021, and the cascade training at school cluster level was rolled out by the end of February.

The project faced some challenges in meeting targets on government engagement, but was able to improve its relationship with government stakeholders following the 2018 election, and coordinated closely with MBSSE during the COVID-19 pandemic

To support the project's systems-level engagement goals, Output 4 targets the sharing of programme evidence and learning with key educational decision makers, in order to influence the education sector. However, prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the project has struggled to meet the targets set on government engagement, owing to activities and events being cancelled or postponed. The project was able to improve its relationship with government stakeholders following the election in 2018.

In Y2 of the project, GATE-GEC reached its target of 35 MBSSE officials taking part in training, reaching a total of 42 officials. Training was also provided to MBSSE personnel to support and monitoring the facilitation of study group sessions by PVs and district school supervisors were trained to provide support to SMCs and BOGs. In Y3, a joint monitoring visit was conducted in February 2020; fewer joint monitoring visits were conducted than initially targeted due to the delays

incurred with the change of government in 2018 and the outbreak of COVID-19. In Y3, only 21 officials participated in trainings (out of a target of 35). However, the project increased its engagement with the TSC, who had taken over responsibility for teacher training and professional development and met its target of delivering five district learning events. The project was also consulted by MBSSE to input into the adaptation of training materials for SMCs to BoGs and on the Education Sector Plan. Engagement at the district level remained strong.

The activities undertaken as part of the STRP and MTRP provided a renewed impetus for coordination and government engagement. During the STRP and MTRP the project worked closely with the government to ensure that the project's COVID-19 response was in line with the government's emergency response and there was no duplication of effort. Efforts included coordination with other projects (namely GEC EAGER, Leh Wi Lan, and GLADI) to harmonise approaches, regular attendance at three of the MBSSE's four pillars of COVID-19 response Education in Emergencies (EiE) Task Force (communication, remote learning and school re-opening), and coordination at the district level with institutions such as the TSC, and with MBSSE leaders.

Similarly, the distance learning and study group adaptation activities described above were also designed to be sustainable at the systems level, by utilising the strong engagement and partnership with MBSSE and the TSC, and aligning with the core competencies set out in the PSS and JSS curriculums. This approached emerged from, and was informed by, the COVID-19 response EiE Task Force meetings, ensuring contextual relevance and government buy-in. The ToT attendees included key stakeholder to ensure the sustainable use of resources so that MBSSE and other key stakeholders were trained in the use of applications to support their continuation after programme closure. This approach has helped to ensure the buy-in of government stakeholders, as well as capacitating them to take forward and scale this approach in future.

6.3.3 Evidence of sustainability

This section explores the evidence available on the key interventions that are intended to contribute to lasting change at the community, school and systems levels in Sierra Leone. Here, we examine the range of evidence available, with particular attention to the experiences and perspectives of key school stakeholders (such as PVs, head teachers, and NQFTs) rather than project beneficiaries. This section examines the community level, school level, and systems level in turn.

Community level sustainability

School and policy stakeholders strongly valued the potential of VSLAs to contribute to both parental/guardian engagement as well as for longer-term financial sustainability of education outcomes

As highlighted in Section 6.2.3., economic barriers continued to be a primary concern for many project beneficiaries, and the bursary and VSLA components were important interventions to address this. All of the national stakeholders interviewed described the role of the economic interventions, in particular VSLAs, as a crucial part of the GATE-GEC project. This activity is

intended to be a more sustainable alternative to bursaries, and in each case stakeholders expressed positivity over the intervention and the perception that it would be sustained by community members, who were empowered and motivated by being part of VSLAs:

> *I was highly impressed with the VSLA, the design, the elements and the strategies they used to empower the beneficiaries and because of the style they used, the people understood what they should do to benefit and for the results of that VSLA to be sustainable. (National stakeholder)*

Another stakeholder similarly voiced:

> *At the community level, the [VSLAs] with some communities I guess would work well because they were excited about it and they were proud of it; so I think that would be sustained. (National stakeholder)*

Stakeholders recognised the importance of VSLAs to provide the longer-term sustainability of project impacts, notably on transition, by engaging with parents through training which enabled them to maintain financial independence. As one stakeholder noted, parents often have the motivation to financially support children to attend school, but may not always have had the means or capacity to achieve this:

> *One of the things [GATE-GEC] did for the sustainability of this project, [is] the parent in the community are trained to do some local banking for this project. We [were] told that in the beginning, the project [provided funds], so [VSLA members were trained to] maintain that, because they don't want the children to drop out of school for financial need, which is very good for sustainability. So they did that, which is very impressive. (National stakeholder)*

Similarly, head teachers also recognise the value of VLSAs as the mode of engagement of the project for parents, in which 'the VSLA teach parents how to manage and upkeep their children' (Head Teacher, JSS). Part of the success of VSLAs as a vehicle for parental engagement was their involvement of both men and women. One stakeholder expressed:

> *[M]en were involved. For the VSLA, I was highly impressed because everybody knew what they were up to and because of that, cohesion has been absorbed. And because of that, the people knew they should have a stake in the education of their children and they are responsible enough now to play their role as parents. They ask their children to study, they check them after school and they encourage them to speak English at home and in the community. (National stakeholder)*

Previous evaluations found there was a strong commitment to prioritising education costs at the household level, but without the implementation of livelihoods activities there is a risk that economic barriers to attendance and transition will persist

Previous waves of evaluations have found a strong commitment expressed by parents and guardians to allocate savings and earnings to pay for school fees. However, the number of households with commitment varied little between baseline and midline data collection, suggesting that the numbers were strong to start off with, and have not dramatically improved as a result of the project. It should be noted that the endline evaluation did not collect new data at community and

district level, however as discussed in Section 6.2.3, economic barriers to education remain a concern for many beneficiaries, which may be exacerbated by the disruption of planned livelihoods activities as a result of COVID-19.

While economic empowerment activities have been an important and well-received intervention at the household level, stakeholders continued to voice concern that sensitisation activities were still needed to ensure that households would translate the dividends from economic activities towards children's education:

> *My fear now is, if this project runs out, it's going to be difficult for some communities or some parents to be able to continue. Although they had the [VLSA] savings project [which] they are hoping that they would continue afterwards… [I[am just wondering how many of those parents are continuing the savings project and how are they seeing that savings project? Are they seeing it as money for themselves, or their immediate family or the needs of those students moving across? So, I think more sensitization is needed in that vein so that the parent is aware that this money that has been given to them for savings and not just to take care of their immediate families, but especially for those beneficiaries afterwards. (National stakeholder)*

Conversely, one stakeholder expressed the importance of awareness and sensitisation at the household level is a key accompaniment to the financial support mechanisms supported by the project, in order to ensure that households are willing to commit funds to children's education over other household needs.

> *So I think….because when we went around, interviewing some of the parents, some of those that were involved, they said they came and give us money and now we can take care of our families and all of that. Yes, we agree, but are you taking care of your husband or are you taking care of the project beneficiaries? (National stakeholder)*

Community ownership and buy-in was perceived to be a key mechanism to support economic sustainability of project activities

National stakeholders reported that community ownership was key to ensure that activities and support carries on beyond the lifespan of the project. They emphasised, the role that the community can play in improving the learning environment, and how that can benefit the whole community:

> *As part of our engagements, we emphasised community ownership we told them the schools are yours, the girls, the children are all yours. Whoever is in this community you make them safe if they come to school they are educated it will help the community. So today, we see parents and in the form of PTA coming together to help clean schools, we see the SMC going beyond keeping food that is supply for the school feeding programs. You see parents also coming so that they will help to cook for free, if government cannot afford to pay cooks. So they come and cook for free because, if government is buying the condiments, they can come and offer their services. (National stakeholder)*

In particular, national stakeholders expressed the key role to be played by communities and households to support lasting changes. Household and community-level support was seen as key because of their ability to provide on-going monitoring and engagement, beyond what the government, teachers, and institutions such as the TSC can offer:

> *We have to push our teachers to do more, we have to push our students, our parents so that it looks like community approach. If we can use the community approach in education, then it will be successful because the Ministry on its own can't do everything, the teachers on their own can't do everything, the TSC on its own can't do everything… but the parent is almost every day within the school or very close to the school, they can pop in to check on what is going on; so I think community approach to education is a way forward. (National stakeholder)*

School stakeholders recognised that the project has made important steps to support marginalised students, and in some cases, this has further raised their awareness of further students within the community who are in need of support

Stakeholders expressed that the impact of the project stemmed from its successful reach of the most marginalised students, and to encourage communities to support their education:

> *What I come to admire about the project is that Freetown is not Sierra Leone. So they went to deprived communities and addressed the needs of deprived children and vulnerable children. When it comes to vulnerability, indeed they targeted vulnerable children. (National stakeholde*r)

> *They have incorporated lots of vulnerable children, and the parent even testifies that. The parent is all motivated to send their children to school and also ensure that the children are in school. (National stakeholder)*

> *To the community, the project has sensitized them to send their children to school especially children with disability can now go to school without fear of being provoked or mock. (PV, PS)*

In some cases, the awareness of the need to support marginalised children further heightened the awareness about those who were *not* supported by the project. One JSS head teacher mentioned, 'I want to appeal so that the project will be extended to include more vulnerable and marginalised children' (Head teacher, JSS). Although support to out of school children was beyond the remit of the GEC-T portfolio and therefore the GATE-GEC project, one national stakeholder expressed the need to provide care this group:

> *For example, when they are taking these packages to the beneficiaries, [there are] those who are not captured in the database for the packages, [as] some people withdraw their children from school… They need to increase the number of beneficiaries [and] they need to expand and extend the project to other schools. Because of all the other schools they have not targeted, some children are leaving and going to the schools they have targeted, and the schools are becoming overpopulated. (National stakeholder)*

School level sustainability

PVs expressed strong commitment and motivation to support marginalised girls and children with disabilities, and highlighted CPD activities as means to do this effectively and sustainably

The PVs described their motivations for joining the programme, which were frequently associated with their commitment to teaching, drive to support children, and recognition of the inequalities faced by marginalised girls and children with disabilities. Many of them expressed playing a part in supporting girls and children with disabilities and their commitment to teaching were major motivators in their decision to join the programme:

> *I decided to become a PV especially for the girls, most of them are been marginalized before this time. I want them to empower themselves through this project, that was how I was motivated to become a PV. (PV, JSS)*

> *My opinion of being in the PV because, for the past years, those children are not participating in school, they have been marginalized. As a person, I thought it fit that I need to step up and help these children to also educate and become somebody to society. (PV, PS)*

These attitudes appear to have been prevalent prior to the programme, but the activities and support provided by GATE-GEC have been instrumental in giving the tools and capacities to address these concerns. PVs, head teachers and NQFTs all expressed a strong commitment to teaching and CPD. The provision of CPD and training intended to have a wider impact beyond the current extended cohort of students, towards a more sustainable impact; as one head teacher put it in reference to the CPD training he received, 'As long as I have got the knowledge, I will continue doing that' (Head teacher, JSS).

The importance and value of CPD activities was emphasised by all PVs, in particular those who were previously unqualified and had received limited training opportunities in their career, and many reported that they are now keen to pursue further training and qualification: 'Professional development is the most important training that I have received' (PV, PS)

> *As long as I am in the teaching field, the things that I have learnt will not leave me again they will continue to be part of me. The only thing just like I told you, refresher training will be needed from time to time so that we will upgrade ourselves or we renew what we have learned. (PV, PS)*

> *We are having in our minds that we should continue with these changes and that is why we have thought it fit to attach the reading program in our system so that it can be a continuous process, we will not leave it behind again. (PV, JSS)*

> *One of the things that will help me stay in class is support to further my education. If I could acquire adequate education that will help me stay in school, I want to acquire adequate education to keep passing on adequate knowledge to the students. (PV, PS)*

However, many educators, particularly PVs, recognised that for these gains to be sustainable, there was a need for further training, particularly at that point, when they learned new techniques

and were interested in learning more. Many were concerned that the skills they gained would wane if they were unable to receive further training in the future: 'Let the project support us with more learning and teaching materials and let them continue to provide us with more training' (PV, PS)

> *As PVs, my final messages are that we need more training to build our capacities and to give more support to vulnerable students especially children with disability so that school enrolment will continue to increase and they would stay in school. If they don't help them, most of them would drop out of school. (PV, JSS)*

> *Well in the first place, like we have previous training for this project, we also need to have training after this project [ends]. How are we going to continue to help these children? We need to be trained so after the end of the project we will continue in that direction to help the children (PV, JSS)*

In addition to mentioning intrinsic motivations, which enhanced educators' engagement in programme activities and training, others referred to the more practical motivations. The latter included the provision of stipends, which was an important resource for many PVs in order to sustain them:

> *The incentive that I am receiving at the end of the month also is motivating. But as I told you if this project should be here before this time, we should not have a lot of girls in this community that are not going to school but because I want the girls to improve and be serious in school, this is my greatest motivation. (PS, PV)*

> *I was inspired because I was selected by the head teacher. I am a community assistance teacher serving the school with no payment. So, the little stipend I am receiving is given more energy to do my job. .*

Finally, it should be noted that not all of the PVs were full time, registered teachers, meaning they were not on payroll. Several mentioned that being able to achieve full registered status and an improvement in salary would help to ensure that the skills as sustained as PVs remain in the profession and support a greater number of children. This was particularly the case for those as PS level:

> *The other thing again is the salary, when there is improvement in the salary that will help me to stay in school. Then teaching and learning materials as well as refresher training, to be called and retrained to be better equipped again. These are a few of them… Some PVs should have been supported to go to college. The support should have been for all. They should have engaged the Ministry of Education to put us on the payroll. When the program folds, we will continue to suffer because we are not on the payroll. (PV, PS)*

> *If I have a pin code, I will be able to continue to be a teacher although I am doing my teacher's certificate... I will want the project to help us because most of us that are in the project we are students and we are not in a government payroll. If they can pay our college fees, that will be great. (PV, PS)*

> *As I am talking to you, I am one of the teachers who is not trained […] I am a graduate with a diploma in sacred theology but I also want to be trained as a teacher, because*

that will help to keep me within the system and I want to be in the system for even more than 5 years because I want to help these children become what they should become in the future (PV, JSS)

Educators valued the impact of study groups for marginalised learners and strongly supported their continuation, but also recognised the risks to their long-term sustainability

School stakeholder interviews provided evidence that study groups were the intervention that educators wished to continue. Head teachers expressed that they intended to continue running study group sessions, officially or unofficially:

In my opinion, I think there are activities or aspects of the GATE-GEC project that I think will continue and I have said earlier, one of the bigger things of this project that we have learnt is putting together these small classes and have these study classes because most of the study classes we have with them is based on a revision to help go over their work over and again and that is what we have implemented even in the normal timetable that every Wednesday we have a reading period. That is one of the bigger things I believe will continue even when the program is gone. (Head teacher)

I think the study group session should continue. Even though that has not been officially communicated to us but we are planning to maintain the study group session so that the children will do well in public examination as it has always been. We would then find a way for all the other children to benefits including the marginalized girls and children with disabilities (Head teacher, JSS)

PVs similarly expressed a strong desire for study groups to continue, but some feared that this may not happen following programme closure:

in our last training, we were told that by July this project is going to fold. [We] want this project to continue not for the little stipend they are given us, we do appreciate it of course, but not because of that. We want to continue helping our children and also our community, and want this project to continue. (PV, JSS)

Head teachers also recognised that while there are considerable benefits for marginalised girls and children with disabilities in study groups, they were conscious that these benefits also needed to be extended across the school and into regular classrooms – as discussed in Section 6.2.3, while the skills learnt by PVs have the potential to transfer to wider classrooms, they may continue to face barrier such as large class sizes. That said, some head teachers described how they were applying the lessons taken from the GATE-GEC project to the wider school environment:

Most of the training we received from the GEC project, we are now implementing them into the normal school system and they are working for us. For instance, the reading session we have tried to implement every Wednesday which we were able to bring about as a result of lessons learnt from the GEC project has helped our students to learn better in school. (Head teacher, JSS)

The main perceived threat to the continuation of study groups was financial, both with regards to the provision of stipends for PVs, but also for the provision of learning materials and food for students staying afterschool. The project intended to address the financial sustainability of study

groups through the involvement of SMCs/BoGs to work together to raise funds for the longer term continuation; plans were disrupted due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and as of the time of writing, remain ongoing for the project.

The LA/ST model had a valuable impact on the lives of NQFTs, improving the way that they perceived themselves, their standing in communities, and their potential to be role models and influencers for marginalised children

The evaluation explored the experiences of NQFTs as both beneficiaries of the project, as well as stakeholders and actors. It found that the project had a strong positive impact on the lives of NQFTs, and on their perceptions of how they could continue to influence and support the lives of marginalised children going forward.

NQFTs spoke of how their lives improved since joining the LA/ST programme. Some described previously dropping out of school following pregnancies, and struggling to support their family:

> *Before volunteering at the school, I was not engaged in anything. After dropping out of school I was living with my parents. […] I dropped out of school because I was pregnant for a guy who did not support me and he did not even care about me. So I have to go to my family in the village. That was a challenging time for me and there was no one to take care of me till I gave birth and there was no money to even take care of my child. (NQFT, PS)*

> *I was not doing good before joining the LA/ST program. During that time, when I have like Le5000, or Le6000 I will be making fish and selling around the school and students will come and buy and this was where my brother saw me. […] I have been in the school for the past six years; teaching and I am one of the PV of the school as well. (NQFT, PS)*

NQFTs shared their motivations to join the programme in order to overcome the challenges they have faced, to provide them with greater opportunities, and to improve the lives of students:

> *One of the objectives of the project is to inspired young dropout like us to continue our education and serve our community. They thought that more women have dropped out of school but some of us want to continue our education but we don't have the support. That is why the project supported us to achieve our dreams. It was an opportunity I took seriously. Because there is an adage that I believe which says when you educate a woman you have educated a whole society that inspires me. (NQFT, PS)*

> *I thought it fit as female to add value to myself because it will help me greatly to come and help another female, it is not good for me to sit down there not helping the female pupil to come forward. I Am inspired to be a teacher because it will help me greatly to inspire another female, that when they go through their examination, they too will say I want to be a teacher and if I want them to be a teacher, I will need to set a great example to them by helping them, teaching them for them to be successful. (NQFT, PS)*

The NQFTs interviewed provided strong and compelling accounts of improvements in terms of their livelihood and their standing within the community. They reported feelings of increased

confidence and pride, and improved community attitudes towards them, which in turn has helped them to be better role models to those who may be facing similar life challenges. Examples of the mentioned experiences are provided below:

> *As a result of my involvement as a student teacher, I have been independent and I don't rely on anyone to take care of me. Now I can take care of myself without the help of any man, I can meet my expectation. (NQFT, PS)*

> *Let me tell you when I pass on the street, people will tell me, Madam, we admire you for the way you are taking care of yourself and your children. You don't have a husband but you can take care of your children and they are doing well. In terms of my confidence level, whatever I say is what happens now because everybody has respect for me and they also have trust in me. (NQFT, PS)*

> *It has helped us become role models, a woman who is supposed to go to the bush to support herself and her children today can take her bag and go to the classroom to teach. It has made a great impact in my life. (NQFT, PS)*

Ultimately, NQFTs felt the support from the programme enabled them to inspire and advise other girls, provide them with guidance and support, and to influence life decisions:

> *As a result of my advice to young girls, they can take wise decision for themselves and further their education, rather than focusing on married that will have a negative impact on their lives. Giving birth to their fellow children is not a competition. They have used my advice to make good decisions for themselves. (NQFT, PS)*

> *Now, I am a newly qualified female teacher. That will inspire another girl child. At first people said, "I don't want to be a female teacher, I don't want to stand in the classroom to teach". As a female teacher, if you teach a girl child and explain tom them they will feel to become a teacher, I think that will motivate the child [to] say, when I grow up, tomorrow, I want to be a female teacher. (NQFT, PS)*

That said, one national stakeholder stressed the need for there to be clarify on how these important gains will be sustained in the future:

> *The support to the [student teachers], I wonder who is going to take up that mantle. Who is going to continue that support, because the [young women] are already learning, they love it and now they are teachers and they are proud to be teachers and so on….If it's stopped now, without continuity, that means those [young women] who are supposed to benefit, will be difficult for them to do so. Of course, those who have already acquired their certificates, I think would be able to continue to support themselves which is sustainability itself. They would be able to support themselves, their families and so forth. (National stakeholder)*

Systems level sustainability

National stakeholder recognised their crucial role in extending the reach of marginalised children beyond that achieved by the project

National stakeholders were cognisant that they played an important role in ensuring that the impact of the project is to extend beyond its direct beneficiaries. Here, refinements to national frameworks were particularly important to translate lessons learned from the project more widely. This was particularly true of translating impacts to communities, and students, who remain even harder to reach than those already reached:

> *[This] is what we are working on right now… For more deprived communities, you hardly see such implementation there or opportunity for their teachers and those are the most vulnerable communities that we need to reach out to…So many a times you see communities like Port Loko, Bombali, Kenema and Bo are benefiting from a project like this. But if you go to extreme communities, like Koinadugu, like Bonthe, you hardly see such for them. Which is for me is a thing that we need to work on and we need to ensure that we evenly distribute opportunities for all our schools and children and teachers at the same time. (National stakeholder)*

National stakeholders also emphasised the importance of involving and aligning with government education policy, in order to ensure that the government both has the mandate and the impetus to continue activities:

> *What I want to tell you is that this [project] was not done by impulse. It is aligned with our education plan. So it is the mandate of the ministry. That is why the ministry created the enabling environment for partners to come in and compliment […] So if we are to do it differently, let the projects be the people's project. Let the ministry takes the lead. It does not mean they should come and hand over the forms to the ministry, but if the ministry takes the lead then sustainability is eminent. (National stakeholder)*

The project improved its alignment with government priorities and institutions, and achieved strong coherence with other programmes

The project improved its alignment with the wider education system in the country. In general, there was a more positive relationship and increased cooperation with MBSSE, especially when the new government came into power 2018. In advance of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project had undertaken efforts to align and cooperate with government efforts, although the effectiveness of these activities remained as 'emerging'. At endline, there is evidence that government stakeholders have valued the input of consortium partners, including through consultation on the Education Sector Plan, and advisory support on the Radical Inclusion Policy from HI.

The outbreak of COVID-19 provided further opportunity and impetus for strong alignment and the project appears to have done so effectively. In addition, training materials developed by the programme, such as for CPD, for the LA/ST component, and distance learning and study group adaptation materials, align strongly with the widely used curricula, and can be taken up by future programming. Approaches taken to the latter activity emerged from, and were informed by, Plan Sierra Leone's role on the COVIDCOVID-response EiE Task Force. A promising development

related to this has been the development of a CPD national framework by the TSC, which was informed by the CPD curriculum developed by the project. Furthermore, the MTRP provided the opportunity to strengthen alignment and coherence with other programmes and the project appears to have done so effectively.

There are promising signs of governmental interest in pilot activities such as itinerant teachers, model schools, and the LA/ST component

The coverage of pilots such as the itinerant teacher, model school interventions, and the LA/ST component was limited across the wider GATE-GEC population. However, the project was effective in demonstrating the potential of these models to government stakeholders, and appealing to interests of government. The activities were well aligned with governmental priorities, for example around inclusive education in the itinerant teacher and model school interventions, and the recruitment of female teachers through the LA/ST model. Although it is too early to identify direct evidence of uptake or adoption by government, there are promising signs of this. These include governmental commitment to recruit 1000 teachers for the 2021-22 school year with a prioritisation of female teachers, as reported to the project by the TSC chairman.

7 Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

Project design, implementation and adaptation

Looking at the design, implementation, and adaptation of GATE-GEC, the project successfully learned lessons from the experience of GEC-1 and the outbreak of Ebola. These lessons informed a strong focus on intersectionality, safeguarding and child protection. This also differentiated it from other education projects operating in Sierra Leone, providing a unique opportunity for stakeholder engagement.

The learnings from GEC-1 also influenced the project's response to the outbreak of COVID-19, ensuring that project adaptations were shaped by the needs of beneficiaries. With the outbreak of COVID-19, the project was required to make a concerted decision to prioritise certain interventions, with a focus on social protection and safety, well-being, and efforts to support continuity of learning and a return to school. The project was able to implement these efforts through its existing structures, such as emergency distribution of food, study materials, dignity kits through study group enrolment lists, and community awareness raising through CBRVs and VSLAs, as well as catch up and school-based well-being initiatives through PVs and NQFTs. As a result, livelihood grants and other efforts to promote the financial sustainability of activities, were less relevant to deliver. Thus, financial sustainability remains an important persisting barrier for beneficiary communities.

Learning

We found that the project met almost all the targets set at the output level involving CPD activities and study groups to improve the quality of teaching and learning and school management and to promote better inclusion in schools. Although it was not possible to measure changes in learning outcomes at endline, the evaluation found strong evidence from beneficiaries, school stakeholders, and monitoring data that the project contributed to a set of important preconditions to boost learning for marginalised girls and children with disabilities. This, in turn, increased their confidence in their own abilities, their sense of belonging, and the feeling that their needs were better understood and recognised.

Transition

There was strong evidence that transition rates have remained consistently high throughout the lifespan of the project. Additionally, the project was successful in supporting the return of children back to school following school closures as part of STRP and MTRP efforts. The existing data did not follow those who have dropped out of the GATE-GEC project. Possible reasons for leaving the project include transitioning, dropping out of schooling, or moving schools or migrating, with the latter being particularly difficult to trace following the effects of Ebola and COVID-19. However, analyses of the profiles of the students prior to their departure revealed that the majority of those leaving the project did so during or just after JSS3, suggesting that the completion of JSS was their main reason.

Sustainability

To support sustainability at the systems level, the project improved its alignment with government priorities and institutions and coherence with other programmes, aided by the change of government in 2018. The outbreak of COVID-19 provided further opportunity and impetus for close collaboration and cooperation with government, and the project appears to have done so effectively. This included working closely with relevant national stakeholders and partners to respond to the emergency situation, including the development of learning tools, which can be adapted for use both for in-person catch up programmes or to support remote self study in future school closures. Additionally, the project was strongly aligned with government priorities such as inclusive education and extending female participation in the teaching workforce, offering compelling models for government uptake.

Reaching children with disabilities

There was strong evidence that the project successfully targeted children with disabilities. Of the total population reached by the project, 3,227 students (23 percent) were children with disabilities, as compared with a national average of 1.5 percent enrolled in schools. This figure was largely comprised of PS students, where 44 percent of the PS students reached were children with disabilities, as compared to the JSS level where 17 percent of the students were children with disabilities. Using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions, 86 percent of the children with disabilities could be characterised as having a moderately severe disability and 1.4 percent with a severe disability, versus 13 percent with a less severe disability.

The midline evaluation found that at the JSS level, children with disabilities had lower learning outcomes. This suggested the ongoing importance of targeting children with disabilities with regards to classroom interventions. The evaluation found strong evidence that improvements in knowledge and pedagogical practices for PVs helped to shift the attitudes of PVs and head teachers on the need for individualised support and the importance of and value of supporting children with disabilities to attend school and learn.

The midline evaluation also found that disability was not a barrier to transition. The project supported children with disabilities to attend and participate in school through the provision of assistive devices, the construction of model schools and the engagement of itinerant teachers. These interventions reached a relatively small proportion of the overall beneficiary population over the project's lifetime: assistive devices were distributed to 600 children with disabilities, representing a total of 19 percent of children with disabilities, and 11 JSS were adapted into model schools and five itinerant teachers engaged in 40 PS out of a total of approximately 436 PS and JSS. The pilot nature of these activities meant that they were implemented on a relatively small scale and may not have had a large enough reach to have had a detectable impact on average effects on learning scores. However, these interventions had an impact through their role as demonstrator projects, which helped to secure the buy in of government and community members around the value of inclusion.

Based on the available MEL and evaluation data, it was not possible to determine the relevance of the individualised support (e.g. to what extent individual beneficiary needs were addressed through the provision of assistive devices). Further data collection would be crucial to better understand

whether the needs of children with disabilities have been met by the project as well as to understand how such needs might change.

Continuous professional development for programme volunteers

The endline evaluation found strong evidence that the teaching practices and methods of PVs have improved as a result of CPD activities. The project met output targets with regard to PV attendance in and engagement with training sessions, reports of positive use of key skills gained and positive beneficiary perceptions of PVs engagement in study groups. Beneficiaries and school stakeholders provided examples of improved teaching skills and practices of PVs to support the individual and diverse needs of marginalised girls and children with disabilities, with particular emphasis on gender-sensitive, inclusive and participatory pedagogical practices.

PVs also expressed that they felt better equipped to implement innovative pedagogies and support and respond to the diverse needs of children. This training further helped to improve attitudes of educators towards vulnerable learners, in particular strong long-term commitment and motivation to support marginalised girls and children with disabilities, to improve their learning and increase their feelings of belonging.

PVs face ongoing workforce challenges, such as lack of certification, which not specific to GATE-GEC and are reflective of national-level barriers. CPD training for head teachers and PVs contributed to a stronger commitment to quality and inclusive education. As a result, educators demonstrated a strong drive to continue their professional development to support marginalised children. This commitment could have wider impacts beyond the life of the programme, provided that CPD activities can continue in the future. Overall, the alignment of the GATE-GEC CPD curriculum with national curricula offers opportunities for government uptake or scale out of the training.

The value of study groups

Study groups were a key intervention for all sub-groups, including marginalised girls and children with disabilities. Throughout the project, study groups had high levels of attendance and attendees reported perceived improvements in literacy and numeracy. Students emphasised the value of study groups as not simply additional study time, but as positive learning spaces. Study groups created opportunities for students to work more closely with peers and educators in smaller groups than in regular classrooms. Students also expressed that in the small classes, they could ask fo help, apply what they learned in class, and be able to catch up when falling behind, which served to increase their confidence.

Students also valued the role of PVs in study groups, reporting that study groups were spaces in which PVs helped students to feel included and to participate equally in activities. Students were positive about the role of their PVs in the study groups and felt supported by them.

For PVs, study groups were opportunities in which they were able to apply their CPD training. Study groups were identified by PVs as an important mechanism which should be continued beyond the lifetime of the GATE-GEC project. Study groups' impact could increase if they can be further scaled out to additional schools, while being continued in GATE-GEC schools. However,

this would be contingent on financial support in order to provide stipends for PVs and learning materials and food for students in study groups.

Community engagement and the ongoing challenge of economic barriers

Household context appeared to impact on the extent to which families were able or willing to support learning, with GATE-GEC beneficiaries from single-parent families, or living with extended family, generally more likely to highlight challenges with family support. It is unclear if the project was able to provide specific support to change outcomes for these groups.

A number of interventions were implemented in order to support community and household engagement, particularly through: VSLAs, awareness-raising activities through CBRVs, and strengthened community structures and work around accountability for child protection. Efforts around safeguarding and child protection, especially after the outbreak of COVID-19, likely contributed to the largely successful retention of programme's cohort, with stakeholders being more aware of child protection issues, actively addressing concerns and providing direct support to beneficiaries.

Overall, households were found to be supportive of education and learning of girls and children with disabilities; evidence from the baseline and midline evaluations suggests that this was the case prior to the start of the GATE-GEC project. This was particularly true for household commitment to prioritising the costs of education for girls and children with disabilities. While community engagement, particularly through VSLAs, was valued by households, with the introduction of FQSE and the outbreak of COVID-19 the project was unable to fully implement its planned interventions, such as livelihoods activities.

At the close of the project, economic barriers, largely beyond the project's control, continued to be a challenge for many families and beneficiaries. Beneficiaries expressed worries over ongoing financial constraints and subsequent issues such as hunger. Despite the government's introduction of FQSE, these barriers have been exacerbated by COVID-19. Thus, they are likely to remain a threat to attendance and future transition for students and to sustainability of the impact of the programme. Future programming should pay particular attention these barriers and lessons learned around them from GATE-GEC, in order to successfully improve learning opportunities for marginalised learners.

7.2 Recommendations

This final section of the endline evaluation reflects on the findings and conclusions from Objectives 1 and 2 to capture lessons and recommendations from the project. These are organised around the support they can offer to the sustainability of GATE-GEC's impact, as well as for future programmes in Sierra Leone seeking to target learning outcomes for marginalised girls and children with disabilities.

Strengthening the sustainability of GATE-GEC's impact could be supported through expanding the evidence base of its most promising activities. This includes:

1. Expanding the evidence base around the effectiveness of distance learning and catch-up solutions introduced by GATE-GEC (such as MyBook), which could be used in emergency settings and as part of non-emergency learning settings
2. Collating and mainstreaming the evidence and lessons learned on the LA/ST model across GEC-1 and GATE-GEC to strengthen the theory of change around how this model supports the development of a female teacher workforce and its impact on girls' education
3. Conducting and reframing the analysis of the LA/ST needs as learners, as well as in terms of professional development needs, in order to build a model that supports learning for out-of-school girls
4. Monitoring the needs of children with disabilities, at the school, community and learner levels, for instance in terms of assistive devices, recognising that these needs can change over time

The momentum around project closure and its attention to project successes and impact could be used to cement the governmental and institutional partners' (such as MBSSE, TSC, and TTCs) engagement to support the following activities:

5. The inclusion of study groups in future programming to strengthen inclusion in Sierra Leonean schools
6. The uptake of teacher training materials developed by GATE-GEC, capitalising on their alignment with the curriculum and its goals
7. Scaling GATE-GEC's work around CPD in terms of subject-specific training as well as training for inclusion
8. Continuing to pilot the LA/ST model as a means to address the challenges of distance learning and expanding inclusion of women in the teaching workforce, particularly in remote areas

Finally, the endline evaluation offers several lessons and recommendations for programme implementers and donors on future programming on girls' and inclusive education in Sierra Leone to consider:

9. Tracking and monitoring the participations who leave the programme to further understand transition and its barriers
10. A broader and whole-school approach to expand the range of beneficiaries and ensure a more systemic change approach to equity and inclusion of vulnerable youth, including out of school children in future interventions
11. Continually monitoring and addressing the persistent financial barriers to learning, which have been demonstrated to be an on-going challenge to learners' school attendance, retention and transition as part of future interventions
12. Taking forward and emphasising the lessons learned from strengthening community engagement in safeguarding and well-being during COVID-19 to national and international stakeholders
13. Investing in capacity building and the development of tools that can capture learning progress and teaching quality in a way that can also contribute to the evidence base of national approaches to learning measurement. These can include development of comprehensive and diverse tools to such as project-specific classroom observation methods, comprehensive and formative assessment methods, methods that capture localised understandings of socio-emotional learning, and training and coaching systems to make sure educators can feel

confident using these. By considering the use of assessment materials beyond the use of the project monitoring and evaluation, this can contribute to wider and more sustainable systemic learning

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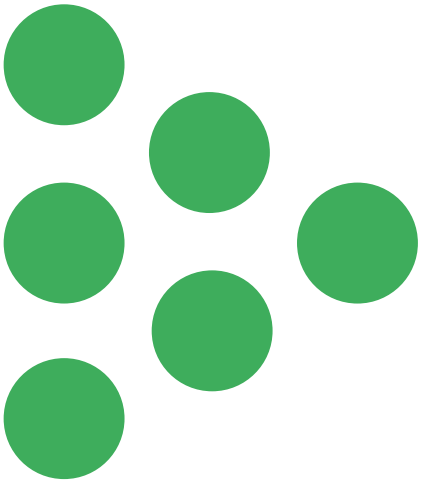
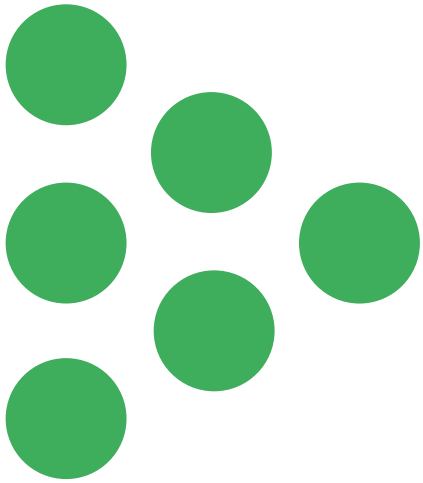


Endline evaluation of the Girls' Access to Education, Girls' Education Challenge (GATE-GEC)

Annexes

November 2021

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)



Endline evaluation of the Girls' Access to Education, Girls' Education Challenge (GATE-GEC)
Annexes

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List of Annexes Included

A. Evaluation Methodology

1.1.1 Evaluation methodology

The design of the evaluation has necessarily evolved since midline, both to account for the project's lessons learned from the midline evaluation as well as due to the change in project design resulting from the outbreak of COVID-19. As such, the evaluation has shifted its focus from the measurement of learning outcomes, to instead capture case studies of beneficiary experiences and perspectives on learning, transition and well-being, to generate wider learning.

To do so, the evaluation has used an innovative and participatory approach, using gender-sensitive and inclusive methods, to provide meaningful engagement with project beneficiaries and stakeholders and to amplify the voices of beneficiaries using the highest standards of safeguarding and ethical protocols.

For this evaluation, we used an Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) approach[1]. IPE is a theory-based (process) evaluation approach that focuses on the generation and analysis of data to examine how an intervention is put into practice, how it operates to achieve its intended outcomes, and the factors that influence these processes. IPE is a flexible approach that allowed us to blend a careful and systematic analysis of existing project monitoring data and documentation, interviews with project implementers (e.g. Plan and consortium members) and project stakeholders, with participatory case studies with a small group project beneficiaries (selected to represent different aspects of intersectional vulnerability) to capture a rich and in-depth understanding of the project's contribution to outcomes.

Our approach has been grounded in the project's 'overarching' theory of change[2], exploring the theory behind the design of activities, the progress made and results achieved by the project, and beneficiary perspectives and experiences on the pathways to outcomes. We examined key implementation factors to compare the project's theory and design and how the intervention has been implemented in practice. This allowed us to draw conclusions about design or implementation successes and failures and to investigate the project context and implementation factors to better understand:

- What worked and what did not work in terms of project activities and mechanisms
- How did the project generate change and why might it have generated different changes in different contexts or for different groups

To operationalise our IPE, we took the following steps in our Inception Phase:

1. **Development of a 'Project Map'**: We gathered crucial information about the design of the GATE-GEC project and its adaptations to generate an overarching project theory of change.

[1] More information and guidance on IPE can be found on the Education Endowment Foundation website (EEF, 2019). Our IPE is also grounded in the UK Medical Research Council's guidance on Process Evaluation of complex interventions (Moore et al, 2015).

[2] See Section 2. This is a version of the project's theory of change developed for the evaluation, which will bring together the project's existing theories of change developed as part of the original project design and as part of the MTRP project adaptations.

We also compiled a full list of project activities to create a project activity map, allowing us to trace the potential pathways to outcomes for beneficiaries. This allowed us to articulate and interrogate the project's intended mechanisms for instigating change. See Annex B of the endline evaluation.

2. **Cataloguing of existing MEL data:** We collated existing monitoring and evaluation data into a data catalogue. This allowed us to understand what data we are able to draw upon to explore project design and theory, results achieved, and implementation factors. Which developed an analysis plan to examine the extent to which project outputs have been achieved and the degree of differentiation amongst beneficiaries. This supported us in investigating project outcomes as output data will contribute to our understanding of outcome pathways for beneficiaries and the data catalogue and will also help us to identify particular gaps in evidence to refine our data collection tools. See Annex E of the endline evaluation.

These two steps allowed us to map an understanding of the project's support to different groups of beneficiaries**,** identify any further gaps in the existing evidence, and devise a sampling approach to support the collection of new qualitative data to document beneficiaries' experience of learning.

Incorporating gender-sensitivity and inclusion into our evaluation

We recognise the moral imperative of and value in ensuring that children (and in particular marginalised girls and CWDs) are involved in participatory fieldwork, in terms of both meaningfully capturing the experiences and understanding of programme impact, effectiveness and quality and for the purposes of generating useful learning for future programming and policy development. This is particularly important in light of COVID-19, where across the world the impact of the pandemic is being shown to affect the most marginalised people in society, including the poorest girls and women (Plan International, 2020; UNICEF, 2020a), and learners with disabilities (UNSDG, 2020).

A key focus of our evaluation has been to examine the differences in learning experiences and the impacts of interruptions to learning with respect to different types of vulnerabilities and how these might continue to affect learning even upon returning to school. Thus, a focus on gender and disability has been incorporated throughout all the stages of the evaluation, from its design and inception to the implementation and reporting and our data collection is centred around the use of participatory methods to meaningfully and safely engage the voices of marginalised girls and CWDs.

As part of this, we have ensured that the voices of girls, boys, women, and men in the programme are represented in the evaluation through our sampling strategy. We have consciously and purposively sampled and considered all beneficiary groups in different stages of data collection and analysis, in order to gain differentiated insights. Furthermore, we have ensured that our data collection tools and methods are child friendly, gender-sensitive, and inclusive for children and adults of different abilities. To help ensure that disability issues are deeply embedded in the evaluation, we enlisted the support of an expert disability research advisor and Sierra Leonean safeguarding expert who provided support and guidance to the evaluation team in data collection tool design, fieldwork training, and in analysis to ensure that a disability lens is incorporated throughout.

Evaluation questions

The table below provides a summary of our evaluation framework. The summary contains our main evaluation questions and how they link to our core evaluation objectives and to OECD-DAC criteria. A full version of the evaluation framework, including how we intended to address each evaluation question and the relevant data sources (MEL data, data collection tools, and analytical processes) can be found in Annex F of the endline evaluation.

Table 1. Summary Evaluation Framework

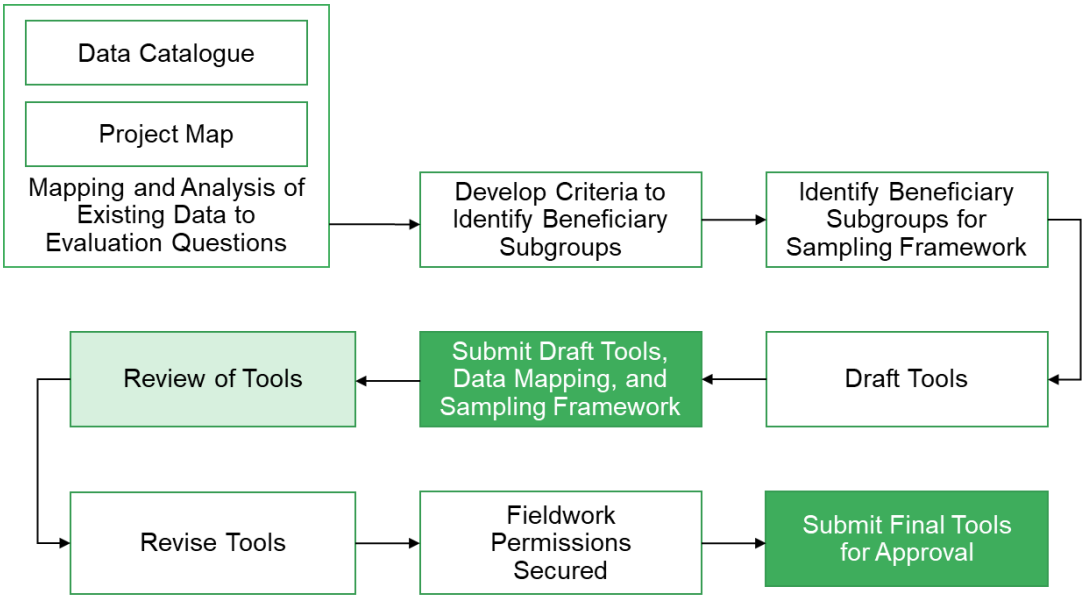
OECD DAC	EQ#	Evaluation Question
Objective 1. Take stock of the GATE-GEC project (2017-2021) to examine the project's design, adaptation and intended results achieved.		
Effectiveness	EQ1	How and how well was the project designed and implemented?
	EQ2	How and how well did the project adapt its design and implementation to respond to changing needs and contexts?
Relevance	EQ4	How and how well did the project include and support marginalised/vulnerable groups, including children with disability?
	EQ5	How and how well has the project responded to the evolution of project beneficiary profiles and needs, particularly with regard to the effect of COVID-19 on retention and dropout?
Objective 2. Document and trace the experiences of the vulnerable and marginalised beneficiary groups as part of the GATE-GEC project, including their evolving needs, the drivers and barriers to learning, transition, and well-being, and how the project has generated change for beneficiaries (with attention to unique and commonalities of experience across sub-groups).		
Effectiveness	EQ3	To what degree did the project achieve its intended results, including differential results across groups?
	EQ6	How and how well has the project supported project beneficiaries to improve learning outcomes through support to improve the quality and inclusiveness of teaching and inclusiveness of the school environment?
	EQ7	How and how well has the project supported project beneficiaries to successfully attend and/or return to school and ultimately transition, through support to beneficiary well-being and for beneficiaries to feel safe and supported by their families, schools, and communities?
	EQ8	How and how well has the project created positive and lasting change for marginalised girls and children with disabilities and with what evidence?

	EQ9	How and how well do the different project activities, outputs and intermediate outcomes come together to generate outcomes for the beneficiary experience?
	EQ10	How and how well has the project addressed the major factors (drivers, enablers and barriers) to achievement and sustainability of project outcomes for different project beneficiary groups?
Impact; Sustainability	EQ11	How and how well has the project contributed to higher level effects (social, environmental or economic, both positive or negative and intended or unintended) and will they be expected to continue beyond the project?
Objective 3. Reflecting on the findings from Evaluation Objectives 1 and 2, capture lessons and recommendations from the project, particularly on how and how well it adapted and responded to changing needs and contexts.		

1.1.2 Endline data collection – pre-data collection

Our process to design our data collection tools began in the Inception Phase with the development of the Data Catalogue and Project Map. These processes will allow us to further target and tailor our data collection based on the sub-groups and types of respondents we intend to sample. This process is outlined in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 1. How we designed our data collection tools and finalised our sample



Sampling Strategy

For this evaluation, we used a non-probability sample for our qualitative fieldwork. As such, this sample was not intended to be statistically representative of the wider GATE-GEC beneficiary

population. Our sample sought to identify particular cases of beneficiaries who can provide information on differentiated impacts. For data collection, we targeted the following groups:

Table 2. Types of respondents for qualitative fieldwork

Respondent type	Sampling criteria
Project beneficiaries	Marginalised girls and children with disabilities, including all cohort groups of beneficiaries. We included both boys with disabilities and girls with disabilities (at PS) and considered different sub-groups of JSS girls (such as girls with disability, girls who are married, pregnant or have children, types of household-head status, and SES status) The sample can be disaggregated by: district, age, gender, type of disability, household characteristics, and other forms of vulnerability. More information on the sample can be found in Annex H.
Teachers and other school staff	Teachers involved in different intervention areas, including PVs, LA/STs/NQFTs (Cohorts 1&2), and head teachers.
Project staff and key stakeholders	Group interviews were conducted with project staff, along the lines of organisation, in order to maximise the number of perspectives (and a range of expertise and service time). Key stakeholders selected on the basis of their involvement in and knowledge of the GATE-GEC project. Key stakeholders were nominated for participation in interviews by the Plan team. A full list of the stakeholders interviewed can be found in Annex I.

Sampling Project Beneficiaries

The basis for our sampling approach is the 2020 beneficiary reverification survey. The survey was conducted at the start of the 2020-21 school year to create a database of original cohort and extended cohort GATE-GEC beneficiaries. The steps used to develop our sampling framework are as follows:

1. Identifying school-level sampling criteria and sub-groups of interest

Our first step involved building an understanding of the beneficiary population (using the project's reverification data) by determining the distribution across sub-groups, such as: school level, sex, age, type of support received, and marginalised status (across disabilities, motherhood/pregnancy, household socio-economic characteristics, and others). This allowed us to understand both the types of marginalisation and the extent to which marginalisation occurs across the beneficiary population.

2. Identifying and selecting school clusters:

Having identified categories, sub-groups or patterns of intersectionality of interest, we purposively sampled schools ('clusters') as the basis for fieldwork. Our sample consisted a total of 12 clusters, or schools, including one JSS and one PS in each of the six GATE-GEC districts. In order to select

clusters, we used a convenience approach by determining the feasibility of fieldwork by examining whether there is a sizable proportion of potential respondents at each cluster.

We created school-level aggregate variables to examine how sub-groups were distributed across schools and districts. Using these, we purposively selected a shortlist of PS and JSS (and a set of back up schools) per district for data collection on this basis. These schools were selected to ensure a mix of different types of beneficiary sub-groups as well as to ensure all the activities carried out by the GATE-GEC project were implemented in at least one of the sample schools. This also allowed us to filter out schools on the basis that they contained relatively few beneficiaries, and thus would not guarantee the opportunity for fieldwork completion.

The sample was reviewed by Plan's MEL team to validate our selection and account for other factors that might disrupt fieldwork. As part of this process, Plan suggested the replacement of one PS in Kailahun and one JSS school in Karene with their backups, on the basis that for those schools, a higher proportion of beneficiaries was preferable than purposively selecting individuals matching key sub-group criteria. The evaluation team further suggested replacing the PS in Karene and Kono on a similar basis.

3. Generating sampling frameworks at the school level

Within the selected schools, we generated a sample frame of potential respondents using reverification data. Priority respondents were selected on the basis of their membership in sub-groups selected for analysis. Within this sample frame, we used a mixture between randomised and convenience approach (based on their attendance) to select respondents to be interviewed.

Within each school, we aimed to sample:

- JSS: 4 beneficiaries; 1 PV, 1 head teacher
- PS: 3 beneficiaries (including boys with disabilities (BWD) and girls with disabilities (GWD); 1 PV, and 1 NQFT (where applicable)

Access to schools was facilitated by Implementation Partners, with introductions to district education stakeholders and head teachers.

The final sampling frame for fieldwork can be found in the attached (password protected) document. The password can be made available by contacting NFER at: enquiries@nfer.ac.uk

GATE-GEC Endline Evaluation Sampling Frame	 GATE-GEC Endline Evaluation Sampling

Sampling school stakeholders, project staff and key national stakeholders

In each of these cases, respondents were sampled on the basis of purposive and convenience sampling. Field research teams worked with head teachers and project district education officers to purposively select PVs and NQFTs for participation in fieldwork, which was also based on convenience (on the basis of their presence in school that day).

The Plan team were responsible for nominating both project staff and national-level stakeholders for participation in interviews; within the consortium partner teams, other

Design of Data collection tools

We developed two sets of tools for qualitative data collection. These qualitative data collection tools are summarised in the table below while copies of the final tools can be found in endline evaluation Annex G.

Table 3. Qualitative data collection methods

Tool	Purpose	Sample
Semi-structured stakeholder interviews	To gather detailed information from key actors in the project or those closely associated with the beneficiaries. These will primarily be used to elucidate information about project implementation, including about project design, adaptation, coherence, and efficiency.	5 group interviews with project staff (including Plan UK, Plan Sierra Leone, AA, HI, OU) 4 key stakeholders (MBSSE, TSC, and MSW) 22 school stakeholders (head teachers, PVs, and NQFTs)
Participatory Toolkit	To gather detailed information about respondent experiences and perspectives of different elements of the project and outcomes experienced.	42 marginalised girls and Children with disabilities (taking into consideration intersectional marginalisation, including disability and categorisation across subgroups, and involvement in different areas of the project).

To engage stakeholders such as project staff, key project stakeholders, and school-level stakeholders such as head teachers, PVs, and Cohort 1/2 NQFTs, we used semi-structured stakeholder interviews. Interviews were designed to last 60 minutes and examined various aspects of project implementation and process. Separate guides were developed and tailored to each of the respondent types.

We employed a toolkit of participatory research activities, which was comprised of two core activities used to facilitate 1-on-1 discussions with project beneficiaries around a semi-structured interview guide with questions designed to address different evaluation questions. The toolkit allowed our researchers to engage with marginalised girls or children with different abilities in a number of different ways (visual, audial, tactile, etc.) and contained guidance for how the activities can be adapted to meet the needs of the individual respondent or adjusted to the tone of the interview.

- **Feelings Dice:** This tool was used as an icebreaker. The tool was also used with younger children as an additional tool to prompt discussion about different aspects of school life and experiences of inclusion.
- **'About You and Life at School'**: This tool allowed children to both trace their journey to school and explore the different elements of school, which act as barriers or enablers to learning. This included physical elements (such as infrastructure), school staff, and understanding social dynamics and norms amongst children and the wider school community

Development of Safeguarding Protocols

Our data collection approach used participatory, gender-sensitive and inclusive methods to support meaningful engagement with project beneficiaries and stakeholders and to amplify the voices of beneficiaries using the highest standards of safeguarding and ethical protocols.

To do so, we developed a bespoke set of Safeguarding and Child Protection Protocols through the support of IfD's Safeguarding expert, which complies with the internal protocols and codes of conduct of each of NFER, IfD, Plan International, and those developed for the GATE-GEC project. We held a consultation session with the Safeguarding Lead from Plan, the GATE-GEC project, and a consultant with the Fund Manager. The Safeguarding and Child Protection Protocols were also reviewed and commented on by the above groups, before being approved for use for the evaluation.

A copy of the protocols can be found below, alongside the consent scripts and forms used as part of fieldwork.

GATE-GEC Endline Evaluation Forms		Document
Safeguarding and Child Protection Protocols		GATE-GEC Endline Evaluation Safeguar
Consent scripts and form used for qualitative data collection	Research with children	GECS_Child_Adoles cent_Information_Sheet GECS_Parent_Guard ian_Information_She
	Research with adults	GECS_Adult_Inform ation_Sheet_Conser
	Consent form	GECS_Consent_she et_Final.pdf

Researcher recruitment, training and pilot

To ensure that fieldwork was conducted with highest standard of safeguarding and sensitivity, and that data collection produces meaningful engagement and useful data, we provided our field teams with extensive training in the use of data collection tools and participatory research, gender-sensitive and inclusive research techniques, and safeguarding, child protection and safety protocols using a multi-day, blended-learning approach. This included support from the IfD team in Freetown, as well as the NFER team in the UK and with training and support from our Disability Expert.

All of our field researchers received in-depth training on identifying and being inclusive of disability. This training aimed to ensure that field researchers would be able to solicit information regarding impairments in a sensitive manner and to engage with any CWDs in a respectful and egalitarian way. Researchers were also trained to adapt participatory research activities to the different abilities of the respondent, and including provision for interpreters, extra time, attention to location and other factors to accommodate the needs of children with disabilities

All researchers were also trained on the use of each tool in our participatory toolkit, including an understanding of the purpose of the tool and how the tool supports in answering various research questions and what adaptations (such as the need for sign language interpretation, visual aids, and the assistance of either a family member, guardian, or if relevant, a teacher known to the child) may be required.

Recruitment

IfD has a decentralised pool of Field Researchers based across all sixteen districts of Sierra Leone. Typically, these researchers are university graduates with two or more years of field research experience. Being district-based, they are familiar with the context of the local area. Upon recruitment to the IfD pool of researchers, IfD trains each of the researchers in topics such as basic data collection, ethics and safeguarding. Subsequently, they receive training to prepare them for specific research studies. Training is conducted remotely, so the data collection process is efficient with low travel costs.

Given the profile of the beneficiaries to be interviewed for this GATE GEC endline evaluation and in consultation with NFER, IfD designated research teams of a female and a male researcher in each of the six study districts. This meant prioritising female researchers with a lesser experience in qualitative research in some of the district to ensure this balance of achieved.

Fieldwork Training (26 – 30 April 2021)

Training for data collection for the GATE-GEC endline evaluation was delivered by NFER with support from IfD for four days from 26 to 30 April 2021[3]. The training was delivered via the Zoom platform and IfD provided top-up to the Field Researchers to ensure they had sufficient data for the four-day training.

[3] Tuesday 27 April was a national holiday in Sierra Leone and thus no training took place on this day.

All the materials for the trainings were shared with the researchers prior to the training to ensure that the researchers come prepared and can use the time together with NFER and IfD to gain a deeper understanding of the project and purpose of the endline evaluation. Sessions included a detailed explanation of the GATE-GEC project and the evaluation design, safeguarding, conducting research with children with disabilities, and training and practical sessions using the data collection tools. The full programme can be found in Annex 1.

To account for the varying levels of experience of some of the researchers in participatory research, the training had a particular focus on building a sound understanding of participatory approaches to data collection with a focus on conducting research with children with disabilities. These sessions were led by an NFER associate, Maria Zuurmond, who is an expert in research with children with disabilities. The session included

The training included a standalone half day session on safeguarding to ensure that each researcher understands their role in ensuring safety of the beneficiaries are other participating in the research as well as know the roles and responsibilities of the safeguarding focal person. The training used multiple scenarios to check researchers understanding of the safeguarding issues as well as their grasp on actions that need to be taken in each case. The training was participatory and well-paced to facilitate comprehension and reflection.

A detailed schedule for the training session can be found below.

GATE-GEC Endline Evaluation Researcher Training Schedule	Researcher Training Schedule.docx

Pilot (29 April 2021)

As part of the researcher training, to ensure that the researchers felt comfortable with the participatory research tools, field teams were tasked to piloting the research tools and share their feedback with the team so that any issue could be discussed and addressed during the training. The piloting activities took place on Thursday 29 April. The teams were asked to access a participant in their local area with a similar profile to school-going children in the study and conduct a test interview. The test interview included practice applying the participatory icebreaker using the feelings dice as well as the 'river of life as a tool for discussing the timeline of events. All six teams conducted a field test and shared their experience. The feedback led to some modification of some of the questions, including removal of the river of life activity.

Follow Up Training (14 May 2021)

Following the four-day training, an additional session was delivered on 14 May, upon finalisation of the data collection tools. The purpose of the session was to provide researchers with an understanding of the updates to the tools as well as to allow researchers to practice using the tool in one local language – Krio – which the team agreed would be the most likely language in which the interviews would be carried out being the lingua franca.

1.1.3 Endline data collection – during data collection

Primary qualitative data was collected in the six operating districts of the GATE-GEC project. Data collection took place from 19 – 31 May 2021, with the bulk of fieldwork conducted in the week of 24 – 28 May 2021.

Sample achieved

Changes to sample schools

There were no changes required to the sample schools provided. The detailed planning using the beneficiary data from Plan International UK and coordination with the project team was successful in ensuring that no substitutions were required. Contact was made in advance with the school authorities, and all respondents were alert and ready to receive the IfD Field Researchers. The Plan team were supportive and the parents, school head and district teams were very cooperative.

Changes to the interviewees (beneficiaries/other stakeholders)

Only one change was required with regards to interviewees. The Port Loko team were only able to interview one NQFT in the primary school because only one NQFT was available on that day. A substitution was made so that the Kono team was able to interview an additional NQFT to make up for the shortfall. The IfD Field Supervisor made this replacement in consultations with NFER.

Table 4. Total sample achieved, by school cluster

District	Level	School Code	Total Sample
Kailahun	PS	P11434	1 PV, 2 NQFTs, 2 GWD, 1 BWD
	JSS	J11227	1 PV, 1 head teacher, 4 marginalised girls
Karene	PS	P60209	1 PV, 2 GWD, 1BWD
	JSS	J60101	1 PV, 1 head teacher, 4 marginalised girls
Kenema	PS	P20103	1 PV, 2 GWD, 1BWD
	JSS	J20404	1 PV, 1 head teacher, 4 marginalised girls
Kono	PS	P30617	1 PV, 1 NQFT, 2 GWD, 1 BWD
	JSS	J30608	1 PV, 1 head teacher, 4 marginalised girls
Moyamba	PS	P40308	1 PV, 2 GWD, 1 BWD
	JSS	J41028	1 PV, 1 head teacher, 4 marginalised girls
Port Loko	PS	P50120	1 PV, 2 NQFT, 2 GWD, 1 BWD
	JSS	J50208	1 PV, 1 head teacher, 4 marginalised girls

Table 5. Total sample achieved, by respondent type (and sub-groups)

Type of respondent	Total
Boys with disability (PS)	6
Girls with disability (PS)	12
Girls with disability (JSS)	2
Girls who are mothers (JSS)	4
Girls who are orphans (single or double) (JSS)	9
Marginalised girls (JSS)	9
PVs	12
Head teachers (JSS)	6
NQFTs (PS)	4
National-level key project stakeholders	4
Project staff group interviews	5
TOTAL	73

More information on the sample achieved can be found in the endline evaluation Annex H on the qualitative fieldwork sample characteristics.

Data collection quality assurance

IfD set up a WhatsApp group with NFER and the researchers where researchers shared information about their daily activities and brainstormed solutions to challenges. There was also an additional WhatsApp group with NFER to discuss planning and implementation.

After the first set of interviews in the districts, the NFER team together with IfD team carried out a short debrief on Tuesday 25 May with the Field Researchers to discuss any challenges and brainstorm mitigation strategies. The team discussed fieldwork protocols as well as any issues with regards to tools and interviews. No issues were reported and the data collection was continued as planned.

1.1.4 Endline data collection – post-data collection

Transcription quality assurance

IfD was responsible for translating and transcribing fieldwork interviews, using a pool of well trained and professional transcribers. Some of the field researchers who conducted the interviews also did the transcriptions. The Field Researchers shared audios of interviews with the Field Supervisor within 24 hours of conducting the interview for translation and transcription. All transcripts were transcribed as close to verbatim as possible, given the in-situ translation.

The Field Supervisor was responsible for coordinating with transcribers to complete transcripts within 24hrs of receipt. The Field Supervisor conducted quality assurance spot checks to ensure transcripts mirrored the audios, as the translation was done in situ. Three interviews in Kenema were done in Mende – this meant that the Field Supervisor could not perform this check as he does not speak the language.

After the Field Supervisor's check, the IfD quality assurance manager performed a further check of all transcripts, by reading through each transcript to check spelling and grammar and for general sense-making.

Upon receipt, an additional quality assurance process was conducted by NFER to flag issues with transcript quality, completeness, and to ensure that the transcript could be linked back to the completed sample frame. Only minor issues with transcript labelling were detected at this point, which were quickly corrected by the IfD team. NFER reviewers performed an additional transcript cleaning to remove any remaining personal identifiers ahead of the preparation of transcripts for analysis.

Analysis of qualitative primary data

To analyse the primary data collected as part of the evaluation, we used computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (ATLAS.ti) to structure and interrogate qualitative data from different perspectives to answer our research questions. We developed a coding framework (see Annex J) to ensure consistency and depth of analysis and to explore different case-types.

We used a two-step approach to data analysis. In the 'first level' of coding we used a deductive approach, utilising our coding framework, to support the organisation of our data. We first analysed the existing project data, which includes project documentation. We then analysed the primary data collected as part of the evaluation. All of our interviews were recorded (following participant agreement) and written up as full transcriptions. We used reverification data to create attributes tables linking interview quotations with key characteristics and sub-groups. This allowed us to organise quotations into case types and for analysis of characteristics at both the individual or sub-group level. At each of these stages, the coding framework was updated as data was analysed to reflect new emerging themes. Our second level of analysis applied an inductive approach to generate further observations to answer each of the evaluation questions and by comparatively examining our data according to different types of cases or sub-groups.

We also conducted internal emerging findings workshops which included the participation of IfD as well as disability research expert to help provide additional reflections and validation to our analysis.

Analysis of secondary data (quantitative)

The quantitative data analysis focused on project MEL data. The goal was to deliver insights into the distribution of beneficiary characteristics and to report on project outputs against logframe indicators, disaggregated to understand trends and distributions for relevant subgroups.

At the stage of planning the analysis, we mapped project outputs to the corresponding sources of data and summarised these data sources along with the key logframe indicators they captured, data collection time frames, level of disaggregation, and sample sizes into a data catalogue. On

the basis of this catalogue, and with inputs from the project MEL team, we identified the appropriate data sources to use to estimate the project output indicators. As a first step, we also carried out an exploratory analysis of the beneficiary reverification data to develop an understanding of the beneficiary characteristics and their distribution across the beneficiary population. This enabled us to identify the key subgroups and attributes that we would explore in our analysis.

Datasets were cleaned prior to analysis, which included carrying out consistency checks for data quality. We used a combination of Stata and Excel to carry out the analysis. This involved generating descriptive statistics to explore differences in project progress between beneficiary subgroups and trends over time, and re-estimating project output indicators to measure progress against log frame targets. Results were disaggregated by key beneficiary characteristics including school level, gender, disability, socioeconomic status, and other indicators of marginalisation (such as parenthood, marriage and orphan status), where there was sufficient sample size to allow this.

1.1.5 Challenges in endline data collection and limitations of the evaluation design

Design challenges

The endline provides an analysis of the progress made by the project in achieving its milestones, the successes and challenges encountered, as well the sustainability of the changes made. However, the adaptation to the scope of COVID-19, which resulted in the shift of the scope of the evaluation, also meant that it has certain limitations. Additionally, the choice of any methodological approach carries some limitations.

In the following table, we have included the main points that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the evaluation's findings and analyses. For further information about the data sources analysed, the process of analysis, and the limitations of this analysis, please see Annex A.

Table 6. Our approach to mitigating the limitations and risks to our evaluation approach

Limitations / risks	Our approach to mitigation
Design	
It was not possible to collect learning outcomes data, or any information from a comparison group, given the pandemic-related school closures. **Risk**: Limitation to our ability to compare the learning outcomes from baseline to endline and to report on changes to beneficiaries' learning outcomes.	The lack of primary learning assessment data resulted in a greater focus of the current evaluation on qualitative sources of information, and previously-collected MEL data. These sources were used to track the project's progress and accomplishments and to understand the changes achieved by project. However, it does mean that the evaluation cannot fill the (quantitative) data gaps from previous data collections.
Attribution of impact by the project cannot be confirmed within the scope of the research,	The limitation around the inability to use statistical methods to establish causality has

Limitations / risks	Our approach to mitigation
due to the lack of representative sample and no quasi-experimental evaluation approach. **Risk**: Misinterpretation of findings presented, erroneous attribution of causality.	been acknowledged in the evaluation Terms of Reference. By employing a mixed-methods approach and putting the emphasis on qualitative methods, we explore the role of project in contributing to stakeholders' outcomes and provide plausible explanations for the changes.
Restrictions on international travel meant that enumerator training and data collection in the field had to be coordinated remotely. **Risk**: Lower ability to stay connected with the enumerators	The data collection was preceded by extensive virtual training to make sure that enumerators were comfortable with the GATE-GEC programme, the evaluation objectives and the tools. Additionally, in-country coordinators followed up with teams in each province to make sure that any questions were addressed. Communication during field work was achieved regularly using messaging services as well as more direct communication with the IfD team.
Sample was small and limited to beneficiaries currently in schools. Purposive sampling was used. **Risk**: Biased reporting, not reflective of proportions in the population.	Our qualitative findings cannot be used to present a comprehensive picture of all beneficiaries but aim to highlight representative experiences. The findings will be triangulated with the analyses of the quantitative MEL data and findings from previous evaluations.

Fieldwork challenges

This section provides an overview of some of the challenges experienced by the Field Researcher teams as well as the mitigation and coping strategies undertaken. The primary challenge faced by field teams included poor road networks and conditions (due to rain) and poor mobile network coverage in some areas. In most cases, these caused only minor delays to fieldwork. In the case of Kono, challenges resulted in a delay of fieldwork by two days, with the field team finishing fieldwork on Monday 31 May instead of Friday 28 May.

Table 7. Fieldwork Challenges identified and mitigation strategies

	Challenges	Mitigation Strategies
Kailahun	The rains have affected the quality of the roads, so this increased travel time to the interview site.	The Field Researchers had access to a motorbike that the pair took turns in riding.
	Activity at school conducted by ministry officials clashed with the interview date, so getting the	They booked the appointment in advance and ensured they continued engaging the

	attention of school authorities was a bit difficult	school authorities while they travelled to the site.
	Some respondents did the interview during their lunch break, so they were unable to go home for lunch.	The Field Researchers bought snacks for the children, as they could not go home for lunch.
Kenema	The road network was in poor condition	The Field Researchers walked for some distances, especially rugged areas, to avoid falls and injury
	The weather condition rains were terrible, including a heavy downpour of rain	They spent more days than expected because of the weather conditions
	There was a language barrier. The male researcher was not fluent in local language of the region, Mende.	The male Researcher received support from their female colleague with the language challenges and Mende vocabulary he could not understand
	The phone network was poor, especially at Gorama Mende Chiefdom - Mondama community.	The Researchers spoke with the GATE-GEC project team in Kenema to organise the interview with the school authorities. After every workday, researchers had to move to another community to pass the night and submit their daily update.
Port Loko	Location of the communities - got wrong information from the partner about the location of a school	The Field Researchers asked local 'Okada' drivers for directions
	Phone network challenge for one of the communities	For the location without phone coverage, researchers had to go there without contacting the head of the school
	The sampling frame indicated that the Field Researchers were meant to interview two NQFTs, but only one was available.	The Field Research Supervisor was able to contact NFER, who provided an appropriate substitute in Kono. This was possible as fieldwork in the Kono PS had not yet been conducted.
Karene	The road network was poor.	The Field Researchers used a different route, although it did not help the problem because there was a bridge collapse
Moyamba	The questionnaire was a bit long for primary school pupils. The	The Field Researchers paused every 15 minutes for a break to check with

	interviews lasted longer than expected.	respondents if it was fine to continue the interviews.
	The mobile network was poor, and there no coverage at Njama	To provide updates to the Field researcher had to travel to a nearby town to send an update and attended debrief.
Kono	The Male Researcher became ill with malaria and that delayed data collection for a few days.	The Male Researcher paused work and took treatment for about two days.
	The Female Researcher had an accident on a motorbike, and that affected her ability to continue data collection the following day.	The Female Researcher also received treatment for the minor injuries sustained from the motorbike accident and paused work to recover. This accident was reported to the Safeguarding Focal Point.
	Field Researchers were unable to conduct data collection on Friday 28 May due to the start of National Primary School Examinations	Data collection was postponed to Monday 31 May and completed on that date.

Analysis and Data Quality Challenges

For our quantitative analysis, the evaluation design did not include primary quantitative data collection; therefore, the evaluation is reliant on the data collected by the GATE-GEC MEL system. We adopted a flexible but rigorous approach to the evaluation in order to adapt to the availability and quality of existing MEL data. We conducted checks to ensure that the evidence we used was reliable and fit for purpose. Prior to analysis, we cleaned and standardised the data where required and omitted analysis of those indicators where a substantial proportion of observations were missing or where we were unable to interpret the quality of the data effectively.

As a result, we have tried to ensure that where necessary, our findings are caveated with relevant considerations to minimise the risk of invalid conclusions. We note some of our observed limitations below:

- Throughout the evaluation, the project was still in implementation and therefore, MEL data collection was on-going. As such, not all datasets were complete or available at the time of analysis, and required additional time to process as analysis was therefore conducted on an on-going basis. In some cases, there may be discrepancies in the figures reported as part of project progress reporting and in our evaluation as they utilised datasets at different points of time.
- Other than the reverification survey, the data collected by the MEL system was based largely on samples, and in some cases, without many details as to how the sample and sample size were determined. As a result, this limited generalisability and the ability to make conclusions across the beneficiary population, while the small sample sizes made it difficult to meaningfully disaggregate by sub-groups.

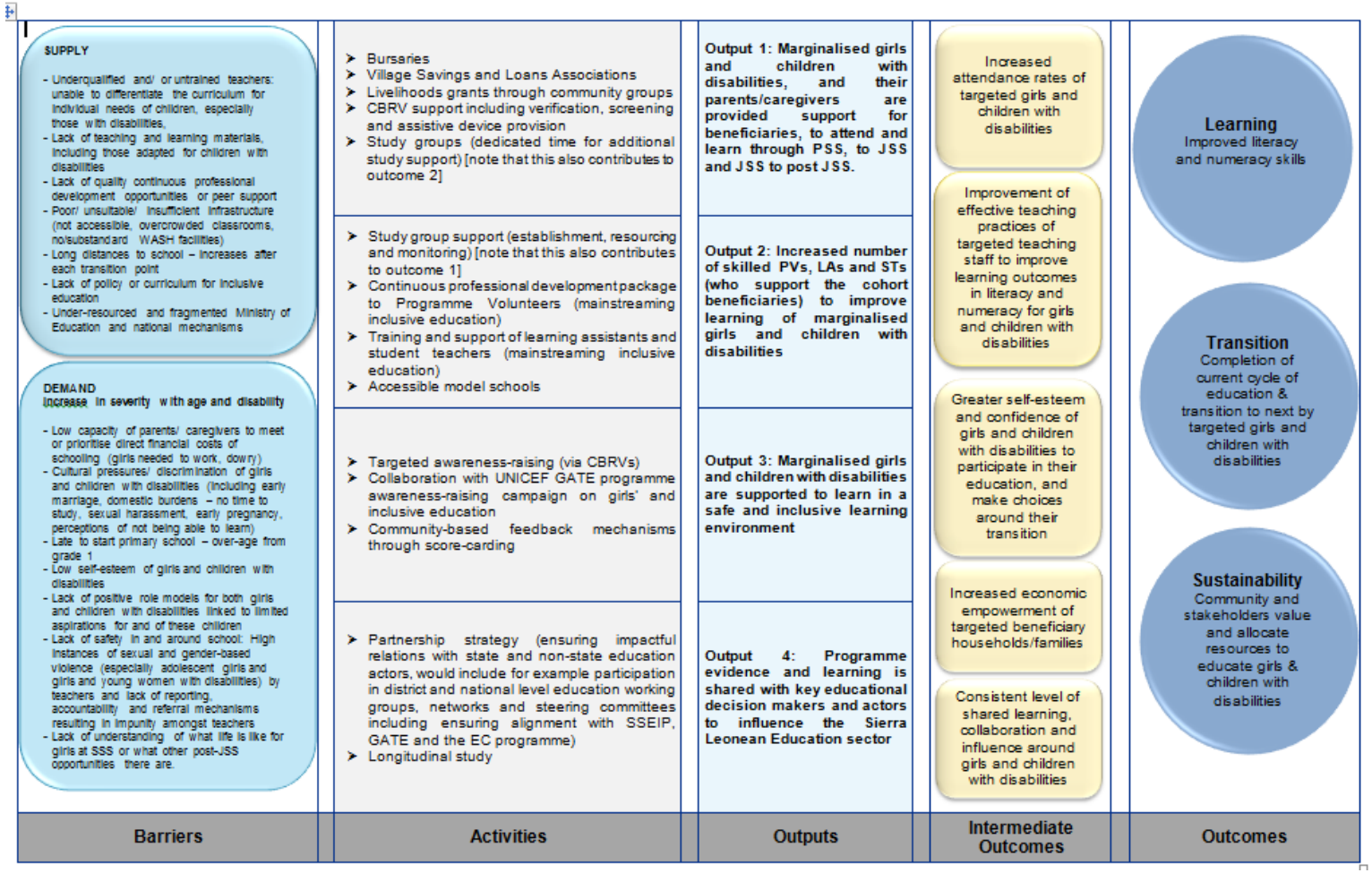
- Much of the data was based on self-reporting questionnaires with limited triangulation. This may have led to the data quality issues that were detected in some of the data sets which presented some internal consistencies. With regards to the reverification surveys, this may also have led to respondents incorrectly reporting interventions which they, or their households, received, as these figures were inconsistent with other data provided by the MEL system. Some examples include:
  - Findings from reverification data longitudinal analysis points to some data quality issues in tracking (for example, gender was not stable for tracked beneficiaries over time in about 3 to 5 % of cases). Disability status also not stable, although this could be reflective of the actual situation.
  - There were discrepancies between grade recorded (P1 to JSS3) and school level; for example, students in a JSS grade were recorded as belonging to Primary school, and vice versa.
  - We found cases where male students were recorded as pregnant.
- Beneficiary tracking not always consistent: Some evidence of beneficiaries dropping in and out of tracking (based on linking of beneficiary IDs over years). A relatively smaller sub-group (1268) was present in all 4 years. 883 new beneficiaries were added in 2018. Some new “additions” may be due to new IDs being issued. Further exploration of variable capturing open responses on ID, whether or not they have lost the ID, etc. would need to be carried out.

B. Project Map

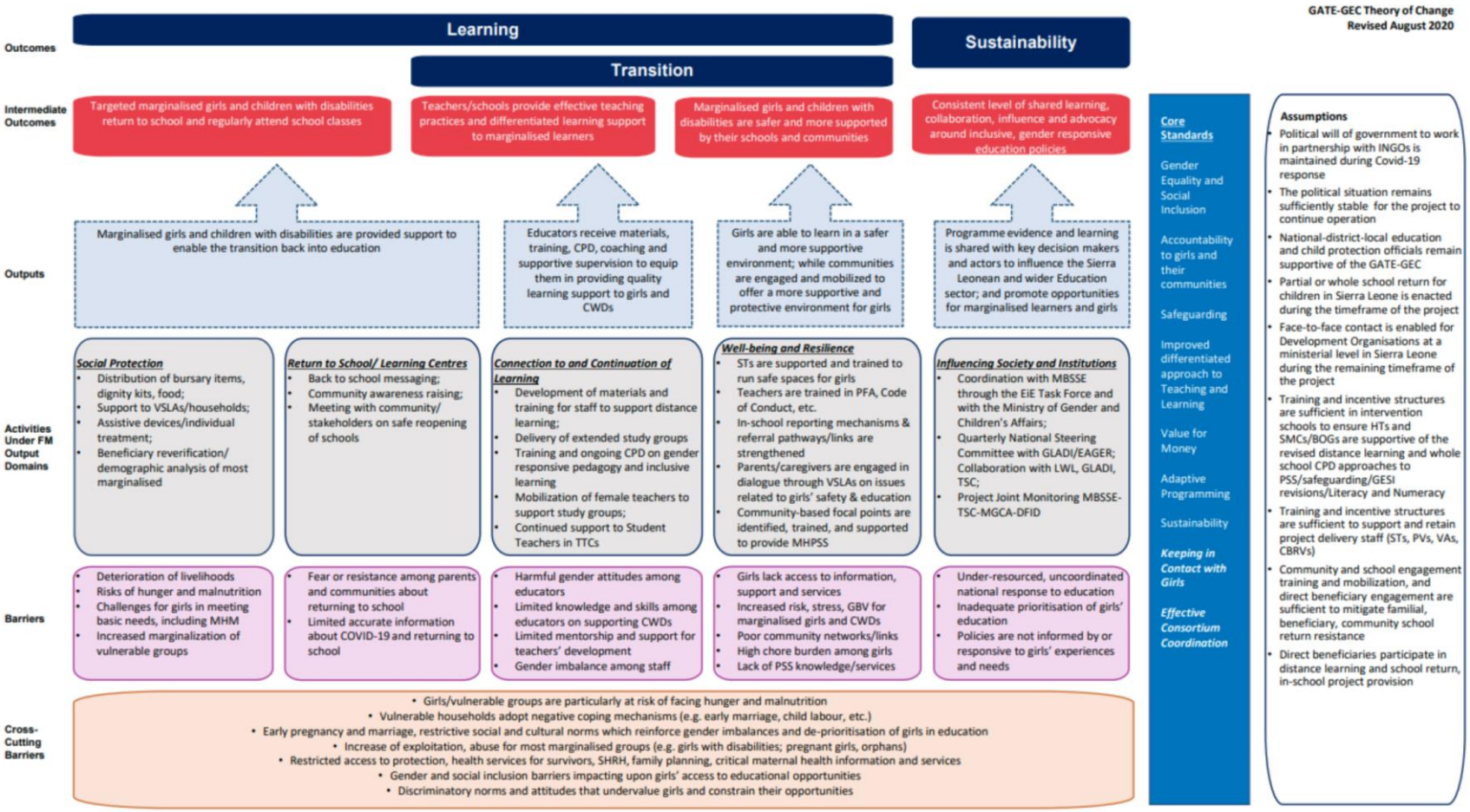
Project Map	Annex B Project Map.docx

C. GATE-GEC Theories of Change

GATE-GEC original theory of change (project proposal, September 2016)



GATE-GEC revised theory of change as part of the MTRP (MTRP, August 2020)



D. Documents Reviewed

Doc. no.	File name	Document type	Timeframe
A.01	GEC Transition Window Full Proposal.docx	A. GATE-GEC Design Documents	GEC-T
A.02	Original GATE-GEC Theory of Change.pdf	A. GATE-GEC Design Documents	GEC-T
A.03	Revised GATE-GEC Theory of Change.pdf	A. GATE-GEC Design Documents	MTRP
A.04	GATE GEC GESI Presentation_August 2020.pptx	A. GATE-GEC Design Documents	MTRP
A.05	GATE GEC GESI Presentation_Updated Dec 2020.pptx	A. GATE-GEC Design Documents	MTRP
A.06	GATE-GEC T&L Covid-19 Response Plan_Aug 2020.pptx	A. GATE-GEC Design Documents	MTRP
A.07	GATE-GEC T&L Covid-19 Response Plan_Dec 2020.pptx	A. GATE-GEC Design Documents	MTRP
A.08	GATE-GEC Covid Short-Term Response (Apr-Jun 2020).docx	A. GATE-GEC Design Documents	STRP
A.09	GATE-GEC Covid Medium-Term Response (Sept 2020-Jul 2021).docx	A. GATE-GEC Design Documents	MTRP
A.10	GATE-GEC Project Closure and Exit Strategy.docx	A. GATE-GEC Design Documents	GEC-T
A.11	GATE-GEC Sustainability Plan.docx	A. GATE-GEC Design Documents	GEC-T
A.12	GATE-GEC - Project Overview.pptx	A. GATE-GEC Design Documents	GEC-T
A.13	GATE-GEC Programme Organogram.pptx	A. GATE-GEC Design Documents	GEC-T
B.01	CS STRATEGY_GATE-GEC_October_2019_Final.pdf	B. Operation Guides and SOPs	GEC-T
B.02	Covid - GATE-GEC CP Referral Service Mapping.xlsx	B. Operation Guides and SOPs	STRP/MTRP
B.03	Covid - GATE-GEC Keeping in Contact with Girls SOPs.docx	B. Operation Guides and SOPs	STRP/MTRP
B.04	Covid - GATE-GEC Reporting Mechanisms.docx	B. Operation Guides and SOPs	STRP/MTRP
B.05	Covid - GATE-GEC Safe Distribution Template.docx	B. Operation Guides and SOPs	STRP/MTRP
C.01	GECT Annual Workplan_Y1 Progress Review.xlsx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	GEC-T
C.02	GECT_Q4_Report_Annual_Report.pdf	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	GEC-T
C.03	20190430 GATE-GEC Q8_Y2Annual Report.docx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	GEC-T
C.04	GECT Annual Workplan Progress Review Q5-8_Year 2.xlsx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	GEC-T
C.05	20200430 GATE-GEC Annual Project Report Template.pdf	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	GEC-T
C.06	20200430 GATE-GEC Q12 Tracker.xlsx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	GEC-T
C.07	GATE-GEC Logframe Output Table - Y3.xlsx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	GEC-T
C.08	GECT Annual Workplan Progress Review Q9-12_Year 3.xlsx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	GEC-T
C.09	GECT_Q12 Y3 Annual Report.docx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	GEC-T
C.10	GATE-GEC MTRP Workplan - Internal.xlsx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	MTRP
C.11	20200731 GATE-GEC Q13 Tracker.xlsx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	STRP
C.12	20200731 GEC-T Q13 Quarterly Report.pdf	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	STRP

C.13	20201030 GATE-GEC Q14 Quarterly Report.pdf	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	STRP/MTRP
C.14	20201030 GATE-GEC Q14 Workplan Tracker.xlsx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	STRP/MTRP
C.15	5096 GATE-GEC Q15 Quarterly Report Template_Final.docx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	MTRP
C.16	5096 GATE-GEC Q15 Workplan Tracker template Final.xlsx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	MTRP
C.17	5096 GATE-GEC Q16 Output Framework.xlsx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	MTRP
C.18	5096 GATE-GEC Q16 Workplan Tracker.xlsx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	MTRP
C.19	Y4 5096 APR Template.docx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	MTRP
C.20	Y4 Annual Workplan Tracker.xlsx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	MTRP
C.21	Y4 MTR_Revised Output Framework_Annual.xlsx	C. GATE-GEC Project Progress Reporting and Workplans	MTRP
D.01	HI - Monitoring overview.docx	D. GATE-GEC MEL Strategy and Planning Documents	GEC-T
D.02	Monitoring overview.docx	D. GATE-GEC MEL Strategy and Planning Documents	GEC-T
D.03	Overview of GATE-GEC monitoring tools.docx	D. GATE-GEC MEL Strategy and Planning Documents	GEC-T
D.04	Plan's MEL Framework Nov 2017	D. GATE-GEC MEL Strategy and Planning Documents	GEC-T
D.05	Plan's MEL Framework_Revised.docx	D. GATE-GEC MEL Strategy and Planning Documents	GEC-T
D.06	MTR_Revised Output Framework - FINAL - Copy.xlsx	D. GATE-GEC MEL Strategy and Planning Documents	MTRP
D.07	Monitoring plan MTRP.xlsx	D. GATE-GEC MEL Strategy and Planning Documents	MTRP
E.01	GATE-GEC Education Needs Assessment Report_2020.pdf	E. GATE-GEC MEL Learning and Reporting	MTRP
E.02	Sierra Leone LA Research Report 170517 FINAL.docx	E. GATE-GEC MEL Learning and Reporting	GEC-T
E.03	PLAN Int Write-up Template.docx	E. GATE-GEC MEL Learning and Reporting	MTRP
F.01	GATE GEC Sierra Leone Baseline Evaluation Report.docx	F. Previous Evaluation Reports and Annexes, Tools	Baseline
F.02	GATE GEC SL Completed Logframe.xlsx	F. Previous Evaluation Reports and Annexes, Tools	Baseline
F.03	Annex 5 Logframe.xlsx	F. Previous Evaluation Reports and Annexes, Tools	Midline
F.04	Plan GATE-GEC Midline Report FINAL v5.docx	F. Previous Evaluation Reports and Annexes, Tools	Midline

E. Data Catalogue

GATE-GEC Endline Evaluation Data Catalogue	Annex E GATE GEC Endline Evaluation D

F. Evaluation Framework

OECD DAC	EQ#	Evaluation question	Description	Our approach	Data sources													
					Primary data		Secondary data analysis											
					Par	Sta	Pro	Pre	Rev	VSL	Stu	Ben	S	Par	Stak	H-ST		
1. Take stock of the GATE-GEC project (2017-2021) to examine the project's design, adaptation and intended results achieved.																		
Effectiveness	EQ1	How and how well was the project designed and implemented?	Explore the project's original design, objectives, and theory of change with regard to validity, based on the process for design, the theories on which it is based, and the context in which it the project is situated.	• Analysis of project documentation, including design documents and proposals, theories of change for the original and MTRP designs and analysis of existing literature as related to the project's theory of change and context. • Analysis of project MEL data against output indicators, including: reverification data, beneficiary survey, parent/guardian survey, VSLA survey, activity pre-post tools, activity observation tools. • Key stakeholder interviews to explore the process of project design and theory, project adaptation, and successes and failures of the project in achieving its planned outputs, including with regard to theory and implementation.		x	x											
	EQ2	How and how well did the project adapt its design and implementation to respond to changing needs and contexts?	Examine the changes to the project's context over time and the ways in which the project has responded through adaptations in its design, theory of change, activities, and implementation.			x	x											
Relevance	EQ4	How and how well did the project include and support marginalised/vulnerable groups, including children with disability?	Examine intervention factors, including reach (and change in reach) of different groups of cohort beneficiaries (marginalised girls and children with disabilities, both the original cohort and the expanded cohort) and different characteristics of sub-groups and patterns of intersectionality. This also includes attention to relevance and the change of beneficiary needs over time and how well the project has responded to these changes. These questions will also examine fidelity/adherence, quality of implementation and other implementation factors that examine the project experience through the perspectives of beneficiaries and other key project stakeholders (various educators and STs) who have been involved in delivering or received project support.	• Examination of project MEL data (reverification data) longitudinally, and where possible, joined with previous evaluation data and beneficiary surveys. • Participatory case studies with select and differentiated beneficiary sub-groups and intersectionalities, and others involved in the project.	x		x		x			x					
	EQ5	How and how well has the project responded to the evolution of project beneficiary profiles and needs, particularly with regard to the effect of COVID-19 on retention and dropout?			x		x		x			x					
2. Document and trace the experiences of the vulnerable and marginalised beneficiary groups as part of the GATE-GEC project, including their evolving needs, the drivers and barriers to learning, transition, and well-being, and how the project has generated change for beneficiaries (with attention to unique and commonalities of experience across sub-groups).																		

OECD DAC	EQ#	Evaluation question	Description	Our approach	Data sources												
					Primary data		Secondary data analysis										
					Par	Sta	Pro	Pre	Rev	VSL	Stu	Ben	S	Par	Stak	HH	STt
Effectiveness	EQ3	To what degree did the project achieve its intended results, including differential results across groups?	Assess the project's achievements towards its output and output indicators, against its intended targets, with particular attention to its reach across different beneficiary groups.				x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	EQ6	How and how well has the project supported project beneficiaries to improve learning outcomes through support to improve the quality and inclusiveness of teaching and inclusiveness of the school environment?	These questions address the three main project outcomes and examine the ways in which the project has contributed to outcomes for beneficiaries. For each question, we will explore project outcomes by examination of project results, and participatory case studies to examine diverse cases of beneficiary groups provide an understanding of how and how well did the project generate outcomes for beneficiaries. This theory-based approach will seek to showcase the experiences of particular sub-groups of beneficiaries or patterns of intersectionality in order to contribute evidence to understand what outcomes look like and mean to project beneficiaries and why results differ across different contexts and groups of beneficiaries. We will then use a combination of existing MEL and evaluation data as well as participatory research to test and validate, as well as qualify, aspects of the pathway.	• Examination and development of a theory / pathway for each outcome (and therefore each evaluation question). This will contain information about the contextual factors (such as barriers and enablers) and mechanism (project activities and inputs, outputs, and intermediate outcomes) that contribute to the outcome. • Test and validate the pathway through an examination of applicable MEL data (see data sources for Evaluation Question 3, as activities and outputs relate to outcomes). For EQ6: • MEL data related to reverification (exam scores) midline evaluation, beneficiary survey, and pre/post for beneficiary activities, observations, and PV surveys, ST surveys, parent/guardian survey on teaching practices. • Participatory case studies with beneficiaries (disaggregated) and interviews with educators. For EQ7 • MEL data related to reverification, beneficiary survey, study group observation (attendance), attendance records, and midline evaluation results. • Participatory case studies with beneficiaries (disaggregated) and interviews with educators. For EQ8: • MEL data related to stakeholder engagement tool. • Participatory case studies with beneficiaries (disaggregated) and interviews with educators and key project stakeholders	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
	EQ7	How and how well has the project supported project beneficiaries to successfully attend and/or return to school and ultimately transition, through support to beneficiary well-being and for beneficiaries to feel safe and supported by their families, schools, and communities?			x			x	x				x	x				x
	EQ8	How and how well has the project created positive and lasting change for marginalised girls and children with disabilities and with what evidence?			x	x							x	x	x		
	EQ9	How and how well do the different project activities, outputs and intermediate outcomes come together to generate outcomes for the beneficiary experience?	Examine how different project activities, outputs, and intermediate outcomes have come together to contribute to project outcomes, to consolidate learning about what activities worked or did not work, and how this changed over time.	• Reflection across the findings from Objectives 1 and 2, including examining the results against various project theories and theories of change to draw conclusions that validate or refute the theories. • Key stakeholder interviews to explore how different mechanisms led by different stakeholders were implemented.	x	x											

OECD DAC	EQ#	Evaluation question	Description	Our approach	Data sources												
					Primary data		Secondary data analysis										
					Parent	Staff	Prog	Prog	Rev	VSL	Stud	Ben	S	Par	Stak	HH	STT
	EQ10	How and how well has the project addressed the major factors (drivers, enablers and barriers) to achievement and sustainability of project outcomes for different project beneficiary groups?	Examine major factors for different beneficiary groups, with attention to how these factors changed over time and how the project adapted to take into account these changing needs and how well the project leveraged the drivers and enablers and mitigated the barriers for different beneficiary groups. This will allow us take individual and differentiated project experiences and contextualise them, so that these findings can be used to generate generalisable learning.	• Participatory case studies with select beneficiary sub-groups to understand their experiences with different project mechanisms. • For EQ10, MEL data including reverification, beneficiary survey, and other surveys such the VSLA, PV, ST, and parent/guardian surveys.	x				x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Impact Sustainability	EQ11	How and how well has the project contributed to higher level effects (social, environmental or economic, both positive or negative and intended or unintended) and will they be expected to continue beyond the project?	Through the perspective of beneficiaries, explore the impact of the project (intended and unintended, positive and negative) and the sustainability of the project's outcomes and impact beyond the project's timelines.	• Participatory research with select beneficiary groups to explore the relative sustainability of the project for direct beneficiaries. • Interviews with educators to understand the wider impact of the project at the beneficiary level and sustainability of this impact. • Interviews with key project stakeholders, including stakeholders responsible for the sustainability of project interventions.	x	x											
3. Reflecting on the findings from Evaluation Objectives 1 and 2, capture lessons and recommendations from the project, particularly on how and how well it adapted and responded to changing needs and contexts.																	

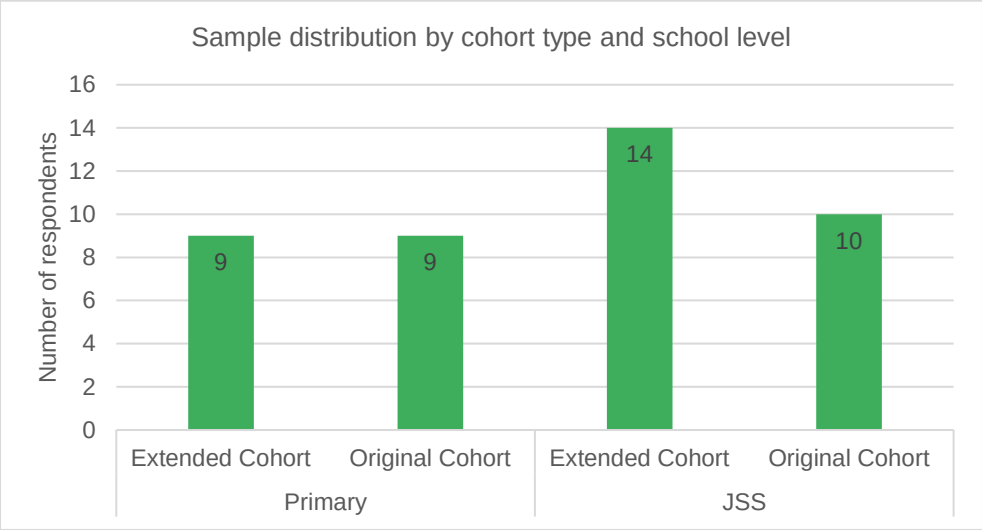
G. Data Collection Tools

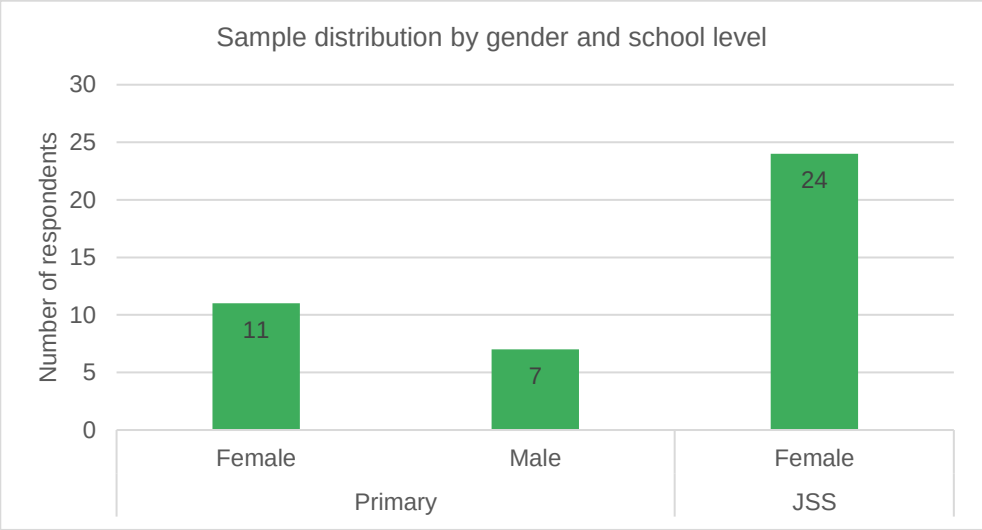
Tool name	
Participatory Toolkit	GECS Participatory Toolkit_FINAL.pdf
Programme Volunteers Topic Guide	GECS Stakeholder Topic Guide - Progra
Head Teachers Topic Guide	GECS Stakeholder Topic Guide - Head
Newly Qualified Female Teachers Topic Guide	GECS Stakeholder Topic Guide - NQFT_
Project Staff Topic Guide	GECS Stakeholder Topic Guide - Projec
National Stakeholders Topic Guide	GECS Stakeholder Topic Guide - Natior

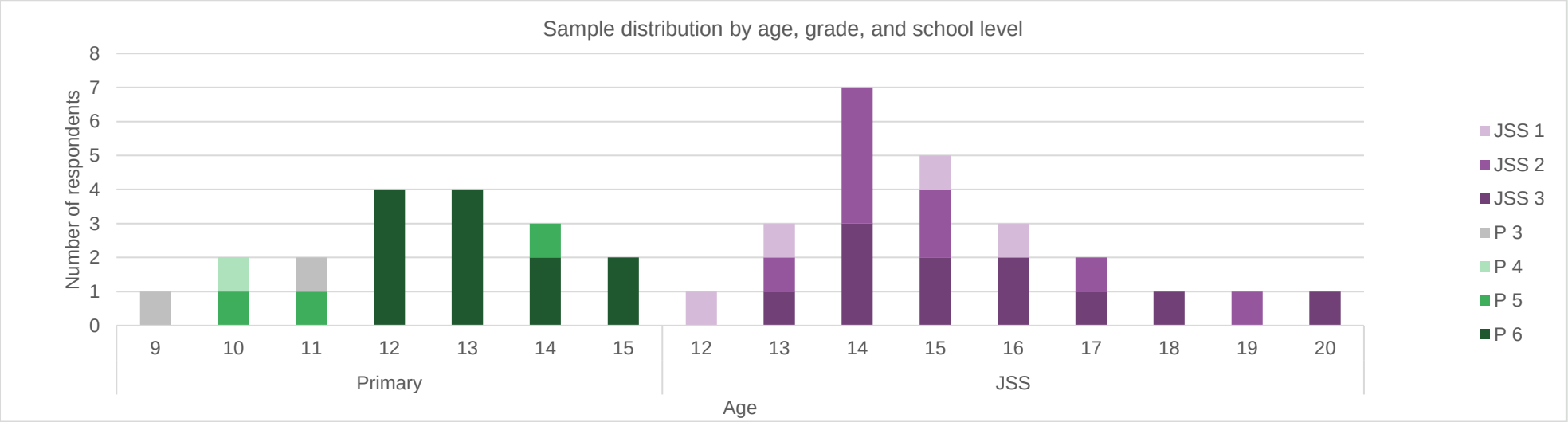
H. Qualitative Fieldwork Sample Characteristics

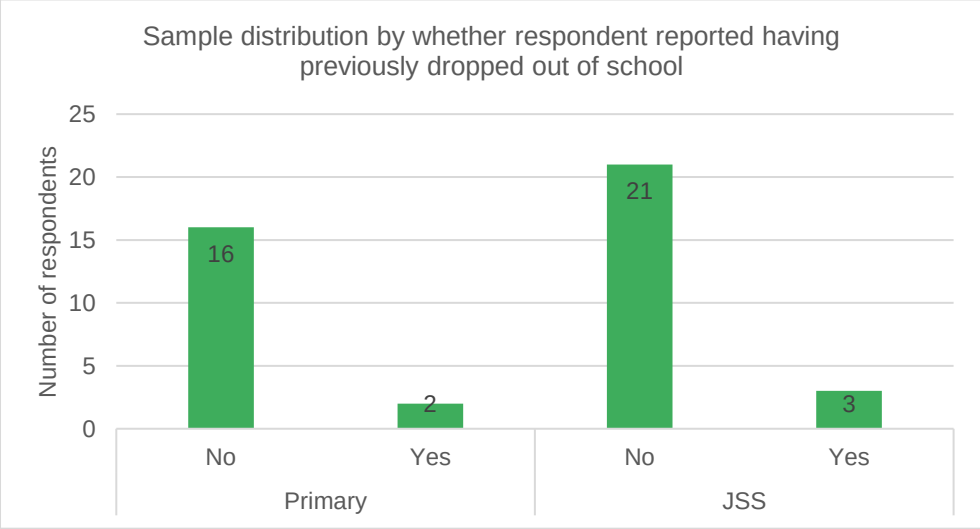
Respondent Code	School level	Cohort type	Gender	Grade	Age	Parent-hood	Previous Drop Out	Disability	Disability - Type	HH lives with	HH orphan	HH head	HH marital status	HH SES
35JS01	JSS	Extended Cohort	Female	JSS 2	13	No	No	Yes	Sight - a lot of difficulty	Grandparents	No	Male-headed	Widow/er	Middle
35JS02	JSS	Extended Cohort	Female	JSS 2	14	No	No	No		Mother only	No	Female-headed	Single	Middle
35JS03	JSS	Extended Cohort	Female	JSS 2	14	No	No	No		Grandparents	No	Female-headed	Single	Middle
35JS04	JSS	Extended Cohort	Female	JSS 2	14	No	No	No		Aunt	No	Male-headed	Married	Middle
35PS01	Primary	Extended Cohort	Female	P 5	14	No	No	Yes	Sight - a lot of difficulty; Self-care - a lot of difficulty	Mother and father	Single Orphan	Male-headed	Married	Middle
35PS02	Primary	Extended Cohort	Male	P 6	13	No	No	No		Mother only	No	Female-headed	Single	Middle
35PS03	Primary	Extended Cohort	Male	P 5	10	No	No	Yes	Communication – a lot of difficulty	Mother and father	No	Male-headed	Married	High
38JS01	JSS	Extended Cohort	Female	JSS 3	14	No	No	No		Grandparents	Double Orphan	Male-headed	Widow/er	Middle
38JS02	JSS	Original Cohort	Female	JSS 1	16	No	No	Yes	Hearing – a lot of difficulty	Mother and father	No	Male-headed	Married	High
38JS03	JSS	Extended Cohort	Female	JSS 2	14	No	No	No		Aunt	Double Orphan	Female-headed	Widow/er	Middle
38JS04	JSS	Original Cohort	Female	JSS 3	14	No	No	No		Mother only	No	Male-headed	Widow/er	Middle
38PS01	Primary	Original Cohort	Male	P 4	10	No	No	Yes	Sight - a lot of difficulty	Mother and father	No	Male-headed	Married	Middle
38PS02	Primary	Original Cohort	Female	P 5	11	No	No	Yes	Sight - a lot of difficulty	Mother and father	No	Male-headed	Married	Middle
38PS03	Primary	Original Cohort	Female	P 3	9	No	No	Yes	Walking – a lot of difficulty	Mother and father	No	Male-headed	Married	High
43JS01	JSS	Original Cohort	Female	JSS 3	14	No	No	No		Aunt	No	Female-headed	Married	Low
43JS02	JSS	Extended Cohort	Female	JSS 2	15	No	No	No		Mother only	Single Orphan	Female-headed	Widow/er	Middle
43JS03	JSS	Original Cohort	Female	JSS 3	20	Yes	Yes	No		Mother only	No	Female-headed	Single	Middle
43JS04	JSS	Original Cohort	Female	JSS 3	16	No	No	No		Mother and father	No	Male-headed	Married	Middle
43PS01	Primary	Original Cohort	Male	P 6	13	No	No	Yes	Sight - a lot of difficulty	Mother and father	No	Male-headed	Married	Middle
43PS02	Primary	Original Cohort	Female	P 6	15	No	No	Yes	Walking – a lot of difficulty; Self-care – a lot of difficulty	Mother only	No	Female-headed	Separated	Middle

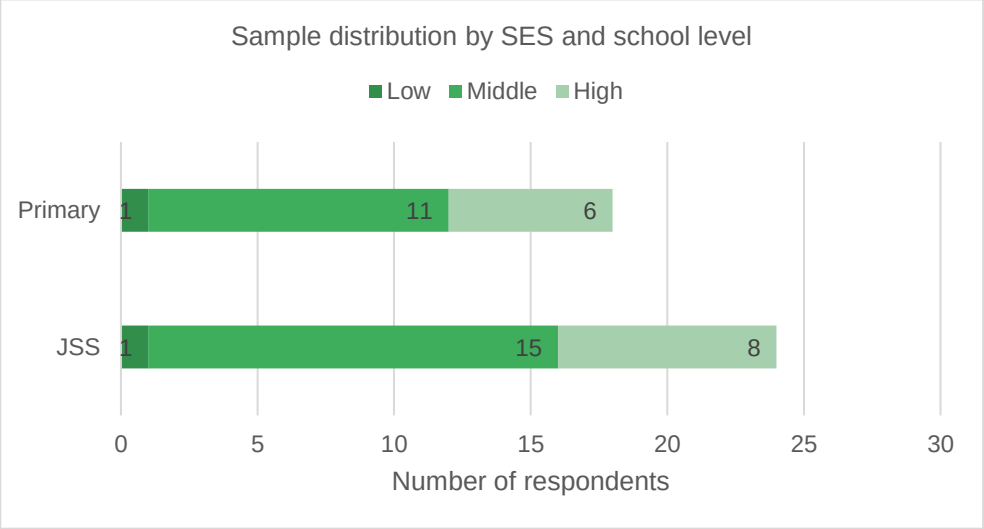
Respondent Code	School level	Cohort type	Gender	Grade	Age	Parent-hood	Previous Drop Out	Disability	Disability - Type	HH lives with	HH orphan	HH head	HH marital status	HH SES
43PS03	Primary	Extended Cohort	Female	P 6	13	No	No	Yes	Sight - a lot of difficulty	Mother and father	No	Male-headed	Married	High
45JS01	JSS	Extended Cohort	Female	JSS 1	12	No	No	No		Aunt	Single Orphan	Female-headed	Widow/er	Middle
45JS02	JSS	Original Cohort	Female	JSS 2	19	Yes	Yes	No		Mother and father	No	Male-headed	Married	High
45JS03	JSS	Extended Cohort	Female	JSS 3	13	No	No	No		Grandparents	No	Female-headed	Widow/er	Middle
45JS04	JSS	Original Cohort	Female	JSS 3	18	Yes	No	No		Father only	No	Male-headed	Married	High
45PS01	Primary	Original Cohort	Female	P 6	13	No	No	Yes	Sight - a lot of difficulty	Aunt	No	Female-headed	Married	Middle
45PS02	Primary	Original Cohort	Female	P 6	14	No	No	Yes	Sight - a lot of difficulty; Hearing – a lot of difficulty	Grandparents	No	Female-headed	Married	Middle
45PS03	Primary	Extended Cohort	Male	P 6	12	No	No	Yes	Sight - a lot of difficulty; Hearing – a lot of difficulty	Mother only	Single Orphan	Female-headed	Widow/er	Middle
63JS01	JSS	Extended Cohort	Female	JSS 3	16	No	No	No		Father only	Single Orphan	Male-headed	Widow/er	High
63JS02	JSS	Extended Cohort	Female	JSS 3	15	No	No	No		Mother and father	No	Male-headed	Married	High
63JS03	JSS	Original Cohort	Female	JSS 1	15	No	No	No		Aunt	Single Orphan	Female-headed	Separated	High
63JS04	JSS	Original Cohort	Female	JSS 2	15	No	No	No		Grandparents	No	Female-headed	Widow/er	High
63PS01	Primary	Original Cohort	Female	P 6	12	No	Yes	Yes	Sight - a lot of difficulty	Mother and father	No	Female-headed	Married	High
63PS02	Primary	Extended Cohort	Male	P 6	12	No	No	Yes	Hearing – a lot of difficulty; Self-care – a lot of difficulty	Grandparents	Double Orphan	Male-headed	Married	High
63PS03	Primary	Extended Cohort	Female	P 6	12	No	No	Yes	Hearing – a lot of difficulty	Uncle	Double Orphan	Male-headed	Married	High
77JS02	JSS	Extended Cohort	Female	JSS 3	15	No	No	No		Aunt	Double Orphan	Female-headed	Single	Middle
77JS03	JSS	Extended Cohort	Female	JSS 1	13	No	No	No		Aunt	Double Orphan	Female-headed	Single	Middle
77JS04	JSS	Extended Cohort	Female	JSS 3	17	No	No	No		Mother only	Single Orphan	Male-headed	Married	High
77JS05	JSS	Original Cohort	Female	JSS 2	17	Yes	Yes	No		Aunt	No	Male-headed	Married	Middle
77PS01	Primary	Original Cohort	Male	P 6	15	No	Yes	Yes	Walking – a lot of difficulty; Self-care – a lot of difficulty	Mother and father	No	Male-headed	Married	Middle
77PS02	Primary	Extended Cohort	Female	P 6	14	No	No	No		Mother and father	No	Male-headed	Married	Middle
77PS03	Primary	Extended Cohort	Female	P 3	11	No	No	No		Mother and father	No	Male-headed	Married	Low

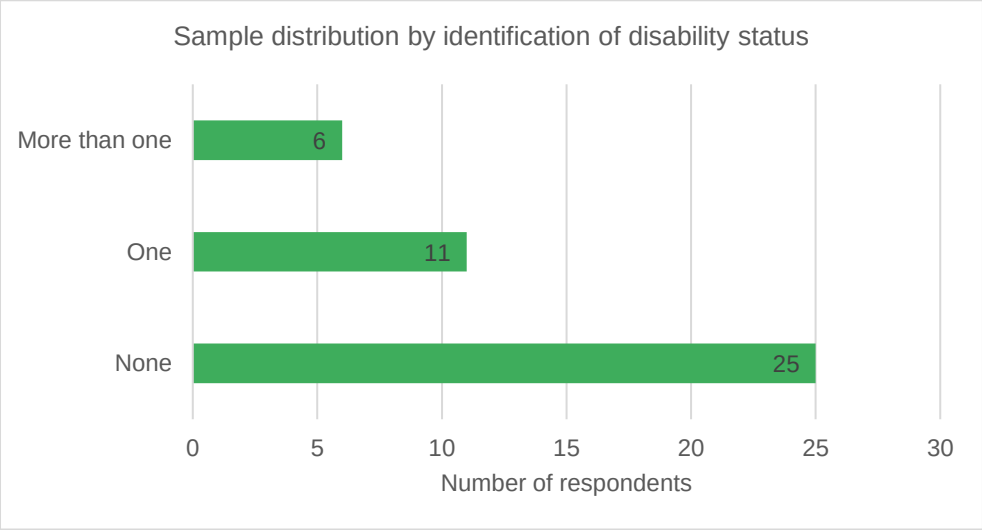

Sample distribution by cohort type and school level
Number of respondents
16
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
9
9
14
10
Extended Cohort
Original Cohort
Extended Cohort
Original Cohort
Primary
JSS

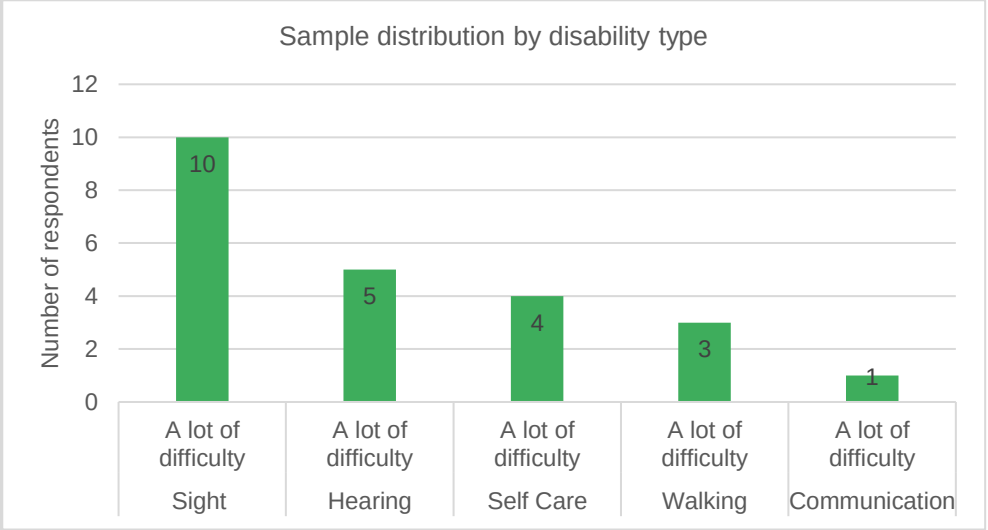

Sample distribution by gender and school level
Number of respondents
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
11
7
24
Female
Male
Female
Primary
JSS

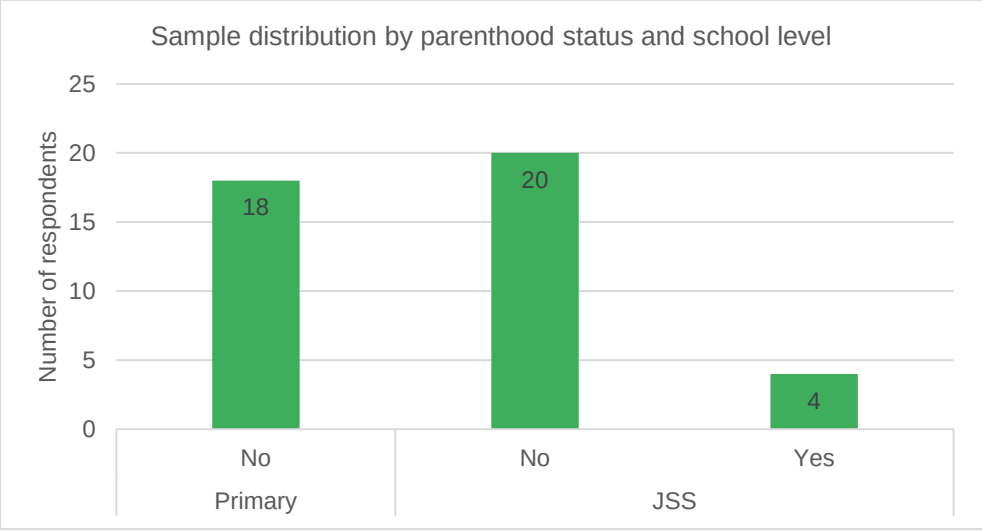

Sample distribution by age, grade, and school level
Number of respondents
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
Primary
JSS
Age
JSS 1
JSS 2
JSS 3
P 3
P 4
P 5
P 6

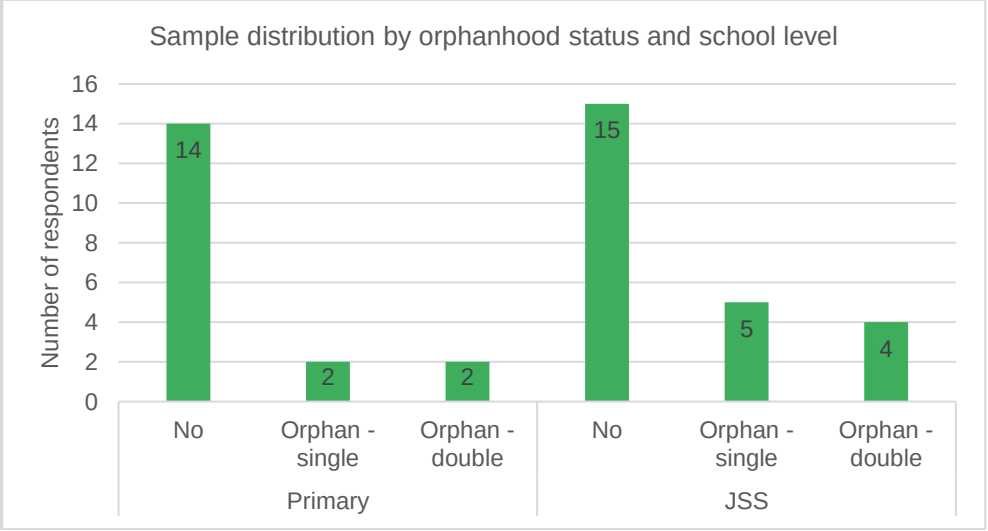

Sample distribution by whether respondent reported having previously dropped out of school
Number of respondents
0
5
10
15
20
25
16
2
21
3
No
Yes
No
Yes
Primary
JSS

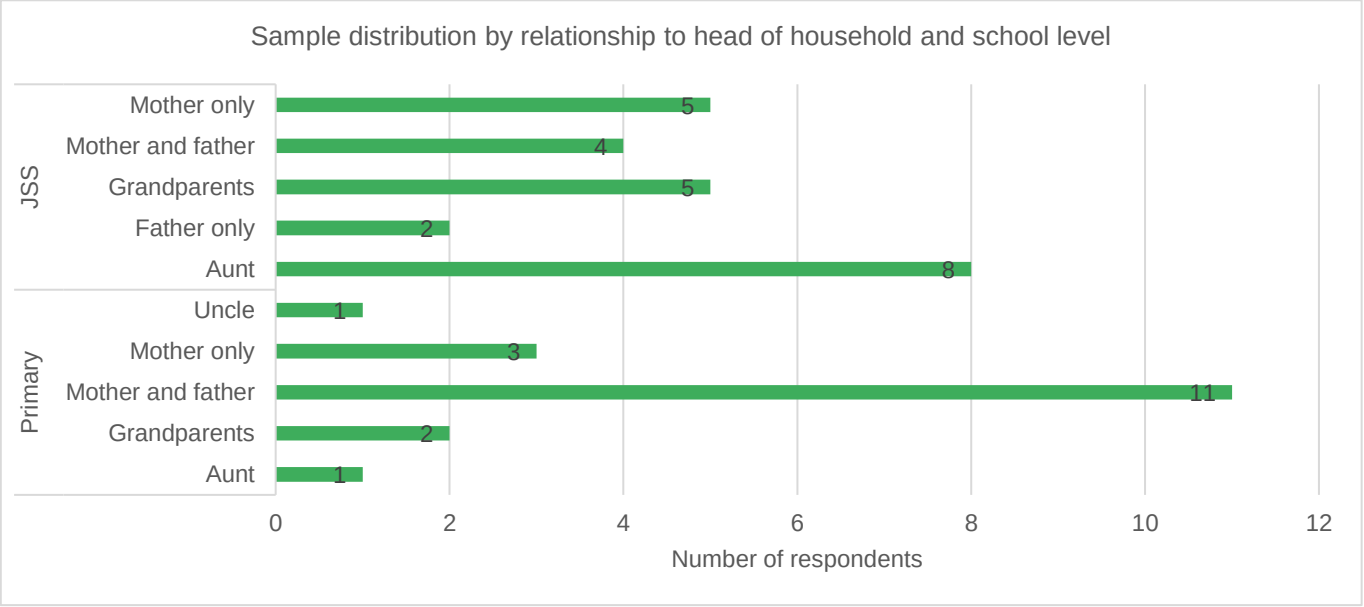

Sample distribution by SES and school level
Low
Middle
High
Primary
1
11
6
JSS
1
15
8
0
5
10
15
20
25
30
Number of respondents


Sample distribution by identification of disability status
More than one
One
None
6
11
25
0
5
10
15
20
25
30
Number of respondents


Sample distribution by disability type
Number of respondents
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
10
5
4
3
1
A lot of difficulty
Sight
A lot of difficulty
Hearing
A lot of difficulty
Self Care
A lot of difficulty
Walking
A lot of difficulty
Communication


Sample distribution by parenthood status and school level
Number of respondents
0
5
10
15
20
25
18
20
4
No
Primary
No
Yes
JSS


Sample distribution by orphanhood status and school level
Number of respondents
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
16
14
2
2
15
5
4
No
Orphan - single
Orphan - double
Primary
No
Orphan - single
Orphan - double
JSS


Sample distribution by relationship to head of household and school level
JSS
Mother only
Mother and father
Grandparents
Father only
Aunt
Primary
Uncle
Mother only
Mother and father
Grandparents
Aunt
5
4
5
2
8
1
3
11
2
1
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
Number of respondents

I. List of Stakeholders Interviewed

	Role / Title	Location	Organisation
1	Education Project Manager Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Coordinator Project Accountant Village Savings and Loan Associations Coordinator	Sierra Leone	ActionAid SL
	Programme Quality and Assurance Specialist	UK	ActionAid UK
2	Deputy Inclusive Education Project Manager Inclusive Education Project Manager Rehabilitation Inclusion Technical Advisor Senior Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer	Sierra Leone	Humanity & Inclusion SL
3	Child Protection and Accountability Advisor Education Advisor Education Programme Manager Senior Monitoring and Evaluation Manager	Sierra Leone	Plan International SL
	Interim Team Leader	Sierra Leone	Plan International UK
4	Monitoring and Evaluation Officer Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Specialist Programme Manager Technical Advisor in Education	UK	Plan International UK
5	Lecturer Professor Senior Lecturer Senior Project Manager	UK	The Open University
	Project Manager	Sierra Leone	Plan International SL

J. Coding Framework

Categories	Code group	#	Code	Description
GENERAL CODES				
		*	good_quotation	Noting any particularly good or strong quotations for use in the report
		**	transcript_issue	For any transcripts or parts of transcripts for which the quality of the transcript is in question or may require clarification or correction from the transcribers
		***	other_interesting_content	For any other interesting content for which there is not yet an applicable code
School Profile	0.1 District	0.1.1	district_kailahun	Any reference to implementation or results specific to each respective district Note - for KIIs, these will be pre-coded based on the sampling frame.
		0.1.2	district_karene	
		0.1.3	district_kenema	
		0.1.4	district_kono	
		0.1.5	district_port loko	
		0.1.6	district_moyamba	
CODES				
EQ1. How and how well was the project designed and implemented? EQ2. How and how well did the project adapt its design and implementation to respond to changing needs and contexts?	1.1 Project design	1.1.1	Project design_design	Details on project design, including: Stakeholders to work with, Beneficiary Involvement, Structure and Partners. Project vision, Project innovations KII reference to stakeholder and project staff's opinion on design, relevance, coherence
		1.1.2	Project design_vfm	References to the project's VFM strategy and efficiency. Mainly applies to project proposal and MTRP.
		1.1.3	Project design_GEC1 learnings	Learnings from GEC1 Specific references in proposal and in early progress reports.
		1.1.4	Project design_coordination	References to coordination with stakeholders
		1.1.5	Project design_M&E and evaluation plan	Details on the project's monitoring plan, evaluation plan and progress (Note: for the MEL framework, code sections on evaluation separately to sections on M&E)
		1.1.6	Project design_dissemination and learning	References to the project's plan for dissemination and learning
	1.2 Project Implementation and adaptation	1.2.1	Project implementation_implementation	Details on progress on implementation (general) This code should also be used to reference project progress and results (e.g. to indicate the results for an output/IO versus the design, or adaptation) KII reference to stakeholder and project staff's opinion on project implementation and adaptation
		1.2.2	Project implementation_adaptation	Details on project adaptation, prior to Covid-19
		1.2.3	Project implementation_Covid 19 adaptation	Details on project adaptation including: Covid-19 project adaptations, How project has kept in touch with girls and other

Categories	Code group	#	Code	Description
				beneficiaries
		1.2.4	Project implementation_safeguarding GESI	References made to safeguarding issues and GESI updates in progress reports. Includes: Safeguarding, Child Protection, and DNH and unintended consequences Project - Reporting, any other issues Risk and mitigation
		1.2.5	Project implementation_lessons learned	References in progress reports to lessons learned and 'looking forward' during implementation KII reference to stakeholder and project staff's perception of most important lessons learned
		1.2.6	Project implementation_evaluation recommendation	Recommendations set out by the baseline and midline evaluations
		1.2.7	Project implementation_evaluation response	Project response recommendations set out by baseline and midline evaluations
EQ3. To what degree did the project achieve its intended results, including differential results across groups?	2.1 Intervention	2.1.1	Activity_VSLA, bursaries	References to support provided to VSLAs (incl. livelihood grants); support to families/pupils in form of bursaries (until 2018 only)
		2.1.2	Activity_Assistive devices	References to assistive devices, learning aids and individualised treatments (including medicines and doctor visits)
		2.1.3	Activity_CBRV awareness	References to support to children with disabilities (CWDs) provided by community-based rehabilitation volunteers (CBRVs)
		2.1.4	Activity_Model school	Includes schools' infrastructure adaptations, support by CBRVs and training of teachers in inclusive education
		2.1.5	Activity_School group	References to study groups, including both pupils and the training of PVs, head teachers and STs
		2.1.6	Activity_ST-LA programme	References to LAs, STs, NQFTs, as well as their tutors/practice study mentors (PSMs) and teacher training colleges (TTCs) Any references made to the support provided to LA/ST/NQFTs (including bursaries, tablets, solar chargers distributed following the MTRP) can be included here.
		2.1.7	Activity_itinerant teacher	References to itinerant teachers, individual education plans (IEPs), and the work accomplished together with IEDOs (inclusive education district officers) and CBRVs
		2.1.8	Activity_CPD for PVs, HTs	References to capacity development for PVs and head teachers, including in gender and inclusive pedagogy in addition to literacy/numeracy training
		2.1.9	Activity_Capacity dev HT, BOG, SMC	References to capacity development to school management members to improve school governance and management
		2.1.10	Activity_Scorecarding	References to different modalities of community-based feedback mechanisms through scorecarding
		2.1.11	Activity_Partnerships	References to partnership strategy and higher-level institutional engagement This also applies to MTRP related activities to do with coordination at government level and with other programmes
		2.1.12	Activity_MTRP distribution	References to items distributed to pupils during the pandemic response: food, dignity kits, bursaries and MyBook (distance learning materials)
		2.1.13	Activity_MTRP remote learning	Remote, distance and accelerated learning support to pupils

Categories	Code group	#	Code	Description
		2.1.14	Activity_MTRP back to school messaging	References to back to school sensitisation and preparations for the safe reopening of schools yearly since 2017
		2.1.15	Activity_MTRP girls' clubs	References to MTRP's Girls' Clubs (also called 'safe spaces'), as well as support provided for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).
		2.1.16	Activity_GESI and safeguarding training	References to radio messages, brochures, posters, awareness-raising sessions, Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials, etc., on topics like child protection and safeguarding, GBV, pregnancy, marriage, SRHR, etc., to project staff, volunteers and communities in general.
	2.2 Project Results	2.2.1	Results_1 attendance (IO1 and OP1, IO4)	Includes references to design and results for intermediate outcome 1 and output 1; also includes intermediate outcome 4 on economic empowerment.
		2.2.2	Results_2 inclusive education (IO2, OP2)	Includes references to design and results for intermediate outcome 2 and output 2
		2.2.3	Results_3 self-esteem. well-being (IO3, OP3)	Includes references to design and results for intermediate outcome 3 and output 3
		2.2.4	Results_4 coordination (IO5, OP4)	Includes references to design and results for intermediate outcome 5 and output 4
EQ4. How and how well did the project include and support marginalised/vulnerable groups, including children with disability? EQ5. How and how well has the project responded to the evolution of project beneficiary profiles and needs, particularly with regard to the effect of Covid-19 on retention and dropout?	3.1 Project Context and TOC	3.1.1	Context_background	From project design docs and evaluation reports: Contextual factors, education policy,
		3.1.2	Context_Covid-19	References to the project's context with regards to Covid-19: effect, situation in country and how it is impacting on activities, challenges girls face) MTRP, progress reports only
		3.1.3	Context_barriers	From project design docs and evaluation reports: - Proposal: Conditions for learning, environment for learning, teaching and learning, etc - Sustainability plan: Core drivers, barriers - Previous evaluations: TOC and assumptions; education outcomes, barriers to education, education marginalisation, intersection of barriers and characteristics, etc. References to project's TOC assumptions and mechanisms
	3.2 Targets	3.2.1	Context_target beneficiary numbers	References to planned targets for beneficiary reach
		3.2.2	Target_beneficiaries	General references to project beneficiaries: marginalised girls and children with disabilities. Note that specific references to GIRLS with disabilities should be coded to 3.2.3 - if it's just a general reference to CWD or boys/girls, then code here.
		3.2.3	Target_girls with disability	Specific references to project targeting and reach of subgroup, girls with disabilities (e.g. JSS level)
		3.2.4	Target_girls parenthood	Specific references to project targeting and reach of sub-group, beneficiaries identified as pregnant/parents
		3.2.5	Target_single headed households	Specific references to project targeting and reach of sub-group, beneficiaries identified as orphans or single-headed households
		3.2.6	Target_cohort beneficiary	Specific references to beneficiaries designated as 'cohort' beneficiaries (e.g. beneficiaries tracked from the start of GATE-GEC)
		3.2.7	Target_non-cohort beneficiary	Specific references to beneficiaries not designated as 'cohort' beneficiaries - 'non-cohort' beneficiaries. These are beneficiaries who have been counted starting from the MTRP.
EQ6. How and how well has the project	4.1 Outcome 1	4.1.1	OC1 learning_outcome	Specific references to Outcome 1, in terms of design and results reported or measured for

Categories	Code group	#	Code	Description
supported project beneficiaries to improve learning outcomes through support to improve the quality and inclusiveness of teaching and inclusiveness of the school environment?	Learning			learning outcomes or teaching practices.
		4.1.2	OC1 learning_learning experiences	ONLY FOR KIIS - adults (NQFTs, PVs) and beneficiaries References to beneficiaries' experiences in learning
		4.1.3	OC1 learning_school closures	ONLY FOR KIIS - beneficiaries References to beneficiaries' experiences during Covid-19 school closures
		4.1.4	OC1 learning_inclusive experiences	ONLY FOR KIIS - beneficiaries References to beneficiaries' experiences of inclusion at home, at school (gender, children with disability)
		4.1.5	OC1 learning_teaching experiences	ONLY FOR KIIS - adults and beneficiaries References to educators' experiences in teaching, including perceptions of changes to teaching practices and aspirations
EQ7. How and how well has the project supported project beneficiaries to successfully attend and/or return to school and ultimately transition, through support to beneficiary well-being and for beneficiaries to feel safe and supported by their families, schools, and communities?	5.1 Outcome 2 Transition	5.1.1	OC2 transition_outcome	Specific references to Outcome 2, in terms of design and results reported or measured for transition
		5.1.2	OC2 transition_transition experiences	References to beneficiaries' experiences with transition (e.g. for JSS students, transition from PS to JSS; for all students: upcoming transition point)
		5.1.3	OC2 transition_aspirations	References to beneficiaries' experiences for future aspirations (after current level of school ends); role models
		5.1.4	OC2 transition_confidence	References to beneficiaries' experiences with confidence and self-esteem
		5.1.5	OC2 transition_safeguarding	References to beneficiaries' experiences with safeguarding
		5.1.6	OC2 transition_community attitudes	References to HT's perceptions of wider community attitudes towards children in school
		5.1.7	OC2 transition_way to school	References to student's journeys to school, including distance, transport options and journey, and support they receive from others for school (e.g. family, teachers)
EQ8. How and how well has the project supported community and stakeholders to value education for project beneficiaries through consistent levels of sharing learning and engagement with key educational stakeholders to influence the Sierra Leonean education sector?	6.1 Outcome 3 Sustainability	6.1.1	OC3 sustainability_outcome	References to Outcome 3, in terms of design and results of project against systems-level changes, including partnership and government-coordination activities; More directly relates to the outcomes resulting from OP4, IO5
	6.2 Project sustainability	6.2.1	Project sustainability_sustainability	References to the project's sustainability plan and progress made towards it Includes the sustainability of project activities, outputs and outcomes Note: this only applies to documents.
		6.2.2	Project sustainability_systems level	Specific reference to KII discussions of project against systems-level changes, including partnership and government-coordination activities; More directly relates to the outcomes resulting from OP4, IO5
		6.2.3	Project sustainability_activities	References to project/respondent perceptions of the sustainability of different activities, outputs of the project Note: this only applies to KIIs.
		6.2.4	Project sustainability_educator aspirations	References to educators (PVs, NQFTs) own aspirations for teaching careers Note: this only applies to KIIs
EQ11. How and how well has the project contributed to higher level effects (social, environmental or economic, both positive or negative and intended or unintended) and will they be expected to continue beyond the project?	7.1 Wider impacts	7.1.1	Wider impacts	

K. Summary Findings against Logframe (outputs)

Summary of findings against Logframe Outputs

This annex examines the results achieved by the GATE-GEC project against the project logframe outputs, both pre-COVID-19 and during the MTRP. We examine each of the project outputs in turn to better understand to what extent GATE-GEC has met its targets. We also investigate the unintended consequences (whether positive or negative) of the programme.

The project met most of the output targets set out in the results framework, and demonstrated improvement throughout the life of the project

The table below provides a high-level snapshot of the current assessment of the projects achievement against output indicators based on the project results framework and MEL data. It shows that overall the project has mostly achieved its targets across the outputs. The Pre-COVID outputs capture project progress between start of the project in 2017 to March 2020, MTRP outputs cover the period between September 2020 and April 2021. STRP activities were carried out between March 2020 and September 2020.

Table 1: RAG rating[4] of the project outputs based on project MEL data

Output Description	RAG
Output 1 (Pre-COVID): Marginalised girls and children with disabilities and their parents / caregivers are provided support for beneficiaries to attend and learn through PS, to JSS and JSS to post JSS	
Output 1 (MTRP): Marginalised girls and children with disabilities are provided support to enable the transition and attendance back into education	
Output 2 (Pre-COVID): Increased number of skilled PVs, LAs and STs (who support the cohort beneficiaries) to improve learning of marginalised girls and children with disabilities	
Output 2 (MTRP): Educators receive materials, training, CPD, coaching and supportive supervision to equip them in providing quality learning support to girls and children with disabilities	
Output 3 (Pre-COVID): Marginalised girls and children with disabilities are supported to learn in a safe and inclusive learning environment	

[4] **Green** is used when all indicators were met for the project, **Amber** is used when all but one indicators were met, and **Red** is used when more than one indicator for an output remained unmet.

Output 3 (MTRP): Girls are able to learn in a safer and more supportive environment; while communities are engaged and mobilised to offer a more supportive and protective environment for girls	
Output 4 (Pre-COVID): Programme evidence and learning is shared with key educational decision makers and actors to influence the Sierra Leonean Education sector	
STRP Activities: Project led emergency support to the beneficiaries and community during school closure from March 2020 and September 2020	

Output 1: Marginalised girls and children with disabilities and their parents / caregivers are provided support for beneficiaries to attend and learn through PS, to JSS and JSS to post JSS (Pre-COVID)

The objective of this output was to support beneficiaries and their families to overcome demand-side barriers and ensure that children stay in school longer and learn more effectively. This was supported through five interventions: Bursaries; VSLAs; CBRV support including assistive device provision; support to SMCs and BoGs; and study groups. The table below provides the indicators used by the project to ascertain project's progress on this output, project targets, and the progress made up until March 2020.

Table 2: Progress against Output 1 indicator targets – Year 3 Logframe[5]

Element	Indicator	Target	Progress
Bursary	**% of the GEC cohort receiving bursaries**	**N/A**	**N/A**
Study group attendance	**average attendance rates (%) of GATE-GEC cohort in study groups**	**85%**	**94.1%**
VSLAs	**% VSLA members reporting utilising some of their loans on education needs for a child**	**60%**	**61%**
Support to SMCs and BOGs	**% of School Management Committees (SMC) in primary schools that have developed an annual school development plan**	**50%** **50%**	**49%** **48%**

[5] **Source: Y3 logframe reporting, which captured activities until November 2019.**

	% of targeted Board of Governors (BoG) in JSS that have developed a school action plan		
Assistive devices	**# of GATE GEC Children with disabilities receiving assistive devices and individualised treatments**	**186**	**156**[6]
CBRV support	**# of Community Based Rehabilitation Volunteers (CBRVs) actively engaged in the programme in supporting children with disabilities and their families in the project into education**	**136**	**138**

Based on the project's results framework, the project made significant progress and met all of its Output 1 target on all indicators. The exception to this is the provision of bursaries, which was discontinued in 2018 in compliance with the Government of Sierra Leone's FQSE programme. As such, no target was set for this activity.

Study Groups went beyond the original cohort beneficiaries, supporting extended cohort beneficiaries throughout the lifetime of the project. Study group monitoring data (i.e. attendance spot checks and study group observations) collected by the GATE-GEC MEL team shows that attendance in study groups was remained high. These groups' prioritised girls and children with disabilities as intended in the project's theory of change.

VSLAs: VSLA's were designed as a longer term and more sustainable alternative to bursaries to address financial and economic barriers. The analysis of survey data of 222 VSLA members found that 6% had utilised a loan for their children's education, and of those parents who had utilised a loan for their children's education:

- 96% reported using it to buy children shoes,
- 88% reported using part of the loan for their child's uniform,
- Other uses included paying for exercise books (71%), text books (45%) and stationary supplies (57%).

These findings, combined with the mid-line findings, demonstrate that the project was successful in setting-up of VSLAs in the community, and that the community actively participated in VSLAs and used the financing available for their children education. Of those who reported using loans for educational expenses, only half were beneficiary households, indicating the programme reached beyond the parents of beneficiaries.

Support to SMCs and BoGs: All primary schools within a sample of GATE-GEC schools[7] were found to have an active SMCs by March 2020.

[6] Note: While the target was narrowly missed at the time of Y3 reporting, the project ultimately exceeded this target during the MTRP

[7] Tool used: 2019 BoG SMC profiling (n=400)

- 47% of these SMCs were trained by the project of some management/governance topic,
- 63.7% of those trained felt that they were adequately trained on the topic of School Development Plans (SDPs),
- 48.4% of primary schools in the sample reported having an SDP, with a greater proportion of trained SMCs having an SDP (57.8%).

Similarly, 97.8% of JSS in the sample were reported to have an active BoG by March 2020.

- 41.2% of these BoGs were trained on any topic including School Development Plans
- 47.3% of all JSS in the sample were found to have an SDP, with 53.5% of trained BoGs having SDP.

For both primary and JSS, there is a greater likelihood that SMCs / BoGs that have been trained have an SDP at their school.

Assistive devices: According to HI monitoring data, the project met its target of assistive devices and treatment over the life of the programme (600), covering 292 girls with disabilities, and 305 boys with disabilities, while three children were referred for specialist treatment for epilepsy.

CBRVs: The project met its target of recruiting and mobilising 138 CBRVs to create awareness in the community around educating children with disabilities. CBRVs also worked with IEDO to provide support to the beneficiaries and their families around additional needs (ensuring the assistive devices provided are functioning, building parents understanding on how they can support their child's learning, supporting parents in re-enrolling children in school during MTRP, etc.).

Output 1. Marginalised girls and children with disabilities are provided support to enable the transition and attendance back into education (MTRP)

During the MTRP period, the project redefined the transition as re-enrolment, and included emergency response activities around distribution of food packs and bursaries to Output 1 to ensure the project addressed the evolving needs of beneficiaries. Table 3 below provides the project progress till March 2021 on MTRP activities.

Table 3: Progress against Output 1 indicator targets – MTRP[8]

Element	Indicator	Target	Progress
Re-enrolment	**% re-enrolment of GATE-GEC beneficiaries**	**60% girls and children with disabilities**	**99%**
Re-enrolment	**% of beneficiaries who have not returned reached by STs via telephone**	**70% girls and children with disabilities**	**88%**

[8] Source: Y4 revised MTRP output framework reporting.

	calls around re-enrolment		
Distribution	**% of GATE-GEC beneficiaries receiving distribution (bursaries, dignity kits, food rations and resource material)**	**90% of those receiving bursaries** **90% of those receiving dignity kits** **80% of those receiving food rations** **80% of those receiving resource material**	**69%[9] of total re-verified beneficiaries have been distributed bursary items.** **40% of total re-verified girls have received dignity kits.** **70% of total re-verified beneficiaries have been distributed the food supplies.** **94%[10] of total re-verified have received MyBook.**
Assistive devices	**# of GATE-GEC children with disabilities receiving assistive devices and individualised treatments**	**300**	**600[11]**
VSLAs	**# of grants received by GATE-GEC VSLAs**	**160**	**200**

Output 1 aimed to support the return of children to schools following re-opening. The 2020 reverification data found that the project was successful in ensuring that 99% of both the beneficiaries re-enrolled in school when they reopened.

The project conducted a survey of 288 beneficiaries to explore the effectiveness and relevance of items distributed. The analysis found a high level of satisfaction (over 99% for all types of items received) by beneficiaries who received this additional support from the project. As part of the MTRP, the project has continued with study groups, VSLAs and CBRVs until the project closure in July 2021. The project developed updated and refined tools and training guides to ensure additional catch up support was provided during study groups to those who were falling behind.

[9] Distribution was still underway at the time of analysis, and therefore figures provided my not be the final total achieved. The most up to date figures received have been provided here.

[10] Updated figure provided by GATE-GEC during the reporting phase.

[11] Source: HI monitoring log.

PV's and NQFT's were retrained to support students struggling with foundational skills, either remotely in the event of further school closures, or in person during study group sessions.

Output 2. Increased number of skilled PVs, LAs and STs (who support the cohort beneficiaries) to improve learning of marginalised girls and children with disabilities (Pre-COVID)

This output focused on addressing key supply-side learning and transition challenges faced by marginalised girls and children with disabilities. The output remained focused on building the capacity of the educators involved in the project between 2017 and March 2020 as well as during MTRP (Sep 2020 – July 2021). The content and focus of the professional development trainings and support provided in response to Covid-19 outbreak expanded to include an increased emphasis on beneficiary health, safety and wellbeing-focused during MTRP, in response to the increase risks and vulnerabilities created by the COVID-10 pandemic. The project continued its focus on building the capacity of the educators (PVs, STs and head teachers) to provide better literacy and numeracy education through training on distance learning and adapted study group activities, and developing revised tools which can be adapted for both home working, remote support and in-person use during study groups.

Between 2017 and March 2020, the capacity building activities focused on providing continuous professional development support to PVs to ensure that they are better equipped to manage the study groups as well as their classrooms in schools. The project provided support to female Learning Assistants (Las) to help them prepare for Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) entrance exams, and then supported these women as Students Teachers during their time in Teacher Training Colleges. The table below provides the details of results framework indicators used by the project monitoring team to track progress against this output.

Table 4: Progress against Output 2 indicator targets – Year 3 Logframe[12]

Element	Indicator	Target	Progress
Programme Volunteers	**# of Programme Volunteers (PVs) engaged in the GATE-GEC project**	**1550**	**1506**
Student Teachers	**% of Learning Assistants (LAs) passing the marked assignment**	**N/A**	**N/A**[13]
Student Teachers	**% of Student teachers completing teacher training college course (cohort 1 and 2 (GEC 1) and cohort 3 (GATE GEC)**	**85%**	**N/A**[14]

[12] **Source: Y3 logframe reporting, which captures activities until November 2019.**

[13] According to the Y3 logframe reporting, this is N/A as LAs are now STs

[14] Results had not been received before COVID-19 school closures

Study Groups	**% of GEC beneficiaries reporting positive perceptions of PVs teaching skills and support in the classroom**	**80%**	**100%**
CPD	**% of PVs recorded to have attended teacher learning circles on a quarterly basis**	**50%**	**56%**
CPD	**% of PVs recorded to have attended at least one coaching observation session in a quarterly basis**	**50%**	**68%**
CPD	**% of PVs reporting positive use of at least 3 (three) key teaching skills during coaching/observation sessions**	**75%**	**76%**

The project MEL data and results framework show that project met all of its targets, with the exception of one minor shortfall in the number of PVs engaged where the project. The quality of the CPD provided by the project was not assessed as part of this Endline Evaluation, however the project surveyed 170 beneficiaries in 2019 to assess the effectiveness of the PVs and over 80% of the beneficiaries surveyed reported that PVs have helped them improve literacy and numeracy learning.

Output 2. Educators receive materials, training, CPD, coaching and supportive supervision to equip them in providing quality learning support to girls and children with disabilities (MTRP)

The project continued to provide capacity building support to the educators during MTRP, which included an extended focus on beneficiary health, safety and wellbeing in recognition of the increased vulnerability and risks facing many children during school closures. Further training on distance learning and study group adaptation activities were provided to project staff, PVs, head teachers, and NQFTs. Trainings used a 'Training of Trainers' (ToT) model where consortium leads, field staff, MBSSE staff, district supervisors, TSC staff, and a select number of school-based staff (one head teacher, one PV, and one NQFT from each school cluster) were trained, and a cascading of the training to the remainder of the school staff would take place subsequently. ToT Training was conducted in mid-February 2021, and the cascade training at school cluster level was rolled out by the end of February.

Table 5: Progress against Output 2 indicator targets - MTRP[15]

Element	Indicator	Target	Progress
Student Teachers	**% of Cohort 3 Student teachers completing teacher training college course**	**N/A**	**N/A**

[15] Source: Y4 revised MTRP output framework reporting.

CPD	**% of school staff attending CPD whole school training on resource material to support children's distance and accelerated learning**	**75% of GATE-GEC school staff attend 80% of CPD training sessions**	**99%**
Study Groups	**% of GATE-GEC beneficiaries attending study groups**	**80% of beneficiaries**	**95%[16]**

The project ensured safe return of 94% female and 100% of the male beneficiaries to schools as schools opened in September 2020. The support provided by the educators and field staff to the beneficiaries during STRP and MTRP kept beneficiaries connected to school as well as ensured their emotional and physical safety. This was evidenced in MTRP survey where 99% of beneficiary respondents reported that they found their teachers (PVs) to be supportive in the study group, and 98% of beneficiaries felt supported in their learning (improvements in maths and literacy) through the study groups.

Output 3. Marginalised girls and children with disabilities are supported to learn in a safe and inclusive learning environment (Pre-COVID)

Creating an environment that is not only conducive to, but supportive of, girls and children with disabilities' education was identified as a mechanism towards achieving learning and transition objectives. This output, therefore, focused on introducing activities that supported community awareness raising and breaking negative stereotypes around educating girls and children with disabilities. This remained a key focus both before and after the start of the pandemic in March 2020. The activities within this output focused working with community volunteers (CBRVs) and broader schools community (SMCs, BoGs) to create a culture a community accountability to ensure that girls and children with disabilities felt safe and were aware of different support mechanisms that were available to them.

The project, under this output, also transformed 11 schools to disability-friendly 'model schools' as models for the communities as well as government on how children with different abilities can be included within mainstream education system. The project met all its intended targets, as reported by the project MEL data.

Table 6: Progress against Output 3 indicator targets – Year 3 Logframe[17]

Element	Indicator	Target	Progress
Score Carding	**% of targeted JSS school stakeholders involved in the score carding process at the beginning of the school year**	**80%**	**100%**

[16] Based on a sample of students
[17] Source: Y3 logframe reporting, which captures activities until November 2019

Score Carding	**# of score carding action plans developed by targeted JSS school stakeholders on an annual basis**	**79**	**83**
Score Carding	**Of beneficiaries who are aware of a suggestion box, % who have used it (or know someone who has)**	**55%**	**62%**
Model Schools	**# of schools that are adapted to be disability friendly (model schools)**	**4**	**3**[18]

Output 3. Girls are able to learn in a safer and more supportive environment; while communities are engaged and mobilised to offer a more supportive and protective environment for girls (MTRP)

As before pandemic, the goal of this output was to create safe and supportive environment for girls and children with disabilities in schools and in community. However, the project identified additional vulnerabilities faced by students due to the isolation caused by school closure and pandemic, which put girls at greater risk of gender based violence (GBV), early pregnancy and forced marriage. Therefore the output scope was broadened to ensure CBRVs, head teachers, project staff, PVs and STs were effectively trained to support girls and children with disabilities during pandemic.

Table 7: Progress against Output 3 indicator targets - MTRP[19]

Element	Indicator	Target	Progress
Girls Clubs	**% of primary girls attending Girls' Clubs by trained STs facilitators**	**75% of primary girl sample**	**70%**
CPD	**% of school staff, VAs and CBRVs attending training GESI, safeguarding, and PSS/PFA**	**75% of staff**	**96%**
CPD	**% of MHPSS focal points identified and trained**	**60%**	**85%**
VSLAs	**% of parents/caregivers reached through VAs in VSLAs**	**70%**	**66%**
Model Schools	**# of model schools completed**	**5**	**5**

[18] Note: While the target was narrowly missed at the time of MTRP reporting, the project was able to achieve the total target during the MTRP
[19] Source: Y4 revised MTRP output framework reporting

One of the key findings from the ENA was girls in primary school age group being at a higher risk of permanently dropping out of schools during school closure due to early marriages or pregnancies. To mitigate this, the project introduced the girl's club initiative to ensure young girls are provided the required support to build confidence and resilience as well as awareness around GBV.

The project also trained 484 project stakeholders on psychological first aid. These trainings were followed by the MTRP beneficiary survey which found over 97% of respondents knew who to contact in an instance where they needed help regarding their safety or mental wellbeing. This high awareness of project activities even during pandemic suggests project's strong presence in the community which enabled the project to disseminate the information deep in the community effectively and efficiently.

Output 4. Programme evidence and learning is shared with key educational decision makers and actors to influence the Sierra Leonean Education sector

This output focused on identifying key activities for the project to develop partnerships with MBSSE and other sector actors. These activities included:

- attending relevant working groups at national level to provide project updates and share results being observed in the field;
- participating in working groups to influence policy on inclusive and girls' education
- working with Deputy Directors at the district level to map out INGOs / NGOs in education for monthly coordination meetings; and
- establishing a long-term relationship with the MBSSE and TSC to get a Government payroll pin code to secure paid employment for STs who completed TTC to become qualified teachers.

The progress made on this output, as reflected in the project log frame, is presented below. There is limited data on the activities carried out under this output.

Table 8: Progress against Output 4 indicator targets[20]

Indicator	Target	Progress
# of MOBSSE and MSWGCA officials participating in trainings on inclusive education and gender sensitive pedagogical teaching practices	**35**	**21**
# of 'Learning events' consortium partners share evidence and learning from the GATE GEC project with key educational stakeholders	**6**	**5**
# of MOBSSE and MSWGCA officials supporting joint monitoring visits	**12**	**4**

[20] Source: Y3 logframe reporting, which captures activities until November 2019.

The project was not able to meet its intended targets by March 2020. This is primarily due to activities and events being cancelled or postponed due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, which was outside of the projects control. Some of the indicators and the targets were, therefore, revised as part of the MTRP. The revised indicators are provided below.

Table 9: Progress against Output 4 indicator targets - MTRP[21]

Indicator	Target	Progress
# of MOBSSE and MSWGCA officials supporting joint monitoring visits	**4**	**9 (4 MBSSE, 3 TSC, 1 Ministry of social welfare, 1 ministry of gender / 4 female, 5 male)**
# of engagements with the MOBSSE and MSWGCA around key issues in the education of girls and children with disabilities	**N/A**	**2**
# of engagements with other NGO and relevant stakeholders around key issues in the education of girls and children with disabilities	**N/A**	**1**

The project also carried out a number of other activities that were not captured in the results framework. These included project team's work with the Education Emergency Taskforce (EET) to advise and support the government on activities during and post-COVID-19 period. The project staff attended and contributed to national-level Communication, School Reopening and Distance Learning pillar meetings of the EET and provided input on government strategy school reopening preparedness and plan development and preparation of distance learning materials. The project also ensured presence of MBSSE and TSC district and national teams at the projects distance learning and study group training.

Short Term Response Plan Activities

As stated earlier, the project launched a Short-Term Response Plan (STRP) as soon as schools closed in March 2020. The STRP served as a transition between the original project activities and the MTRP. During the STRP, **the project successfully completed all activities** planned around the three key outputs:

- Rapid Educational Needs / Gender Analysis Assessment
- Support to remote learning
- Sensitisation activities with community stakeholders, caregivers and children on COVID-19, CPD, GBV prevention and response and SRHR

[21] Source: Y4 revised MTRP output framework reporting.

The project completed a Rapid Needs Assessment, the findings from which then fed into the development of MTRP. The study surveyed 276 beneficiaries (210 girls/GWDs and 66 BWDs) and a variety of stakeholders including (34 parents, 29 PVs, 12 HTs, 11 CBRVs, 21 STs and 9 PSMs).

All 2277 cohort beneficiaries were provided bursary items (pens, pencils, school bags, sharpeners, and notebooks) to support remote learning and return to school. Assorted stationery materials were also provided to 194 teachers in 55 schools in all GEC districts to develop accessible teaching and learning aid for 339 children with learning difficulties and behavioural challenges.

The project distributed radios to 1889 beneficiaries, 919 teachers, 664 Student Teachers and 69 Practice Study Mentors based on findings form ENA that majority of GATE-GEC beneficiaries did not have access to radios to partake in government radio lessons. STs and PSMs were also provided solar chargers for their tablets continue with their TTC education. The project also supported the airing of MBSSE radio classes in 3 districts through local radio.

The project printed and distributed COVID-19 prevention and response posters that were developed by the Government (National Emergency Operation Centre) in 593 PS and JSS, 135 Health Units, and 138 communities to raise awareness around staying safe during pandemic**.** The project also trained 30 project staff and 141 CBRVs on the prevention and control of COVID-19 in the community, prevention and response to child protection issues and GBV, and psychological first aid basic skills. The project launched a community sensitisation programme on the radio programming and on why educating children is important for communities. Furthermore, phones and megaphones were provided for CBRVs to conduct sensitisation activities.

L. Summary Findings against Logframe (outcomes and intermediate outcomes)

This annex provides a summary of findings against logframe outcomes and intermediate outcomes from the executive summary and conclusions of the baseline and midline evaluation reports, as well as deriving from the endline evaluation.

Summary of Findings against Outcomes	
Outcome 1: Learning	
Baseline	Overall baseline learning levels of the project beneficiaries (and control group) are mixed, with high levels of proficiency among the more basic literacy and numeracy skills (such as recognising letters and familiar words, basic reading, basic addition and subtraction), but becoming progressively poorer in the more advanced literacy and numeracy skills. This is expected, and the learning assessments designed for the baseline research were done so to ensure poorer results among more complex tasks so repetition of the assessments later in the project can accurately track improvements and avoid ceiling effects. With respect to specific subgroups, it appears that children with disabilities scored as well, or higher, than children without, potentially reflective of the relatively mild severity of the disabilities and/or the different application of the assessments to facilitate children with disabilities (they were allotted more time for many exercises). This is a positive finding, as it suggests that school entry for children with disabilities is the most substantial barrier to be overcome,
Midline	Learning outcomes for JSS show there have not been additional learning achievements in intervention schools compared to control schools. The JSS intervention sample scored an average of 31.22 in literacy (SeGRA) and 39.84 in numeracy (SeGMA). Learning assessment scores in both numeracy and literacy are slightly higher for the control JSS group. Difference-in-difference (DiD) analysis shows that there is a negative arithmetic DiD for the JSS intervention group at midline: -6.52, for a learning achievement of -3.18 in literacy, and -7.82, for a learning achievement of -5.75 in numeracy. Difference-in-difference regression results show -3.906 for literacy and -4.845 for numeracy. Learning outcomes at the primary level show that there has not been an increase in learning outcomes at midline. The primary girls sample scored an average of 28.15 in literacy (EGRA) and 37.94 in numeracy (EGMA). Using a counterfactual analysis, the arithmetic DiD for literacy is -28.63, and for numeracy is -10.60 at midline for primary girls. Difference-in-difference regression shows -15.395 for EGRA and -4.644 for EGMA. It is important to note, however, that due to the small sample size for the primary cohort, the power achieved at midline is 68 per cent.

Endline	The available data shows that the project contributed to a set of important preconditions which made progress in terms of its contribution to increase learning outcomes for marginalised girls and children with disabilities. At the output level, the project met almost all the targets set to improve the quality of teaching and learning through CPD activities and study groups, to promote better inclusion in schools through assistive devices, itinerant teachers, and model schools, and to improve school management by providing training and capacity building to SMCs and BoGs. Activities which aimed to support inclusive learning and environments, namely model schools, itinerant teachers, and assistive devices, were important demonstrator projects. These reached a relatively small proportion of the overall beneficiary population, but there are positive indications that these led to improvements in the school environment, and the individualised support available to children with disabilities. In order to facilitate further scale up or replication, it may be necessary to collect further evidence on their effectiveness in meeting the needs of girls and children with disabilities.
Outcome 2: Transition	
Baseline	Both target and control groups outlined similar transition pathways and identified the same barriers – including poverty – which may prevent them from reaching their goals. In 2013, the beneficiaries were identified as the most marginalised. However, since that time, the lives of many children have changed (for example due to the Ebola crisis) and, while the research team did not have access to data to quantify levels of marginalisation, the short and medium-term effects of the Ebola crisis are likely to still be felt, with more marginalised children within the target communities than before.
Midline	Transition rates are high; 95 per cent of students across the whole intervention sample have a successful transition status at midline, and 98 per cent of control school students. In the JSS intervention group, one of the 35 out-of-school children has successfully transitioned at midline. The most common reason for a JSS intervention child to be out-of-school is due to motherhood or pregnancy, followed closely by a lack of money to pay for schooling costs. Contrary to the expected outcome, disability is not a barrier to transition in the evaluation sample (across intervention and control groups).
Endline	The project was successful in maintaining high transition rates throughout its lifetime, as demonstrated by previous evaluations and project MEL data. It also supported the return of children back to school following school closures as part of STRP and MTRP efforts. The existing data does not shed light on those who have dropped out of school. Possible reasons for not transitioning include leaving, moving schools or migrating to a different region, the latter being particularly difficult to trace following the effects of Ebola, and currently, COVID-19. Economic barriers to transition continued to be a concern for many families and beneficiaries, even with the government's introduction of Free Quality School Education (FQSE). The projects support in this regard was highly valued, with several school stakeholders commenting that this

	provided families with the means to support students to attend school. However, financial barriers are likely to remain a threat to future transition for many students, and this may be further exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19. Family and community support for education and learning has remained high during the life of the project, as documented by current as well as baseline and midline findings. The project provided families and communities with the means and necessary ownership to further support education. Economic support, raising communities' awareness and knowledge of issues facing marginalised girls and children with disabilities, were mentioned as some of the ways in which the project enabled families and communities to more effectively support children to attend and transition through school. This was achieved through the provision of VSLAs and bursaries, CBRVs, itinerant teachers, and support to SMCs and BoGs. In some cases household context impacted the extent to which families were able or willing to support students to attend school and ultimately transition. Beneficiaries from single-parent families, or living with extended family, were generally more likely to highlight challenges with family support. It is unclear if the project was able to provide specific support for these groups, and this may be an important consideration for future programmes. The strengthened community structures and work around accountability for child protection contributed to the successful retention of programme's cohort. School stakeholders reported that they were more aware of child protection issues, and better able to actively address concerns and provide direct support and counselling to beneficiaries. Beneficiaries described being able to speak to teachers or head teachers if they have any concerns or safeguarding issues.
Outcome 3: Sustainability	
Baseline	Community level awareness of the importance of education is high, and of the need for sustainable measures to ensure uninterrupted education. However, as only 50 percent of households are engaged in saving money that can be used for education, and only 15 percent were able to meet all of their education costs in the last year, there is a need for ongoing sensitisation and awareness-raising, both in terms of getting those children who are still out of school into the system and ensuring that those who are in school receive the support they need from parents or caregivers. The VSLA component had not been introduced at the time of the baseline, but if successful it should reduce dependence on the bursaries and ensure that families are in a stronger position to support their children through school and all stages of transition by boosting the savings of those households who are already doing so and facilitating a start to saving among those households who do not. The proportion of households that do not save or have trouble meeting educational needs underscores the validity of this approach.

	At system level, the GATE-GEC project is aligned with MEST policy, but there is a need to facilitate greater engagement on MEST's part, with project sustainability hinging on MEST ownership. One government official recognised the limited involvement by MEST in GEC 1 but stated MEST's desire at central level to be more involved in GATE-GEC. The recent development of a Project Steering Committee with the active participation of MEST and a range of other government stakeholders, including the Ministry of Social Welfare, should facilitate MEST's involvement. This should also contribute to sustainability of those components of the project which MEST feels should be continued. MEST's more active engagement in project monitoring will also feed in to the sustainability of project interventions.
Midline	The sustainability score at midline is 2, demonstrating that overall the project is still in the 'emergent' phase. However, the system level indicators have improved from 'latent' to 'emerging' (score 1 to 2), due to strong relationships at the district level and improved collaboration at the national level. Most other sustainability indicators have also seen some improvement, moving from the lower end to the upper end of the 'emergent' score bracket. The main barrier to sustainability is the availability of finance at all levels.
Endline	At the **community level**, the evidence outlined against transition validates that the interventions focused on economic support were well received, and that the ongoing economic support activities played an important role in providing families with the means and necessary ownership to support education. However, the disruption to VSLA and livelihoods activities as a result of COVID-19, and the ongoing concerns raised by beneficiaries around the economic support available to continue to support their education, suggest there may be a risk to the sustainability of the effects of those activities. At the **school level**, stakeholders described how CPD training for head teachers and PVs contributed to a stronger commitment to quality and inclusive education, and there is a strong drive to continue build professional skills and support marginalised children going forward. This strong commitment and motivation is likely to continue to have wider impacts beyond the life of the programme, but stakeholders stress the need for CPD activities to continue in the future. Similarly, educators highly valued the impact of study groups for marginalised groups, and expressed strong support for these to continue in future. They also expressed concerns about risks to the financial sustainability of these activities, with regards to not only stipends for PVs, but for the provision of learning materials and food for students in study groups. At the **systems level**, the project improved its alignment and coherence with government priorities and institutions, as well as other programmes operating in the region. This was aided by the change of government in 2018 and the strong government focus on inclusive education and the recruitment of female teachers. Following the outbreak of COVID-19 provided further impetus for alignment, which the project effectively responded to by working in close collaboration with relevant national stakeholders and partners to respond to the emergency situation. This included developing tools which can be adapted for use both during school closures and as catch up materials when schools reopen. These tools were developed in consultation with key national stakeholders such as the TSC and TTCs, to insure a close alignment to the relevant school and training curriculums. Additionally, many of the project's activities were well matched with government priorities

	regarding inclusive education and extending female participation in the teaching workforce, these included assistive devices, model schools, itinerant teachers, and the LA/ST model. These activities are intended to be small in scale, and to act as demonstrators which government can replicate and scale up. While this evaluation is not able to confirm if these activities will be adopted by government, the project has taken key steps in the design and implementation of these activities to improve the changes that these activities will be sustained.

Summary of Findings against Intermediate Outcomes	
IO1: Attendance	
Baseline	Qualitative findings suggest that attendance by beneficiaries is high – however the evaluators only met with beneficiaries who were in school and may not reflect the problems some beneficiaries may be experiencing. The quantitative findings also indicate high attendance rates (provided by head teachers based on school records). However, discrepancies in triangulation of data suggests inaccuracy (and likely over-reporting) of figures. The project's ongoing monitoring processes should consider the risk of inaccuracy of attendance as reported by schools, potentially instituting novel means of verification (e.g. spot-checks of actual vs. reported attendance).
Midline	Attendance: at midline students' self-reported attendance was captured through student survey. Eighty seven per cent in the intervention group missed five days or fewer of school in the last school year, compared with 78 per cent in the control group. Attendance rates for primary girls are lower than for JSS (70 per cent), and are lowest for girls with disabilities (44 per cent) and girls who are mothers. Health concerns are the main reason for absence from school (which includes female health considerations), with financial constraints the second main cited reason.
Endline	Project MEL data estimates that the attendance in study groups has been consistently high, with 94 percent attending in Year 3, and an 95 percent attendance estimated during the MTRP. Qualitative findings suggest that most students have attended school regularly in recent weeks, however several mention that barriers to attendance include financial constraints, long distances to travel to school, lack of food, and high chore burdens. These barriers impact attendance in both regular classrooms and in study groups.
IO2: Teaching quality	
Baseline	Qualitative data collection revealed that some teachers in both PS and JSS are applying inclusive techniques. While inclusive education approaches were highlighted during qualitative data collection, there were also examples of CWDs being subjected to bullying and affected by corporal al punishment—indicating that further sensitisation and training is required. Quantitative data collected indicate positive teaching practices in the classes under study, with 41 percent of students noting that teachers use a different language to explain a point when the students do not understand something and 47 percent of students noting that teachers often encourage them to participate. These quantitative findings correlate well with qualitative data collected. During FGDs, girls and boys reported that teachers make an effort to involve everyone (e.g. all students are called on to answer questions). Although carers and students assessed teacher performance to be of acceptable quality, the project's educational support (non-bursary) approach is still valid as there are some indicators that should demonstrate good improvement as the project progresses. The study group approach is endorsed by the finding that some schools, are already running study groups independently of GATE-GEC support.

	Corporal punishment is not (yet) illegal in Sierra Leone22 and based on data collected, it appears that it is normalised in schools, with 85 percent of students noting punishment as sanction for incorrect work and almost all of these (96 percent) noting physical punishment. There does, however, appear to be a policy momentum to make corporal punishment explicitly illegal, and this presents opportunities for the project to both advocate for this policy change at MEST, and sensitise educators, communities and students against such punishment. The project is gender sensitive, with interventions aimed at improving the quality of education for girls. Teachers who are working as Project Volunteers (PVs) are receiving training and ongoing support to make their teaching more gender-sensitive and inclusive.
Midline	Teaching quality: at midline, knowledge of inclusive teaching methods amongst head teachers is present but lacking breadth. Amongst PVs, the average score for gender-sensitive and inclusive teaching practices was 75 per cent. This is up 7 per cent since baseline, but does not meet the target of 7.7 per cent. The majority of students report equal treatment of boys and girls by teachers during class. Very few children with disabilities report that they are treated differently to other children by their teachers. There have been improvements in inclusive education practices, however, corporal punishment is still prevalent, although reported rates have reduced since baseline.
Endline	Beneficiaries and school stakeholders provided examples of improved teaching skills and practices. The project was able to build on the positive attitudes to provide educators with the tools to support the diverse needs of students, and to demonstrate that those groups can excel when supported. The perceived improvement in teaching practices was further enhanced by the positive and welcoming learning spaces provided within study groups.
IO3: Self esteem	
Baseline	Greater self-esteem and confidence has been reported by many respondents during interviews and are supported by the quantitative data from student's surveys, with most respondents (76% of students ≥12 years old, 70% of students <12) reporting medium-high self-esteem.
Midline	Self-esteem and confidence: scores amongst intervention students are fairly high, but with some room for improvement. Less than half of all students participate in decision-making about their education. For both of these indicators, levels for primary girls with disabilities were lower than average. The majority of CWD at midline reported that they are able to access facilities at school, and inclusion scores are high for the whole intervention sample, including children with disabilities. Perceptions of safety are also high, though they are lower for girls with disabilities.
Endline	Qualitative evidence strongly suggests that the self esteem and confidence of marginalised girls and children with disabilities has improved, with most attributing this to the support provided from PVs in study groups, which provided them with opportunities to work in small groups with

[22] *Corporal punishment of children in Sierra Leone*. Global Initiative to End Corporal Punishment of Children, 2018. Accessible at: http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/progress/country-reports/sierra-leone.html.

	individualised support from PVs. As a result, beneficiaries felt they were able to learn more effectively, which, in turn, increased their confidence in their own abilities, their sense of belonging, and the feeling that their needs were better understood and recognised.
IO4: Economic empowerment	
Baseline	The VSLA component of the project had not begun as of the baseline but may be used to enable families to cover education-related costs in a more sustainable way than through the disbursement of bursaries. Qualitative and quantitative findings agreed that families face major challenges in their abilities to pay direct education expenses, thus supporting the validity of focus of the project. When primary caregivers were asked about their abilities to meet education costs in the past year, only 15 percent were able to meet all education costs. Economic empowerment: a large proportion of VSLA members (GATE-GEC and non-GATE-GEC VSLAs) learned skills in saving through their VSLA, and reported feeling confident in saving. Most VSLA members had taken a loan from their VSLA, however nearly half reported that they could not meet the repayments. The majority of caregivers report that they met more than 50 per cent of their child's education costs last year, but only a small proportion met all of them.
Midline	Economic empowerment: a large proportion of VSLA members (GATE-GEC and non-GATE-GEC VSLAs) learned skills in saving through their VSLA, and reported feeling confident in saving. Most VSLA members had taken a loan from their VSLA, however nearly half reported that they could not meet the repayments. The majority of caregivers report that they met more than 50 per cent of their child's education costs last year, but only a small proportion met all of them.
Endline	Economic barriers to transition continued to be a concern for many families and beneficiaries, even with the government's introduction of Free Quality School Education (FQSE). The projects support in this regard was highly valued, particularly VSLAs, with several school stakeholders commenting that this provided families with the means to support students to attend school. However, financial barriers are likely to remain a threat to future transition for many students, and this may be further exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19.
IO5: Shared learning and collaboration	
Baseline	There is evidence to indicate that the relationship between the project and MEST at central level is moving into a more productive phase, with plans for better communication and closer collaboration. The ESP for 2018-2020 outlines mechanisms for participation by partners and there are areas within the ESP where GATE-GEC could contribute to policy development and implementation.
Midline	Community attitudes: attitudes towards girls' education at midline are generally very positive. Community attitudes towards children with disabilities' education are also positive, but to a lesser extent than for girls. The qualitative data indicates a gradual shift in attitudes towards

	girls' and CWD's education within communities, and towards education more broadly. However, despite this there is an enduring belief amongst a sizable minority of caregivers that it is acceptable for a child to miss school if they need to do paid or domestic work, or if education is too costly.
Endline	The strengthened community structures and work around accountability for child protection contributed to the successful retention of programme's cohort. School stakeholders reported that they were more aware of child protection issues, and better able to actively address concerns and provide direct support and counselling to beneficiaries. Beneficiaries described being able to speak to teachers or head teachers if they have any concerns or safeguarding issues. The project improved its alignment and coherence with government priorities and institutions, as well as other programmes operating in the region. This was aided by the change of government in 2018, and the strong government focus on inclusive education and the recruitment of female teachers. Following the outbreak of COVID-19 provided further impetus for alignment, which the project effectively responded to by working in close collaboration with relevant national stakeholders and partners to respond to the emergency situation.

M. Project Design and Interventions

Annex 1. Project design and intervention

Activity	What output will the intervention contribute to?	What Intermediate Outcome will the intervention will contribute to and how?	How will the intervention contribute to achieving the learning, transition and sustainability outcomes?	Start to end date of activity	Target beneficiaries (and numbers)
Distribution of food, dignity kits and bursary items	***Output 1: Marginalised girls and children with disabilities are provided support to enable the transition back into education***	Targeted marginalised girls and children with disabilities return to school and regularly attend school classes	Learning – supports children to return to education	December 2020 - January 2021	Marginalised girls and boys with disabilities (approximately 8,000)
Allocation/ distribution of targeted assistive devices, learning aids and/or provision of individualized treatments	***Output 1: Marginalised girls and children with disabilities are provided support to enable the transition back into education***	Targeted marginalised girls and children with disabilities return to school and regularly attend school classes	Learning – supports children to return to education	September 2020 - March 2021	Children with disabilities (300)
Grant support to VSLAs	***Output 1: Marginalised girls and children with disabilities are provided support to enable the transition back into education***	Targeted marginalised girls and children with disabilities return to school and regularly attend school classes	Learning – supports children to return to education	December 2020 - January 2021	VSLA groups (200)
Back to school messaging to students and communities	***Output 1: Marginalised girls and children with disabilities are provided support to enable the transition back into education***	Targeted marginalised girls and children with disabilities return to school and regularly attend school classes	Learning – supports children to return to education	September – December 2020	Marginalised girls and boys with disabilities (approximately 8,000)
STs keeping in contact with girls to facilitate return to school and provide general support	***Output 2: Educators receive materials, training, CPD, coaching and supportive supervision to equip them in providing quality learning support to girls and CWDs***	Teachers/schools provide effective teaching practices and differentiated learning support to marginalised learners	Transition and Learning	December 2020 – June 2021	Marginalised girls (number TBD based on reverification and demographic analysis) STs (400+)

Development and training of resource material for students and CPD material for teachers	***Output 2: Educators receive materials, training, CPD, coaching and supportive supervision to equip them in providing quality learning support to girls and CWDs***	Teachers/schools provide effective teaching practices and differentiated learning support to marginalised learners	Transition and Learning	September 2020 – June 2021	Marginalised girls and boys with disabilities (approximately 8,000)
Study Groups	***Output 2: Educators receive materials, training, CPD, coaching and supportive supervision to equip them in providing quality learning support to girls and CWDs***	Teachers/schools provide effective teaching practices and differentiated learning support to marginalised learners	Transition and Learning	October 2020 – July 2021	Marginalised girls and boys with disabilities (approximately 8,000)
Provision of female-only after school Girls' Clubs	***Output 3: Girls are able to learn in a safer and more supportive environment; while communities are engaged and mobilized to offer a more supportive and protective environment for girls***	Marginalised girls and children with disabilities are safer and more supported by their schools and communities	Transition and learning	October 2020 – July 2021	Primary school girls (number TBD based on reverification and demographic analysis)
Training on GESI, safeguarding, referral, PSS/PFA, peer working relationships	***Output 3: Girls are able to learn in a safer and more supportive environment; while communities are engaged and mobilized to offer a more supportive and protective environment for girls***	Marginalised girls and children with disabilities are safer and more supported by their schools and communities	Transition and learning	September 2020 – November 2021	STs (400+) PVs (1359, as of midline) HTs (467, as of midline) School staff (exact number TBD) CBRVs (141)
VAs to engage VSLA groups in discussion on gender and power in the home, adolescent SRHR, GBV, etc.	***Output 3: Girls are able to learn in a safer and more supportive environment; while communities are engaged and mobilized to offer a more supportive and protective environment for girls***	Marginalised girls and children with disabilities are safer and more supported by their schools and communities	Transition and learning	October 2020 – May 2021	VSLA members within 200 VSLA groups
Provide psychosocial support to beneficiaries through MHPSS hotline	***Output 3: Girls are able to learn in a safer and more supportive environment; while communities are engaged and mobilized to offer a more supportive and protective environment for girls***	Marginalised girls and children with disabilities are safer and more supported by their schools and communities	Transition and learning	October 2020 – July 2021	Marginalised girls and boys with disabilities (approximately 8,000)
Model Schools	***Output 3: Girls are able to learn in a safer and more supportive environment; while communities are engaged and mobilized to offer a more supportive and protective environment for girls***	Marginalised girls and children with disabilities are safer and more supported by their schools and communities	Transition and learning	September 2020 – March 2021	Children with disabilities (number TBD based on reverification and demographic analysis)

Quarterly National Steering Committee meetings	***Output 4: Programme evidence and learning is shared with key decision makers and actors to influence the Sierra Leonean and wider Education sector; and promote opportunities for marginalised learners and girls***	Consistent level of shared learning, collaboration, influence and advocacy around inclusive, gender responsive education policies	Sustainability	November 2020 – May 2021	Ministry officials (number TBD)
Coordination with MBSSE through the Education Emergency Task Force and with the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs	***Output 4: Programme evidence and learning is shared with key decision makers and actors to influence the Sierra Leonean and wider Education sector; and promote opportunities for marginalised learners and girls***	Consistent level of shared learning, collaboration, influence and advocacy around inclusive, gender responsive education policies	Sustainability	September 2020 – July 2021	Ministry officials (number TBD)
Collaboration with Leh We Lan - GLADI, EAGER the Teaching Service Commission and other relevant stakeholders to ensure alignment and sustainability of project interventions	***Output 4: Programme evidence and learning is shared with key decision makers and actors to influence the Sierra Leonean and wider Education sector; and promote opportunities for marginalised learners and girls***	Consistent level of shared learning, collaboration, influence and advocacy around inclusive, gender responsive education policies	Sustainability	September 2020 – July 2021	Stakeholders (number TBD)
Project Joint Monitoring with MBSSE, TSC, MGCA and FCDO	***Output 4: Programme evidence and learning is shared with key decision makers and actors to influence the Sierra Leonean and wider Education sector; and promote opportunities for marginalised learners and girls***	Consistent level of shared learning, collaboration, influence and advocacy around inclusive, gender responsive education policies	Sustainability	November 2020 – May 2021	Ministry officials (Number TBD)

N. GATE-GEC Logframes

Project Logframe (Y3)	GATE-GEC Logframe Output Ta
Project MTRP Output Framework (Y4)	GECT Y4 MTR_Revised Outpu

O. Beneficiary Tables

Annex 7: Beneficiaries tables

This annex should be completed by the project.

Describe the project's primary target groups in terms of age range, grades, country/region, characteristics, and expected exposure to interventions over the course of the project.

The project's primary target are girls and children with disabilities in primary (P1-6) and junior secondary school (JSS1-3) in Kenema, Kailahun, Kono, Port Loko, Karene and Moyamba. Their age ranges from 5 to 20 years old. The characteristics of these primary target groups: 17% have a disability (according to Washington Group Questions), 4% have lost both parents and 19% have lost one parent, 1% are parents, 2% are married, 72% of households can't afford food all the time, 53% of households own land and 54% of households own livestock.

The original cohort have been exposed to the range of interventions from 2017; which included study groups twice a week, bursaries and school supplies. Within our beneficiary cohort, if a child had a disability, these children received additional interventions, such as access to a CBRV, with a smaller expected exposure of 600 children receiving assistive devices and 11 adapted schools to support inclusive education and the needs of children with disabilities. In addition, the beneficiaries will have received varying exposure to STs, score-carding, and their households via VSLAs

The project extended the beneficiary cohort this year, bringing beneficiaries who were participants in study groups into the tracked cohort. Before the 2020-2021 academic year, the expanded cohort will have been exposed to the study groups, and indirectly been exposed to the other support.

From October 2020, all the beneficiaries will have been exposed to study groups twice a week. All girls received distribution of dignity kits, nearly all received food, bursary items and My Workbook. If an NQFT was placed in their school, they will have been exposed to Girls Clubs. Beneficiaries with a disability will again have received access to a CBRV, potentially received an assistive device, and may have been present in one of the adapted schools. Beneficiaries will have had varying exposure to MHPSS focal point and support, MHPSS phone line, return to school conversations, and their households via VSLAs

Provide the targeted number of girls' beneficiaries and the monitoring data that support this number (for example, in-school population numbers, number of schools, number of communities etc.). Describe the method for calculating the number, and any assumptions made.

The target number of girls for the academic year 2020-21 is 6,280 and across the project is 11,012. This number is calculated from yearly reverification. In previous years, this number was only the original cohort and the reverification process was completed in school, however in 2020-21 this reverification was done for all children identified as a member of the study group and was done in school, over the phone and in the community. This number assumes that the children reverified with then participate in activities, however we have data and confirmation that they do.

Describe how the project defines educational marginalisation for its context and how this definition was applied to selecting beneficiaries. What proportion of direct beneficiaries are estimated as still meeting this definition of educational marginalisation (if known) and how has this been verified?

Our beneficiaries are girls and CWDs from rural areas, from poor background, orphans or living with single parent, living with extended family, or parent with disabilities. These universal and contextual characteristics relate/interact with cultural, structural and systemic barriers which

negatively influence the learning outcome of our beneficiaries. Capturing information on the economic, social and cultural status of our cohort, we are better able to understand the level of need of the beneficiaries and their families. It is recognised that although due to the nature of this programme, and tracking a cohort of the GEC 1 and transition phases, our cohort of children are still some of the most marginalised, however as they have received exposure to the project for a number of years, there may well be more marginalised children that are in need of this support.

The project extended its cohort this year to include all members of the study group, this was to recognise the added barriers beneficiaries may experience due to Covid-19. These beneficiaries were chosen due to their exposure to the intervention and due to ethical considerations. Although these children were not chosen due to their marginalisation status and we did not have this data at the time, the children were selected by the schools based on the students who would benefit from additional learning support; thus we believe they reflect the students at need and further data has been collected in the reverification this year to understand their marginalisation status.

Although not all these criteria are tracked throughout, 30% of our population have disabilities, 4% have lost both parents and 19% have lost one parent, and 72% of families can't afford food all the time.

Did boys receive project interventions? How were these boys selected?

Many of the boys supported by the project are a part of our cohort of children with disabilities. Both boys and girls have been supported through our inclusive education component, there are also boys that have been supported as part of the study groups. These boys have been included in the extended cohort this year. The boys that do not have disabilities, and are attending the study groups, are identified by the PVs (teachers) through their individual assessments based on the level of need, barriers and learning results of these students.

Please fill in the tables below. Individuals included in the project's target group should be direct beneficiaries of the project. The tables should show if numbers changed from baseline to endline and why.

Table 7.1: Direct beneficiaries

Beneficiary type	Total project number	Total number of girls targeted between midline and endline	Comment
Direct learning beneficiaries (girls) – girls in the intervention group who are specifically expected to achieve learning outcomes in line with targets. If relevant, please disaggregate girls with disabilities in this overall number.	11,012 (1,1652 girls with disabilities)	7264 (1,594 children with disabilities)	Children were lost between baseline and endline as they transitioned out of the project either through: moving to senior secondary school, leaving the implementation areas, being untraceable, or passing away. This data has been captured from our project's annual reverification phase, accounting for the total numbers supported and thus using multiple reverifications as the data source. This process allows us to track the transition of our GATE beneficiaries and determine which of the cohort will continue to receive support throughout the academic year. It also allows us to conduct an initial scoping of beneficiaries with disabilities using the Washington group questions to

			determine the numbers of children with disabilities we may be supporting, this is further investigated by our IEDOs through a rigorous screening process determine the type, degree and need of the disability. The methodology involved district based project offices interviewing beneficiaries and their families in schools, on the phone and in the community. The data was gathered on a tablet using the KoboCollect platform

Table 7.2: Other beneficiaries (Total over lifetime of the project)

Beneficiary type	Number	Comments
Learning beneficiaries (boys) – as above, but specifically counting boys who will get the same exposure and therefore be expected to also achieve learning gains, if applicable.	3056 (1575 boys with disabilities)	Data is collected as for direct learning beneficiaries (girls).
Broader student beneficiaries (boys) – boys who will benefit from the interventions in a less direct way, and therefore may benefit from aspects such as attitudinal change, etc. but not necessarily achieve improvements in learning outcomes.	58,532	This figure is taken from the project 2017/2018 school verification dataset. As with the reverification phase, we conducted interviews with Head teachers in each of the GATE GEC schools. Using the school records, they were able to share details about the numbers and types of children in school. The numbers provided reflect the overall school based numbers with the assumption that the project's support/capacity development provided, although specific to a GATE GEC cohort, is also accessible by other children in the schools i.e. PVs receiving trainings, study group sessions, safeguarding feedback mechanisms in place, school sensitisations and awareness raising, that all the children in the school are indirectly benefitting from the project.
Broader student beneficiaries (girls) – girls who will benefit from the interventions in a less direct way, and therefore may benefit from aspects such as attitudinal change, etc. but not necessarily achieve improvements in learning outcomes.	57, 871	This figure is taken from our 2017/2018 school verification dataset. As with the reverification phase, we conducted interviews with Head teachers in each of the GATE GEC schools. Using the school records they were able to share details about the numbers and types of children in school. The numbers provided reflect the overall school based numbers with the assumption that the project's support/capacity development provided, although specific to a GATE GEC cohort, is also accessible by other children in the schools i.e. PVs receiving trainings, study group sessions, safeguarding feedback mechanisms in place, school sensitisations and awareness raising, that all the children in the school are indirectly benefitting from the project.
Teacher beneficiaries – number of teachers who benefit from training or related interventions. If possible /applicable, please disaggregate by gender and type of training, with the comments box used to describe the type of training provided.	**2485** 1359 PVs 704 ST/NQFTs 467 HTs 5 Itinerant teachers	The total number of **teaching staff** both qualified and in the process of being qualified includes our teachers (Programme Volunteers), Head teachers, Student teachers, and Itinerant teachers. As part of our 2020 reverification phase, we conducted a Programme Volunteer (project teachers) profiling to better understand their qualifications, how they support the project, knowledge and skills base, area of need and feedback of their experiences of the project. PVs have received PV training addressing teaching pedological practices, enhancing literacy & numeracy knowledge base and skills, gender responsive pedagogy and assessing learning and positive discipline. In addition to developing further understanding of inclusive education.

		Learning Assistants have supported distance study to enter teacher college and become Student Teachers and practice placements (School experiences) in community primary schools in the project districts. These STs support teachers and children and gain practical experience in the teaching environment to support them towards their qualification. Although they are not formally teachers, they still support the teachers in their teaching capacities and the project felt should be reflected accordingly here. Newly Qualified Female Teachers (NQFT) are student teachers who have passed their NCTVA to become qualified teachers; they support the study groups and lead the Girls Clubs. **Head teachers** have also received support through the project in the form of participating in the PV training, supporting teachers in their schools in a mentoring role, undertaking study group observations and supporting teacher in preparing continuous professional development (CPD) tools, sharing returning to school sensitisation messaging, facilitating and participating in steering meetings with the SMCs/BOGs and ensuring the effective implementation of scorecarding action plans are effectively implemented in schools. The **itinerant teachers** have received support through training by inclusive experts on inclusive pedagogy, interactions with CWDs and how to support and capacity build teachers. The ITs support in the form of classroom management and pedagogy through supporting teachers to identify children with learning difficulties and better understanding their needs, supporting these teachers with the development and implementation of individual education plans (IEPs)for the children identified. They also have the role of providing one on one coaching after classroom observations in a mentoring capacity, as well as supporting parents of children with disabilities and other stakeholders who are also involved in the implementation of the IEPs through regular and ongoing engagement. The ITs are all men and 2 have a visual impairment themselves.
Broader community beneficiaries (adults) – adults who benefit from broader interventions, such as community messaging /dialogues, community advocacy, economic empowerment interventions, etc.	**9235** 138 CBRVs 5,000 VSLA members 4097 SMC/BoG members	The project works with Community Based Rehabilitation Volunteers (CBRVs) who have received ongoing trainings to support them in their roles as CBRVs. They are responsible for supporting the IEDOs with the screening of CWDs, and providing assistive devices. They also provide ongoing support to Children with disabilities in the project ranging from accompanying them to school, supporting them in the classroom and providing mentorship to the children with disabilities. They also hold community-based awareness raising sessions to promote education for CWDs. During the school verification process Head Teachers were asked to provide the number of SMC members in their school. According to this data, there are a total of 4,097 SMC members operating across the 467 GATE-GEC schools (an average of 8.8). The project set-up 200 VSLA groups with approximately 25 members per group – these are mixture of GATE GEC cohort families, and non-GATE GEC families. The groups are provided advice and guidance on setting up groups, ongoing on-going support ensuring the groups run effectively, and have access to resource and tools to support them in this activity.

- Tables 7.3 to 7.6 provide different ways of defining and identifying the project's target groups. They each refer to the same total number of direct beneficiary girls, but use different definitions and categories. The numbers in the first two rows should refer to the status at the start of the project, e.g.

project worked with 500 out of school girls at the start of GEC-T (whose status may have changed over time to in school).

- The last row can only be populated if survey or learning data was collected at endline. Again the total number of girls in the last row of the tables should be the same – these are just different ways of identifying and describing the girls included in the sample.

Table 7.3: Target groups - by school

School Age	Project definition of target group (Tick where appropriate)	Number targeted through project interventions	Sample size of target group at endline
Lower primary (P1-P3)	✔	790	
Upper primary (P4-P6)	✔	1828	
Lower secondary (JSS1-JSS3)	✔	8394	
Upper secondary			
Total:		11,012	

Table 7.4: Target groups - by age

Age Groups	Project definition of target group (Tick where appropriate)	Number targeted through project interventions	Sample size of target group at endline
Aged 6-8 (% aged 6-8)	✔	4% (403)	
Aged 9-11 (% aged 9-11)	✔	11% (1252)	
Aged 12-13 (% aged 12-13)	✔	19% (2042)	
Aged 14-15 (% aged 14-15)	✔	39% (4293)	
Aged 16-17 (%aged 16-17)	✔	24% (2592)	
Aged 18-19 (%aged 18-19)	✔	4% (394)	
Aged 20+ (% aged 20 and over)	✔	0.3% (28)	
Total:		**11,012**	

Table 7.5: Target groups - by sub group

Social Groups	Project definition of target group (Tick where appropriate)	Number targeted through project interventions	Sample size of target group at endline
Disabled girls (please disaggregate by domain of difficulty)	✔	1,652	
Orphaned girls	✔	**493 double orphans** **2684 single orphans**	
Pastoralist girls			
Child labourers			
Poor girls	✔	**11,012** We would contend that all GATE-GEC beneficiaries are from low-income and marginalised backgrounds. Furthermore, our cohort can come under a multiple number of these social groups and the total is not absolute for each.	
Other (please describe)			
Total:		**11,012**	

Table7.6: Target groups - by school status

Educational sub-groups	Project definition of target group (Tick where appropriate)	Number targeted through project interventions	Sample size of target group at endline
Out-of-school girls: have never attended school			
Out-of-school girls: have attended school, but dropped out			
Girls in-school	✔	**11,012**	
Total:		**11,012**	

Once the project has provided information as per the guidance box and populated the tables above, the External Evaluator must:

- **Review the numbers and methodology proposed by the project. Comment on the counting methodology, the assumptions that are made, the expected quality of the data underpinning the final numbers (e.g. project own monitoring data and government data).**
- **Was data collected, e.g. in the school survey, that enables to verify any of the assumptions made by the project in calculating the beneficiary numbers? Examples of such data would be: size and number of communities, size and number of schools, size and number of classrooms, size and numbers of girls clubs, number of disabled girls, number of girls at risk of dropping from school, dropouts in the last year etc. Present any of these data and compare them with the project monitoring data. You can use the sample data collected and presented in Annex 3 to elaborate.**
- **When the available evidence is considered, do the proposed beneficiary numbers look reliable?**

External Evaluator Response:

We have the reviewed the beneficiary numbers and methodology proposed by the project.

We understand that the project estimated the final number of beneficiaries and disaggregation by target subgroups based on data collected through population surveys (carried out as part of the 2020 reverification) and from school records. As the numbers are based on population surveys (as opposed to extrapolation from a sample), our assessment is that the numbers are a valid representation of the true beneficiary numbers.

In terms of reliability and accuracy, our review of the project monitoring data and methodology does not provide any evidence to suggest that there are instances of double counting. It also does not lead us to believe there were any major gaps in data coverage other than those relating to longitudinal tracking of direct learning beneficiaries. Table 7.1 suggests several reasons why children have been lost to project monitoring and participation. Our longitudinal analysis of the project's yearly reverification data between 2017-20 confirmed that there was a degree of attrition over the years. After accounting for the share of beneficiaries who were in JSS3 and moved to senior secondary school the following year, we found an attrition rate of 20 percent between the reverification data in 2017 and 2018, 18 percent between 2018 and 2019, and 27 percent between 2019 and 2020. At the same time, the reverification also captured 'new' occurrences of beneficiary IDs each year. Majority of these were likely to be beneficiaries who had not been reached by the previous reverification surveys. There were about 900 additional beneficiaries captured in the reverification data between 2017-19. In 2020, the project extended its reverification to include 7593 additional beneficiaries who had not previously been surveyed as part of the expanded cohort.

In regards to data quality, we believe that the data is fit for purpose and of reliable quality to the extent that reliable collection tools are in place to measure them accurately in country. In our analysis of the data, we found minor quality issues in the form of inconsistencies in certain variables (e.g. gender and grade) for a small proportion of observations, likely a result of survey

response error. We also found data entry errors for open-ended fields such as school name. These were largely resolvable through triangulation based on other variables and project data sources. No other major quality issues were observed.

P. External Evaluator's Inception Report

GATE-GEC Endline Evaluation Inception Report Final Version	GATE-GEC Endline Evaluation Inceptior

Q. Datasets

Note that the evaluation did not collect quantitative data therefore no datasets are included here.

Qualitative Data Submitted:

Consent scripts and form used for qualitative data collection	
Research with children	 GECS_Child_Adolescent_Information_Sh  GECS_Parent_Guardian_Information_She
Research with adults	 GECS_Adult_Information_Sheet_Conser
Consent form	 GECS_Consent_sheet_Final.pdf
Sample of two qualitative transcripts (selected at random)	 GATE GEC Transcript_38JS01.d  GATE GEC Transcript_35JSHT.d

The full set of transcripts will be shared with the Fund Manager separately.

R. Evaluator Declaration

External Evaluator declaration

Name of Project: Girls' Access to Education (GATE)

Name of External Evaluator: National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)

Contact Information for External Evaluator: k.kubacka@nfer.ac.uk

Names of all members of the evaluation team:

Ahmed Jawad Asghar, Regina Bash-Taqi, Maha Batran, Jessica Chu, Anusha Ghosh, Muallem Kamara, Panayiota Kastritis, Katarzyna Kubacka, Gustavo Lopes, Bintu Mansaray, Jenny Price. Maria Zuurmond

I, Katarzyna Kubacka, certify that the independent evaluation has been conducted in line with the Terms of Reference and other requirements received.

The following conditions apply to the data collection and analysis presented in the endline report:

- All qualitative data was collected independently by the EE and quantitative data was provided by the project for analysis (Initials: KK)
- The data analysis was conducted independently by the EE and provides a fair and consistent representation of progress (Initials: KK)
- Data quality assurance and verification mechanisms agreed in the terms of reference with the project have been soundly followed (Initials: KK)
- The recipient has not fundamentally altered or misrepresented the nature of the analysis originally provided by NFER (Initials: KK)
- All child protection protocols and guidance have been followed ((initials: KK)
- Data has been anonymised, treated confidentially and stored safely, in line with the GEC data protection and ethics protocols (Initials: KK)

Katarzyna Kubacka

NFER

13 August 2021

S. Project Management Response

Recommendation	Project Response
Expanding the evidence base around the effectiveness of distance learning and catch-up solutions introduced by GATE-GEC (such as MyBook), which could be used in emergency settings and as part of non-emergency learning settings	Training materials developed by the programme, such as for CPD, materials for the LA/ST component, and distance learning materials, align strongly with more widely used curricula and therefore can be taken up by future programming. Models, resources and principles of programme delivery for distance/home learning are to be adopted by TTCs, TSC, MBSSE and other NGOs, who expressed interest in expanding the evidence base, with a plan to utilize the training, materials and approach in both emergency and non-emergency settings.
Collating and mainstreaming the evidence and lessons learned on the LA/ST model across GEC-1 and GATE-GEC to strengthen the theory of change around how this model supports the development of a female teacher workforce and its impact on girls' education	Plan UK has commissioned an independent evaluation specifically for the LA/ST model across GEC-1 and GATE-GEC, and to better understand the impacts on the women and the impact on girls' education.
Conducting and reframing the analysis of the LA/ST needs as learners, as well as in terms of professional development needs, in order to build a model that supports learning for out-of-school girls	LA/STs play a unique role in the GATE-GEC project, as they are both direct beneficiaries of the programme (as the project helps them with learning, placements and material support and their narratives match those of the beneficiaries they serve) as well as project support actors who, in-turn, support teachers and beneficiaries in GATE-GEC schools. Part of the additional evaluation piece that is specific to this model with conduct and reframe the analysis of the LAs/STs needs as learners.
Monitoring the needs of children with disabilities, at the school, community and learner levels, for instance in terms of assistive devices, recognising that these needs can change over time	The project worked through multiple pathways to ensure children with disabilities accessed, actively participated in, and felt included in school and their classrooms; and worked to change perceptions around disability in communities through sensitization. The project worked to make schools more accessible by adapting the environment and ensuring children had the appropriate support for their disability. 600 assistive devices and treatments such as wheelchairs, glasses, hearing aids, etc. were provided to children which supported them to gain independence, improve their quality of life and social engagement, and improve their ability to access and better engage in their educational development. Monitoring of the needs of children with disabilities took place at all levels. Regarding changes in needs over time, the project team supported the training of families and community members on supporting the various needs of children with disabilities, including the maintenance of devices and model school

	infrastructure. However, we agree more monitoring and support could have been more strategic in its design and implementation.
The inclusion of study groups in future programming to strengthen inclusion in Sierra Leonean schools	As evident from children's self-reflections and in the Endline, study groups were a successful intervention for both formal academic improvement and the social and emotional development of participants, as the groups provided dedicated time for teaching literacy and numeracy skills and their environment encouraged children to ask questions, work in groups and freely express themselves, which increased self-confidence. Beneficiary reflections on why they enjoyed study groups included the ability to learn in a smaller class, the opportunity to ask questions and as a chance to practice what they had learned in their lessons. In addition, the role of the PVs, who were trained in inclusive and gender-sensitive pedagogical practices, came across as the key feature in the perception of beneficiaries. The Endline evaluation also concluded that study groups reached beneficiary subgroups; and that students felt the groups were an inclusive space where all beneficiaries were provided opportunities to participate. Educators highly valued the impact of study groups for marginalised children and expressed strong support for these to continue. Due to this evidence, we would agree on the inclusion of study groups in future programming to strengthen inclusion, and gender-responsive methologies, in Sierra Leonean schools.
The uptake of teacher training materials developed by GATE-GEC, capitalising on their alignment with the curriculum and its goals	GATE-GEC shared all resources and approaches with other educational stakeholders and the MBSSE. Training materials developed by the programme, such as for CPD, materials for the LA/ST component, and distance learning materials, align strongly with more widely used curricula and therefore can be taken up by future programming. MBSSE welcomed the support of the project to improve their training materials for SMCs and adapt them to BoGs. Through GATE-GEC's work with SMCs/BoGs, the government has also taken forward an initiative to ensure all schools in SL have a management committee or board. MBSSE have also asked GATE-GEC consortium partners to input in the forthcoming teacher training curriculum review process, and the project has contributed to the review of the Education Sector Plan. Plan Sierra Leone are also utilising GATE-GEC developed infrastructure and training materials, stakeholder relationships and programme designs within new funding proposals they are considering with potential funders, outlining how the learning

	from GATE-GEC can be drawn upon to support education programming for marginalised groups.
Scaling GATE-GEC's work around CPD in terms of subject-specific training as well as training for inclusion	The project developed and implemented CPD approaches directly to teachers and students on literacy and numeracy as well as protection, safeguarding and inclusion modules. These are available for use nation-wide. GATE-GEC also supported the Teacher Service Commission (responsible for recruitment and professional development of teachers) with their CPD framework and shared all resources available to scale this work at a national level, and not just for subject-specific training or inclusion, but also for gender-responsible pedogagy, learning assessment, positive discliple strategies and safeguarding/ protection. In the project's closure activities, MBSSE and TSC committed to using the project's CPD work to support comprehensive CPD for teachers.
Continuing to pilot the LA/ST model as a means to address the challenges of distance learning and expanding inclusion of women in the teaching workforce, particularly in remote areas	OU and Plan have started a project (funded by Dubai Cares) to support another cohort of 210 Learning Assistants in the Kailahun district of Sierra Leone. The learning from GATE-GEC is feeding into this new intervention, including inviting previous LAs/STs and Tutors as role models. Reflecting on the transformational impact of this component, we will ensure learning from this intervention continues to support the adaptation of the intervention within Sierra Leone, but also sits at the heart of our approaches when designing and developing new models internationally. The need to engage with the whole community and to manage the gendered social norms within a community when working to professionalise women will be an essential part of future programme design; as will the approach to transforming gendered norms through the role modelling that takes place when local female teachers qualify and teach within their whole community and the systemic change that has taken place within Sierra Leonne through the MBSSE, TSC and TCCs' commitment to wanting this model to shape their teacher training and recruitment strategies going forward.
Tracking and monitoring the participations who leave the programme to further understand transition and its barriers	The project design was to support children from Primary school to JSS3. As children's passed their JSS3 exam, they transitioned out of the programme and into the next stage of education (SSS), employment or other. Through our general monitoring activity, the project did receive feedback from children that had transitioned to SSS that the transition was challenging and resulted in further barriers to maintaining their education. The project did engage in an activity to track and monitor participants who left the programme to better

	understand their transition and its barriers, however, this activity was not consistent. We agree that to better support our beneficiaries, as well as to support future programming, it would have been useful to obtain additional data on the experiences and challenges once leaving the programme. For future programming, we would recommend a follow-up with all beneficiaries post-involvement.
A broader and whole-school approach to expand the range of beneficiaries and ensure a more systemic change approach to equity and inclusion of vulnerable youth, including out of school children in future interventions	The project trained Programme Volunteers and Head Teachers in Continuous Professional Development covering subject-specific training in literacy and numeracy, gender and socially inclusive and child-centred pedagogic practices, classroom and behaviour management, learner differentiation, monitoring and assessment, safeguarding and child protection; with additional training and mentoring for HTs, Boards of Governors and School Management Committees on school improvement strategies, staff mentoring and support, policy development and national legislative requirements. This approach to whole school engagement strengthened the skills of teachers and leadership teams within GATE schools. The development of Learning Circles (regular meetings between school clusters of HTs and classroom teachers to regularly share their training, identify and respond to curriculum and policy development, share challenges and find collective solutions) is also a strong legacy of the project - with the development of teachers' professional skills sets and models of staff support and mentoring – which has been embedded in the school's approach and will continue after the project closes. Although the project was originally designed to follow a specific cohort of children, the project did expand its range of beneficiaries - although the beneficiaries were children already within schools and did not include out of school children.
Continually monitoring and addressing the persistent financial barriers to learning, which have been demonstrated to be an on-going challenge to learners' school attendance, retention and transition as part of future interventions	The Baseline, Midline and Endline all highlighted that poverty continuds to be a significant issue across the cohort and lack of food and hunger is a key barrier. The Endline noted food availability and hunger continued to be a principle challenge to regular attendance and participation. Over half of the beneficiaries, both before (61%) and after (52%) the pandemic, felt that the lack of food in study groups was the aspect that they enjoyed least. This, when considered together with the Midline evaluation finding that a number of participants identified hunger and lack of food as a key barrier to attendance, highlights that hunger remained an ongoing issue. Study groups extend the school day for participants, which could

	exacerbate the feelings of hunger and impact concentration levels during sessions. The Endline noted that more efforts were needed to target hunger as a barrier to learning, including through cross-sectoral collaboration, highlighting that hunger is an issue beyond just the scope of education, its consequences are cross-cutting, thus we agree future programming needs to work across sectors and involve governmental stakeholders (e.g. with health, nutrition, infrastructure experts and government stakeholders) to address financial and other barriers to learning.
Taking forward and emphasising the lessons learned from strengthening community engagement in safeguarding and well-being during COVID-19 to national and international stakeholders	Community engagement has long been recognised as essential to removing barriers and enabling successful education programming and is widely accepted as best practice. Community engagement leads to locally generated interventions that are relevant and accepted, it creates accountability and creates local ownership which ensures sustainability. The project worked in schools and in communities to create positive learning outcomes for girls through interventions targeting teachers/Head Teachers with structured pedagogies and capacity building, and parents/caregivers through community engagement, awareness-raising, sensitisation, and mobilisation. Utilisation and mobilisation of communities as a rights-based tool supported the project's education initiatives, both before and during Covid-19, and enabled long-term sustainable development through the creation of community champions and role-models. The community engagement model developed by GATE-GEC, and adapted during the Covid-19 pandemic, has a proved track record in addressing important objectives to support girls' learning. This key aspect of our programming, in addition to the evidence, was shared with MBSSE, TSC and others to support future initiatives to support girls' education. Safeguarding processes, trainings and activities were enhanced in recognition of the potential effects of Covid-19 on student wellbeing, drawing on many lessons learned from Ebola. The positive work the project undertook pre-Covid-19 to meaningfully engage communities, build their trust and support safer communities and schools was reflected in our successful 'back-to-school and safe re-opening of schools' campaign where the project saw 99% of children return to school after the extended 6-month school closures, translating to 9,049 marginalised children returning to education. On reflection, we learned that our strong community

	networks and relationships, our measures for keeping in touch with children during school closures and our assurances of school safety and protection when schools opened after Covid were successful in engaging families in the return to school. Children's safety and protection turned out to be the major driving force in the return to school, with parents noting GATE-GEC's work in making schools safer and more inclusive through score-carding action plans, as well as our support and monitoring of schools to ensure Covid-19 prevention measures were in place and adhered to, were critical aspects of their decision to send their children back to school. In schools visited near project closure, school personnel had appointed their own safeguarding focal points and developed means of keeping children safe in schools, such as local protection and safeguarding monitoring and reporting pathways and sensitisation of community members on child safeguarding. For future programming, emphasis should continue to be paid on children's protection, safety and establishing community relationships to support safe environments, alongside interventions for overcoming the barriers such as social protection commodities. We embedded our practices into MBSSE and CPD frameworks to support continued work at the national level.
Investing in capacity building and the development of tools that can capture learning progress and teaching quality in a way that can also contribute to the evidence base of national approaches to learning measurement. These can include development of comprehensive and diverse tools to such as project-specific classroom observation methods, comprehensive and formative assessment methods, methods that capture localised understandings of socio-emotional learning, and training and coaching systems to make sure educators can feel confident using these. By considering the use of assessment materials beyond the use of the project monitoring and evaluation, this can contribute to wider and more sustainable systemic learning	Any future model needs to work on the development/improvement of systemic national approaches to in-school methods of learner assessment and national examination. A credible route going forward would be to ensure that any learning progress assessments applied within projects are sustainable, nationally consistent school centred models that any country specific projects can use as THE method of learner measurement, rather than devising external evaluative methods for projects which don't support the sustainable development of in-country policy and practice. This would apply to learner progress assessment or socio-emotional development assessment. Gender transformation is a tangible list of intersectional interventions. Models to enact the most systemic change need to co-produce with education, social welfare and finance ministerial key stakeholders and other key national actors, professional bodies and providers. Projects must be shaped through a co-produced relationship of mutuality between stakeholders and project recipients at a local, district and national level.

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