LESSONS from the field

MARCH 2019

Leaving No One Behind: The importance of good data processes to reduce school drop out

In 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by the 193 member states of the UN General Assembly. It pledged that through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) *"no one will be left behind"*. In fact, it goes further to say the signatories are pledging to *"reach the furthest behind first"*. Member states committed to taking active steps to eradicate extreme poverty, curb inequalities, confront discrimination and fast-track progress for the furthest behind.

Quality education for all is recognised to be a vital part of addressing many of these inequalities. The Leave No One Behind promise is reiterated through many other resolutions at global, regional and national level policy statements. DFID's UK Aid Strategy announced that, "the government will lead the world in implementing the Leave No One Behind Promise".

It is well documented that children from marginalised backgrounds, including ethnic minorities, migrants, those impacted by conflict or with disabilities, face the greatest difficulties in accessing and staying in education.[1] DFID's Education Policy, Disability Inclusion Strategy and Strategic Vision for Gender Equality highlight the importance of focussing on the hardest to reach girls, including those with disabilities or affected by crises - and the need for data disaggregated by sex, age, disability status and geography.

This report, which is based on information and insights drawn from the work of Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) projects, looks at the first step of collecting the right information through project-led monitoring mechanisms to understand who, where and why girls are being left behind from education. It shares examples of good practice in data collection

and how this information is being used to adapt projects to ensure that education programmes are working for all. It is focussed on internal project monitoring cycles, rather than external evaluation, as this is regular and ongoing, covers all project beneficiaries and has a much quicker feedback loop. This means data can be used more effectively to try to keep girls in school and to ensure they have the best chances to achieve an education.

"Recall the face of the poorest and weakest person you have seen and ask if the step you contemplate is going to be any use to them."
Mahatma Gandhi

[1] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Statistics Division, "United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016." Available from https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2016/

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Why disaggregated data matters

The SDGs recognise that to deliver on the Leave No One Behind promise, many developing countries need to significantly improve the availability of timely and reliable data.[2] The development sector has long grappled with the issue that in many of the areas thought to host 'the most marginalised', appropriate data either does not exist, or it misses the people who are hardest to reach.

Whilst official national statistics provide reliable aggregate national data, they often have limited use for analysis of inequality as they show whole country data which can mask regional and socio-economic differences. Within education, the World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) have responded to this challenge by disaggregating all of their data sets by gender, location, region, wealth, ethnicity and religion, which gives a much more nuanced understanding of education indicators. For example, the WIDE database is able to illustrate the gender and regional variations in the data for Afghanistan of people who have had less than four years of education. The national average would have shown that 55% of the population had less than four years of education. However, crucially, this masks the fact that 73% are female and 37% are male.

In 2017 DFID's Data Disaggregation Action Plan committed DFID to include appropriate data collection mechanisms through all programmes to understand who, where and why people have been left behind by other development initiatives. DFID is also an anchor member of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data and played a key role in setting up the Inclusive Data Charter during the Global Disability summit in 2018. DFID's subsequent Inclusive Data Charter Action Plan (2019) builds upon the earlier data disaggregation plan. It lays out the actions and next steps DFID will take over the short, medium and longer term to better understand the situation of the poorest and most marginalised and make better decisions that positively impact all people's lives.

The mandate of the GEC is to reach the most marginalised girls. This means that projects need to capture appropriate data which unpicks and explains the many reasons why a girl might be excluded from school. For example, a girl who has lost both parents due to conflict, has migrated to another country and does not speak the language will have very different barriers to access and experience of education than a girl who is supported by both parents but has a visual impairment. However, a blunt data set could include both of these girls under the 'marginalised' category. The disaggregation of data is vital in responding to these girls' needs.

Leaving no girl behind: how the GEC is using disaggregated and real-time data processes[3]

In the first phase of GEC, project evaluations collected comprehensive social and demographic data on girls through household surveys. Attendance registers from a sample of schools were used and cross checked for reliability. However, projects were often limited in their ability to connect these two sets of data to help understand who may have been dropping out of school and why. Capturing levels of attendance or drop out through evaluation points, which took place at minimum 12 month intervals, meant that the time between data collection and response was often too long to be able to respond effectively to girls who were at risk of dropping out permanently.

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[2] SDG Target 17.18: By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts

[3] All GEC projects and their evaluators adhere to ethical principles across their monitoring and evaluation frameworks including appropriate protocols on data protection, collection, storage and use of personal data.

	EVALUATION DATA	MONITORING DATA
How often is data collected?	Every 12-18 months	Fortnightly/ monthly
Who is tracked?	Sample of beneficiary population	Usually the whole beneficiary population
What kind of attendance data is collected?	School or other education setting registers. Girl's self reported and parental reported attendance	School or club attendance
How do projects respond to the data?	Analysis may lead to project level adaptations e.g. disability review	Project is able respond to individual and project level patterns of poor attendance. e.g. individual reintegration plans, or greater emphasis on parental engagement
What other data is connected to attendance for analysis	Household surveys which include social and demographic data are linked to learning, transition and attendance	Some data sets include sex, class and location data. Others include much more comprehensive demographic and learning data alongside the attendance data

Through signing up to the GEC's Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) standards, all GEC projects have now committed to creating a 'retention strategy' through their monitoring systems that enables them to understand patterns of drop out with a frequency that should enable them to respond and re-engage girls before they have dropped out of education for too long. The level of data collected within these systems vary. Some are detailed enough to include disability status and other demographic data to allow project analysis of potential characteristics that are more likely to be associated with drop out. Others have broader approaches that collect fewer details on characteristics, but still have a methodology that can review patterns of absences and so encourage engagement and response at a local level.

A lesson from the GEC baseline evaluation revealed how the mandatory use of disability disaggregated data prompted an unprecedented response by projects to review how their interventions could be more inclusive to girls with disabilities. Using the Washington Group Questions allowed projects to adopt a standardised, robust, tested approach to collecting prevalence data on disability *(see Lessons from the Field – Disability inclusion in the GEC)*.

A key part of this cycle is ensuring that the data is fed back into project management reviews and decision making. The GEC encourages an adaptive project management approach (see *Lessons from the Field – Learning by doing: Adaptive Management and the GEC*). This means information gathered from these processes can be fed into project adaptations or new interventions. Reviews are held formally on a 6-monthly basis to provide an environment where adaptations can be made.

GEC projects are very aware of the push-pull dynamics that can influence attendance. Considerable effort has gone into addressing the social barriers – for example, to engage parents to value their daughters' education more and provide practical solutions to reduce household chores, or to delay marriage until after they have completed their education. The perceived quality of the education provision and safety of school environment also plays a significant part in parental support to girls attending schools. GEC projects therefore also focus on the school environment to create a 'pull' factor, convincing parents of the value of attending and assuring of the safety of their daughters as they continue to engage with school.

Tracking attendance and retention: using 'better' data and using it better

Three projects, highlighted below, recently shared their retention strategies and explained how they are using data to enable them to track attendance and respond promptly when girls are starting to drop out of education.

Approach

Although Save the Children are in the early stages of implementing their retention model in DRC, they have designed a process which will allow schools to track and respond to drop out, and will continue to refine it as it is rolled out. Teachers complete absence registers that are photographed or scanned by field staff. Open-source software uses that data to prepare a report, disaggregating absences with the name, age and sex of children. These reports are fed back to the school every two weeks by field officers so schools can take action. Schools and parents are encouraged to set levels of absence that should be followed up (e.g. five consecutive days or eight days per month) and design appropriate responses to help prevent further absences or drop out.

At a project level, analysis of this data is able to demonstrate whether there are patterns of absence by school, season, area and between girls and boys. The data added by field officers is also used in project meetings, held each term, to review whether project interventions are responding to issues that are arising.

Save the Children will also be looking for positive examples where absences are particularly low. Methods for maintaining good attendance will be shared with other schools and the ministry.

"I wanted to continue with my education, I decided to get back to school and I'm glad that my life aspiration of getting to university will be met."
Mother & catch up class attendee supported by EDT project.

Approach

Ed Dev Trust have a pre-emptive and reactive attendance monitoring system. The project conducts a vulnerability assessment for all 72,000 project girls. This assessment identifies girls who are 'at risk' of drop out due to factors such as being over-age for their grade, having some kind of disability and/or being young mothers. These girls receive additional support through mentors, counselling and psychosocial support, cash transfers and peer-to-peer support. They are also contacted regularly by the Community Health Volunteers (CHVs).

Ed Dev Trust use a detailed monitoring database which collects data on girls' characteristics, attendance and test scores. CHVs are alerted to unexplained absences of three days or more through SMS messages and are able to follow up at a household level to track reasons for absence. These reasons are fed back to schools, parents and community leaders to discuss reasons for absence and appropriate responses monthly. A broader project level analysis across school and wider regions by CHVs and Ed Dev Trust project staff is held on a quarterly basis.

Insights and adaptation

Recent initiatives have included influencing Samburu county chiefs to shift one of the two market days to the weekend to reduce pressure on children who miss school to help families sell produce. Similarly, the project sought to reduce absence relating to communal burial ceremonies in Kilifi, which were shown to have an impact on school attendance. These often involve the whole community in events for up to two weeks and results in significant absence from school for young people. An increased rate of pregnancies is often reported after these social events. Engagement with the Kilifi county commissioner's office has gained their support to ban children from missing school. These cultural practises are deeply rooted and have not stopped completely, however, this is a key starting point to build supportive communities who prioritise education for their children.

Approach

Mercy Corps Nepal have a comprehensive monitoring database that connects school or project activity attendance to individual profile data. Spot checks for formal classes are carried out bi-annually by the community mobilisers to assure the reliability of registers. Accuracy of school registers and attendance is incentivised through a cash grant scheme to invest in school infrastructure.

The monitoring system on girls' club attendance has tighter feedback loop to allow for project visibility of poor attendance that could indicate a risk of drop out from school. For 'in-school girls', unexplained absence from girls clubs after one week triggers an action for teachers to inform the projects' social mobilisers. For 'out-of-school' girls, a response is usually triggered after an absence of over two weeks, as activities are less frequent.

At an individual level, community mobilisers will follow up with girls first, then parents to understand the reason for absence. If parents are not aware of the absence, the girls are encouraged to go back to school discretely. This is not a common scenario, however, as girls whereabouts are usually restricted/known. Information about a girl's situation is never disclosed without her consent.

In instances where re-enrolment is possible, individualised plans are made with the family to encourage re-engagement with the school or appropriate project activities and recorded in the database for the broader analysis across the project.

Insights and adaptation

Project staff have found the monitoring data invaluable, particularly when it is used alongside the baseline evaluation data on parental attitudes to education. The baseline analysis showed that, although parents were supportive of education for their daughters, the monitoring data revealed that this was not translating into practical support. As a result, the project adapted its approach to allow community mobilisers to have more time to talk to families about ways to reduce girls' domestic workload so they are able to attend school and complete homework.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED ON USING DATA TO LEAVE NO GIRL BEHIND

Key features of good processes were:

- A way to connect absence records with relevant demographic data- e.g. sex/ age, to understand who and where girls are dropping out
- Feedback loops that are fast enough to respond to poor attendance patterns before this becomes too entrenched
- Contextual definition of what counts as 'at risk of drop out' and what triggers a response
- Individualised response that follows up with girls and families to understand the reasons for poor attendance
- Project-level analysis that can reveal and respond to broader school or community patterns of drop out
- Engaging schools, community leaders and parents in identifying solutions to prevent drop out
- Appropriate digital data platforms that allow analysis of attendance patterns

Lessons learned on data processes:

- Significant time (6-12 months) is required to design, test, set up, and train people in system use.
- Teachers must be meaningfully engaged and motivated as these systems rely on accurate registers that they complete.
- Do not fall into the trap of data collection overload!

Forward look

Within the GEC programme, DFID have launched the Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) window of funding specifically to support the hardest to reach girls who have achieved little if any meaningful education by the age of 10. These projects will also have carefully designed monitoring and evaluation systems that allow a detailed analysis of who the girls are and how the project is able to track drop out.

GEC projects will share further learning on:

- The push-pull factors that influence attendance. How the provision of quality education incentivises attendance alongside provision of specific support to girls, families and wider stakeholders to address barriers faced by girls.
- The role of teachers within analysis of attendance. Looking at teachers' attitude and behaviour towards children with a poor history of attendance, and the impact of teacher absence on patterns of pupil attendance.

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- The link between retention strategies and transition- projects will be looking closely at how retention strategies can support girls as they transition through significant phases of their education.
- How locally-owned systems can be sustained beyond project involvement
- How these systems connect with and support government led information systems for education.
- The GEC will continue to collect examples of locally adapted monitoring mechanisms that provide effective, rapid action to identify girls at risk and taking affirmative, gender sensitive actions to address issues as they emerge.

DFID has high aspirations for programes they fund to leave no one behind. This paper illustrates how the GEC is stepping up to this challenge through its tracking of attendance through monitoring processes. The projects showcased in this paper have created mechanisms that have feedback loops that allow projects to be responsive to potential drop out. It requires considerable effort to have the monitoring systems with sufficient detail to tune into who and why girls may be dropping out of ecucation initiatives. However, early results are showing that these systems are beginning to deliver on the promise to "Leave No One Behind" from education.

Girls' Education Challenge

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