

Final reflections

Achievements and lessons learned

Building Girls to Live, Learn, Laugh
and 'SCHIP' in Strong, Creative,
Holistic, Inclusive, Protective,
Quality Education

UGANDA

APRIL 2017 – FEBRUARY 2024



Girls'
Education
Challenge



VIVA
together for children

CRANE
Children at Risk Action Network

“Teachers now use differentiated teaching methods to cater for all learners and their learning needs. They use various methods of teaching, the learning process becomes interactive and enjoyable, thus a progress in quality teaching. They can now plan lessons, evaluate and give feedback to learners.”

Headteacher



● Uganda

What did the project do?

Between 2017 and 2023 Viva and CRANE worked with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) through the Girls' Education Challenge to help girls improve their literacy and numeracy, life skills and safety. The project also focused on improving school governance and management and making schools safer and more inclusive.

The project supported 10,923 marginalised girls and their families through Creative Learning Centres (CLCs) and other initiatives, including mother-daughter and peer clubs. Life skills, career development and vocational training were provided, as well as catch-up classes and learning assistance in literacy and numeracy. The project trained Creative Learning Centre teachers and Learning Support Teachers who were placed at schools to support girls' learning when they transitioned from the CLC to formal schools. The project also focused on strengthening links between the school, community and local government to keep children safe. The project worked closely the Ministry of Education on developing a school monitoring tool, a Learning Needs Identification Tool, and an Education and Resource Assessment Centre run in partnership with Kampala Capital City Authority.

The project implemented the following activities:

1. Running CLCs to teach out-of-school girls about numeracy, literacy and life skills through engaging, participatory and creative teaching methods going beyond the traditional chalk-and-talk teaching style.
2. Providing teacher training and lesson observations for teachers to improve their teaching practice.
3. Introducing and using a Learning Needs Identification Tool to assess children's learning needs early on, ensure proper support is given to children with disabilities, and avoid potential school dropouts.
4. Training girls as peer leaders in child rights and advocacy so they could return to their schools and establish Safe Clubs where girls could address local issues.
5. Establishing Child Protection Committees and providing safeguarding training on safeguarding awareness, child development and psychology in case management to police, judges and public prosecutors.
6. Supporting the establishment and management of an Education and Assessment Resource Centre to help children with additional needs.
7. Creating Village Savings and Loans Associations (VLSAs) to allow parents to access low-cost business loans which increased their household incomes.
8. Implementing the Viva Quality Improvement Scheme (QIS) training programme to build the capacity of school management and improve child protection, governance, financial accountability, planning, and child well-being.
9. Running a mobile library that visited schools to increase access to reading materials.
10. Providing IT training in various ways, including a mobile IT library and resource rooms in some CLCs.
11. Facilitating community mentors to give family members and girls psychosocial support through regular home visits.

“Working with CRANE allows me to help my mum ensure my siblings remain in school. If it wasn't for CRANE, I wouldn't have become the teacher. This has also helped me learn better ways of dealing with children with different learning abilities and working in an environment with talented people.”

Girl



How did the project adapt during COVID-19?

Uganda had the longest school closures in the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. A report from University College London¹ sums up the impact as “deep and uneven” and estimated that 15 million pupils did not attend school for 83 weeks in Uganda.

Statistical models predict a learning deficit of 2.8 years in Uganda because of the time lost through COVID-related closures. As the GEC report “*Emerging Findings*” suggests, 13 million children in Uganda were out of school due to the impacts of lockdowns and school closures. The Endline found significant differences between the impacts of lockdown in rural and urban areas. Those living in urban areas seemed to have fewer options when markets were closed or their workplaces shut down. Landlords insisted on being paid rent, and people moved to cheaper housing or rural areas to lodge with relatives.

The project responded to the pandemic and subsequent school closures by introducing remote learning through mobile phones for girls and keeping in contact with parents and caregivers. The project also worked with the National Curriculum Development Centre to create and distribute teaching and learning packs for girls to use at home during school closures. Teachers also met girls in small groups when lockdown restrictions allowed. The project supported rescue, medical refills, and food relief for children and their families during the lockdown.

Needs in the community were sometimes desperate, especially for children with disabilities whose parents could not access hospitals and medication. Some children died because of the restrictions. CRANE quickly got itself recognised as an emergency service provider and was able to reach children where they were to get them the emergency help they needed and to deliver educational resources.

A total of 1,475 street-connected children were rescued from the streets of Kampala during and after COVID-19. The project also worked on getting girls back to school, and 97% of girls reported back after the COVID-19 lockdown of schools ended. Only 2% of the girls supported by the project got pregnant in those two years, compared to 25% of girls nationally.



¹ [Uganda closed schools for two years – the impact is deep and uneven](#) (theconversation.com). See also [Opinion: Uganda's schools were closed for two years during COVID, now they face more closures](#) | UCL News – UCL – University College London.



“The project made me into a good listener and flexible and self-driven teacher. It boosted my esteem. I always have my learners at heart and look forward to seeing them thrive.”

Teacher

What did the project achieve?

Improved learning for girls. The Endline showed that, across all grades, girls' scores exceeded benchmark targets by an average of 16 points in literacy and 12 points in numeracy (i.e., girls are learning much faster than anticipated, four or five times faster than predicted over the life of the project). This is attributed to activities such as better-managed schools, better quality inclusive teaching, financial support, informal learning through Creative Learning Centres, awareness-raising on education, family relationships and safeguarding.

Improved well-being through working with mentors. Mentors played a key role in identifying and supporting girls to transition to the next level of education or employment. Mentors lived in the communities where project schools were located and engaged with the girls and their families through visits and offering psychosocial support. They also worked towards ensuring girls were safe.

Improved transition through savings groups. One critical factor for helping girls to continue transitioning through education was supporting girls and their parents to tackle the financial barriers they face to accessing education. The project helped to establish savings groups called Village Savings and Loans Associations (VLSAs), which were linked to schools. This linkage helped in negotiating phased payments of fees and enabled more support and accountability. The VSLAs allowed parents access to low-cost business loans, which helped them develop or start small businesses, thus increasing their household incomes and enabling them to look after and educate their children better. In total, 6,688 girls successfully transitioned back to school and through school, 1,412 went on to vocational and higher level training, and 2,823 were in meaningful work by the end of the project.

Improved opportunities for children with disabilities by developing the Learning Needs Identification Tool. The Learning Needs Identification Tool supported teachers in assessing children's learning needs early on, ensuring proper support is given to children with disabilities, and avoiding potential school dropouts. This Tool has been adopted by the Special Needs and Inclusive Education department at the Ministry of Education and Sports and is now being rolled out nationally through pre-and in-service teacher training. The project worked with the Kampala Capital City Authority to open and manage the first National Education Assessment and Resource Centre. This means that children can now get a formal assessment from specialists, and those who have formerly been excluded from national exams are now able to get the assistance they need to sit exams.

Improved safety for children by delivering training on safeguarding and child protection. The project provided training on safeguarding and case management at four levels: families, schools, communities and systems. All 42 schools and communities now have functioning child protection committees. The project also delivered training to the Public Prosecution Office on safeguarding awareness, child development and psychology in case management. Training was also delivered to family court magistrates and judges in Kampala. Assistance was given to the prosecution services to set up 14 child-friendly rooms across Uganda where a child's testimony can be given without the intimidation of the courts. The Prosecution Office is now funding these rooms from their own budget, with CRANE implementing the set-up of the rooms. The project also provided anatomically correct dolls to the prosecutors to help children report what happened to them. The introduction of these dolls has seen an increase in conviction rates from 51% to 80%.

“I have confidence in myself. They counsel me on how not to get pregnant again. I also feel I can go back to school and finish my studies. I now believe I can return to school and complete my education. In three years' time, I hope to have a business selling detergents, paying my school fees and completing my education.”

Girl



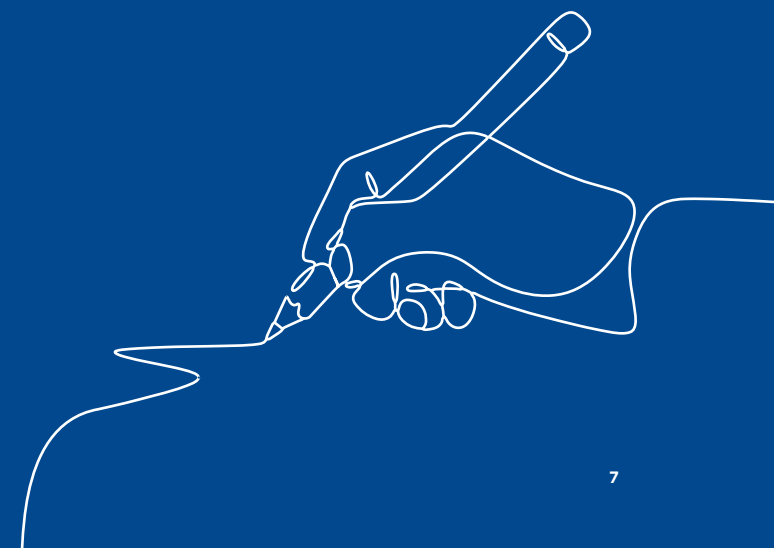
Strengthened existing social networks. The project operated through existing social networks to root the work into communities and education systems. This allowed the project to strengthen their presence and capacity to advocate at a national level and ensure sustainability beyond project closure. CRANE has brought significant value through its solid network, which includes over 154 Ugandan organisations, including schools, civil organisations, NGOs, and churches.

Improved school governance through the Viva Quality Improvement System (QIS). Viva developed an organisational capacity-strengthening programme called the QIS, and this was adapted for use in school management. The QIS takes schools through a journey of improvement in child protection, people care, governance, financial accountability, planning, and child well-being. The process normally takes two to three years to achieve internationally agreed standards. A part of the monitoring strategy used for QIS was to take the District Education Officers and School Inspectors to assess the schools. They found that the schools stood out from others in terms of quality. This led to the development of a new School Monitoring Tool, which is now on a journey to being adopted by the Ministry of Education and Sports. It is now being used by District Education Officers to guide schools in making their improvement plans.

// SANDRA' STORY

Sandra is 18 years old and had dropped out of school because her mother could not afford to pay her school fees. In 2014, she joined a Creative Learning Centre and learnt how to read and write. Sandra is not from Kampala, so she knew neither English nor Luganda when she joined. Knowing that Sandra could not understand much of what was going on, the teachers linked her to a Congolese classmate who could speak with her and help her with the basics of reading. From there, Sandra never looked back. She is now back into formal schooling after joining a CLC and having a chance to learn in a safe and suitable environment.

Aside from the literacy and numeracy lessons, one of the highlights for Sandra was developing practical skills, like soap-making. She noted, “During the school holidays, we were taught how to sew clothes, make books, soap, and skin creams. Making liquid soap was the most exciting activity because we could make liquid soap in the groups, and each member would share her idea. The following day, the teacher would give us a bottle to sell in the neighbourhood in our community, and I sold each bottle at 1,000 UGX (24p). This helped me save some money. Sometimes, I used the money for buying sanitary pads, clothes and food”. She even taught her mother how to make soap. Sandra said her plan is to set up her own business and sell soaps and skin creams. After the training and the initial business experience, she felt more confident about her capacities and she had high hopes for herself and her family.



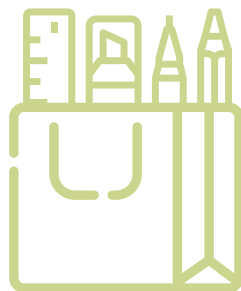
The project in numbers



Number of
girls reached
10,923

Number of girls with
disabilities reached

297



Number of textbooks
and learning materials
distributed

34,812



Number of teachers trained

91

Number of classrooms and learning spaces
constructed or renovated: **48**

Number of child-friendly justice sector
rooms built: **14**

To what extent did the project deliver value for money?

According to the assessment done by the GEC Fund Manager, this project offered very good value for money.

The project had good results, especially around parents' financial planning, effective school management and safer learning. Project activities were relevant. The project developed strong learning assessment centres, identification tools, quality improvement systems and M&E.

// SHARON'S STORY

After both of her parents died, Sharon stayed with her grandmother. It was during that time that Sharon joined one of the Creative Learning Centres. Whilst there, Sharon was taught numeracy, literacy and how to generate household income.

Sharon then worked with her grandmother to implement the skills she had learned and saved money to support her in taking national exams. She went on to enrol in a Modern Nursery Teachers' Institute to undertake an Early Childhood Development course for two years. She was recognised for her exceptional teaching skills and took a job as a teacher in one of CRANE's partner schools. In the recent elections, Sharon contested for the position of Youth Councillor – and won. She is passionate about empowering other girls with self-confidence to make the most of the opportunities they have and to achieve their dreams, just like she has done.

What did the project learn?

Ensure child and community participation. Children and communities know what they want, but they may not know how to get it. It takes time and different strategies to enable them to identify their best fit. The project had quarterly and monthly feedback from the girls, their parents, the teachers and the mentors, and this helped tailor activities.

Supporting continuous learning. A learning institution is one that grows. The project ran quarterly capacity-building initiatives for all staff and key leaders delivering the project. This enabled a continuum of fresh ideas and allowed flexibility to achieve desired goals.

Providing quality teacher training. Efforts should be made to continuously encourage teachers to provide an enabling environment for all girls regardless of their ability to learn. Continuous evaluation of teachers' competence and areas of development can lead to better learning outcomes for girls. The use of lesson observations, regular training, and the creation of a monitoring tool were key to building a pool of teachers who will be effective in the classroom far beyond the life of the project.

Working with local mentors. Working with mentors who are residents of the communities makes it easier to find girls who are out of school or who are about to fall out of school. Mentors who are not residents of a particular community tend to easily connect with the Local Council leaders.

Identifying learning needs. It is important to invest in and support early access to education for all children by prioritising early identification and assessment of learning needs upon school entry. There should be a collaboration between the health and education sectors to ensure this happens. Rolling out the National Learning Needs Identification Tool to all schools across the country is critical.

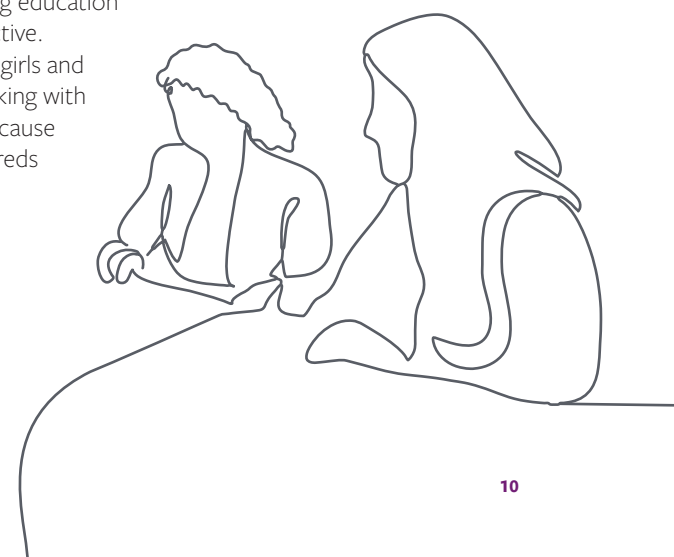
Reaching the most marginalised children. Provide alternatives to re-accessing education for all marginalised children, especially children with disabilities who have fallen out of mainstream school or invest in alternative transition pathways. For instance, children with severe intellectual disabilities who have transitioned to home learning should be supported to access assessment and certification for their progress in learning.

Keeping girls safe. Safeguarding initiatives should take centre stage in all education programming. It is important to ensure that continuous training on safeguarding is provided at school and community level. It is also important to work with government officials to ensure policies and procedures are accessible and operationalised. Education projects and schools need to be encouraged to screen those working with children properly. Creating Safeguarding Committees, establishing Safe Rooms, and training duty bearers is essential to ensure child protection incidents are addressed properly and legally.

Delivering sustained results with value for money. Delivering education interventions within a local network setting is more cost-effective. Investing in training local mentors who then reached multiple girls and families had a multiplier effect, which was cost-effective. Working with the government was the most cost-effective strategy of all because the tools and resources created could positively impact hundreds of thousands of children if rolled out across the Ministry of Education.

“Right now, both children and parents are custodians of children’s safety; they will speak up if there is any form of child abuse in the community because of the sensitisation offered to them through the project.”

Mentor



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Find out more: www.viva.org | www.girlseducationchallenge.org

The Girls' Education Challenge is a project funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ("FCDO"), formerly the Department for International Development ("DFID"), and is led and administered by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP and Mott MacDonald (trading as Cambridge Education), working with organisations including Nathan Associates London Ltd. and Social Development Direct Ltd. This publication has been prepared for general guidance on matters of interest only and does not constitute professional advice. You should not act upon the information contained in this publication without obtaining specific professional advice. No representation or warranty (express or implied) is given as to the accuracy or completeness of the information contained in this publication, and, to the extent permitted by law, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP and the other entities managing the Girls' Education Challenge (as listed above) do not accept or assume any liability, responsibility or duty of care for any consequences of you or anyone else acting, or refraining to act, in reliance on the information contained in this publication or for any decision based on it.

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