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.

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Endline Evaluation

GEC-T

REUSSITE ET EPANOUISSEMENT VIA L'APPRENTISSAGE ET L'INSERTION AU SYSTEME EDUCATIF (REALISE)

IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

December 2021

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By

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For

Save the Children   **World Vision**

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Executive Summary

Background and COVID-19 Context

Education is recognized as a fundamental right in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).[1] The formal education system is based out of four ministries: the Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Technical Education (EPST), the Ministry of Technical and Professional Arts (METP), the Ministry of Higher Education and University (MESU) and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MAS).[2] The majority of the school system is made up of private institutions run by religious institutions or other NGOs.

Despite the recognition of the right to an education, many Congolese children do not have access to education. Children's participation in school has increased by more than 50% since 2011 but the net intake rate in the first grade is only 69% of the official school-age population and only 55% of children who start first grade will still be attending school by sixth grade.[3]

While both boys and girls are not able to access education in the DRC, access is far worse for girls. In 2021, the DRC is ranked 169 out of 180 countries in Save the Children's End of Childhood Index, with high rates of child marriage and teenage pregnancy.[4]

What did the project do?

Réussite et Epanouissement Via L'Apprentissage et L'Insertion au Systeme Educatif (REALISE) is the FCDO-financed Girls' Education Challenge project implemented in DRC by Save the Children in consortium with World Vision and IDS. It is a continuation of the Vas-y-fille (GEC-1) project and is focused on girls' learning, attendance, and transition in the DRC formal education system. REALISE targeted 60,000 girls across six different provinces through a host of interrelated interventions.

Ultimately, six project interventions have been selected for evaluation on the basis of their continuing relevance to beneficiaries and the fact that it is expected that there may have been measurable impacts as result of these interventions despite the many negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and school closure due to elections. The six interventions that will be evaluated are listed below, along with notes on the operational details of how these interventions were carried out, including adaptations that were made in light of the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. Teacher Professional Development (TPD)
2. Village Saving and Loans Associations / Groups (VSLAs)
3. Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) Clubs and Learning Clubs
4. Child Protection and Safeguarding (including training of CP focal points and RECOPE)
5. Bursaries for girls
6. Support for AEP Centres

Since March of 2020, the REALISE project implementation and evaluation has taken place in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic affected nearly every element of the project implementation and evaluation. The effects of the pandemic included school

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[1] Article 43, "DRC – Congo Constitution", *Constitution Net*, October 12, 2021, https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/DRC%20-%20Congo%20Constitution.pdf.

[2] MAS is in charge of non-formal education through AEPs for children and adults who have fallen too far behind in the traditional education system.

[3] UNESCO Institute for Statistics (uis.unesco.org). Data as of February 2020.

[4] Save the Children. Global Childhood Report 2021. https://www.savethechildren.org/content/dam/usa/reports/advocacy/2021-global-childhood-report.pdf?vanityurl=endofchildhood

closures, job and income loss (especially among women), rising food prices and food insecurity, and a major spike in reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence, which affected people throughout DRC.[5] Each of these negative effects of COVID-19 are important to note because they, individually and jointly, can be expected to lead to higher dropout rates from school, reductions in safety for women and girls, reductions in access to sexual and reproductive health support services, and increases in pregnancy among school-aged girls who are the primary, direct beneficiaries of REALISE.

How did the project adapt during COVID-19?

It is our expectation that the COVID-19 pandemic had the effect of heavily attenuating progress on most key project indicators or outcomes of interest. It may even be the case that there was negative progress toward the achievement of the outcomes that were likely to be most heavily affected by the pandemic, namely attendance and dropout rates. The findings reported below should be interpreted in light of these expectations and there will be cases in which the simple prevention of reversal progress should be interpreted as an important impact of the project and a major achievement, given expectations of substantial backsliding in attendance and a higher-than-normal likelihood of dropout due to pregnancy or marriage, family economic hardship, or fear about returning to school because of disease or violence.

To provide a brief timeline of the COVID-19 pandemic in DRC, we have provided a description of the key public health and education policy decisions made in the DRC during the pandemic below.

The COVID-19 epidemic in DRC was declared on March 10, 2020, with the first cases confirmed in Kinshasa. Since that time, the pandemic has spread to 23 of the 26 provinces. Testing services have remained extremely limited throughout the duration of the pandemic, and only confirmed cases have been reported. As of March 11, 2021, the country reported 29,573 confirmed cases, of which 26,108 recovered, and 752 confirmed deaths. Kinshasa remains the epicentre with 70% of all confirmed cases. Five out of the six REALISE provinces are currently affected by the pandemic: Haut Katanga (1,928 cases), Lualaba (897 cases), Ituri (294 cases), Tanganyika (19 cases), and Kasai Oriental (7 cases).[6] The COVID-19 vaccination campaign started on April 19 in Kinshasa—as of April 24, a total of 1,265 people have received their first dose.

The DRC government ordered schools to close on March 19th of 2020 to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As a result, students were unable to attend school and missed approximately six months of their ongoing school-year, during which classes would have normally ended in May, and exams would have been completed by the end of June.

The planned midline study for REALISE was cancelled and replaced with a mid-term assessment in agreement with the FM as it was recognized that a full, face-to-face midline could not be conducted in the midst of school closures and significant COVID-19 infection risk.

As a result of school closures, it is known that most cohort girls had limited learning opportunities from March through mid-October and again from January to mid-February. The government also issued a directive that no direct contact with children was permitted either through small groups or home visits by teachers or others, which further curtailed potential retention activities. Nonetheless, the REALISE project made a number of important adaptations (detailed in the MTR Plan) that were intended to contribute to learning retention while schools were closed. While schools were closed, the project maintained contact with

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[5] See, report from CASS, *The impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak response on women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.* Accessible at: https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/impacts-covid-19-outbreak-response-women-and-girls-democratic.

[6] See, REALISE Endline TORs.

girls through sessions with parents and caregivers, printed and distributed MHPSS guidance for parents and caregivers as well as home study workbooks for G6 and Learning Club students. TPD also continued during the school closures, and COVID-19 self-study modules were provided for teachers. Notwithstanding these adaptations, there may have been some loss of key reading and numeracy skills during this timeframe due to lack of practice.

Economic factors were important to both students and teachers in terms of their abilities to return to school, and so the policy of the MOE toward collecting school fees and paying teachers was highly relevant. In August 2020, ahead of the start of the new school year 2020/21, The MOE announced a revision of the school policy, the *Gratuité* de l'enseignment, which had been introduced in August 2019. Primary education would still be fee-free (without student fees), and teachers were to be paid by the MOE. On the other hand, the MOE stated that it would not pay "new" teachers who had been hired directly by secondary schools. This was a reversal of the announced policy of the MOE from 2019. Current MOE policy suggests that they intend to pay new teachers at primary level grade 1 to grade 6. However, secondary school teachers will now be paid by school fees that will be collected to cover teacher salaries. [7]

Save the Children and Forcier jointly assessed the COVID-19 situation in the DRC in September of 2020 and reached an agreement that the situation was sufficiently safe in certain provinces that it would allow for limited face-to-face data collection, provided that collection was carried out by REALISE MEL and project staff as part of their planned site-visits. A mid-term assessment was conducted in early October of 2020 in order to provide rapid access to information about barriers to returning to school so that Save the Children and partners could act quickly to reduce barriers in anticipation of the re-opening of schools in October.

The mid-term assessment was unable to measure girls' learning outcomes directly but found significant evidence of learning retention activities being performed by the most motivated and supported girls in the sample. Evidence suggested that girls and teachers were likely to return to schools when they re-opened. COVID-19 was cited as a potential barrier to continuing attendance, but most teachers and learners reported that they intended to resume attending school as soon as schools reopened.

Immediately following the completion of the mid-term assessment, schools were reopened on October 12th of 2020. Somewhat in contradiction to the findings of the mid-term assessment, re-enrolment was slow, and teachers returned to school, but teacher's strikes were announced due to delayed pay and also concerns that schools had made insufficient preparations for operating under COVID-19.

On December 16, 2020, the DRC government introduced new COVID-19 restrictions nationally due to a rise in confirmed cases, especially in Kinshasa. Measures included a 9 PM to 5 AM curfew, reduction of meeting size to a maximum of 10 people, and the early closure of schools ahead of the holiday. Schools were set to resume on January 5, 2021, but the MOE on January 4 delayed the reopening of schools for a few weeks. Schools reopened on February 22, 2021, and classes have resumed their normal schedule as of the writing of this report.

What did the project achieve?

The qualitative data indicate that project activities, specifically learning clubs and TPD training, improved children's learning outcomes. A substantial number of children reported learning to read, write, and do math, because of participation in learning clubs and improved teaching methodologies. In parallel, parents noted that their children became more interested in learning and were doing better academically.

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[7] See, report from IDS and ISP, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Education in South Kivu, DRC*, Oct 2020.

REALISE activities supported the *Gratuité* public policy, which helped to promote a large increase in enrolment of children in school, but also stretched thin the resources to serve students in terms of both teachers and teaching and learning materials. According to teachers and government actors, project activities such as VSLA groups, bursaries, TPD, and learning clubs contributed to managing the greater influx of students.

On a broader level, the qualitative evidence suggests that the REALISE project's advocacy among girls, parents, and community leaders helped to transform perceptions of gender roles and had a positive community-level impact. Girls reported greater levels of confidence participating in the classroom due to learning and SRH clubs. Community leaders and project stakeholders said that they believe parents are increasingly supportive of the education of girls. Both findings suggest broad changes about gender norms. Girls reported that they have the desire to not only finish primary school but to go onto university, and parents' opinions aligned with those of the girls and, furthermore, there were no indications of early marriage plans.

SRH clubs appear to have supported changes in normalizing the discussion of sexual health and dissemination of information on sexual health to girls, boys, and parents. Moreover, girls reported that they intend to pass SRH knowledge onto their children, offering further evidence that the importance of sexual health information had gained traction.

Key Findings

The summary of key findings and the body of the findings section of the report are organized around the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. Findings speak to specific evaluation questions as well as to the specific project activities and intended outcomes that were subject to evaluation. Below are summaries of the key findings, organized, where appropriate, by the project activity they speak to.

Relevance

- **Advocacy efforts**: While qualitative evidence suggests that progress has been made, the main underlying factors constraining girls' access to education remain poverty and cultural beliefs that girls' education is less valuable than boys' education. School fees and related expenses are sufficiently high that low-income families often cannot afford to send all their children to school. As a result, parents must choose which children to educate, and endline evidence suggests that some families still prioritize boys over girls. This finding highlights the continued relevance of REALISE advocacy efforts in favour of girls' education among community leaders, parents, and children.

- **VSLA and bursaries**: The qualitative data was consistent with the project's Theory of Change which posited that economic burdens forced children, and disproportionately girls, to neglect or to leave school to help their family. The high chore burden imposed on girls emerged as negatively affecting girls' attendance and ability to complete school. Due to food insecurity and poverty, some girls were enlisted into income-generating activities such as selling products in the street, sweeping the house, washing clothes, and doing dishes. The finding suggests that the REALISE projects efforts ease the economic burden of schooling on households through VSLA groups and the provision of bursaries to girls remain relevant.

- **VSLA and bursaries**: Building on the previous point, parents found bursaries and VSLA groups to be relevant to the goal of keeping girls enrolled and attending school, as VSLAs helped to address the financial barrier presented by school-related expenses that households might have otherwise not been able to afford.

- **Bursaries**: While parents noted the importance of bursaries in keeping girls enrolled in schools, parents also reported that the limits of the benefits. Some parents wished

that bursaries would also cover school materials. Parents also said that many girls dropped out after primary school, because households are not able to afford school fees for secondary schools which under *Gratuité* are not fee free. The parents suggested that if their daughters' fees were not covered, they would probably prioritize keeping their boys in school.

- **Learning clubs**: According to parents and teachers, learning clubs were relevant as they targeted the educational needs of the weakest students and keep them motivated. Many children said that because of the clubs, they learned how to read, write, and calculate. Parents and teachers noted that students had developed a habit of studying and were performing better at school.

- **TPD**: Interviews with teachers and head teachers suggest that TPD adequately addressed the needs of teachers for capacity building on teaching methodologies and sensitization on violence prevention.

- **TPD**: Teachers noted a number of important gaps in teacher support including understanding how to manage large, unruly classes, meeting the learning needs of blind, deaf, and mute children, and lack of timely payments which lead teachers to be unmotivated and absent. However, the latter is a factor that cannot be easily addressed by the project, limitations on allowable costs.

- **TPD**: While the TPD module on conflict sensitive education is relevant, it appears that the teachers did not understand the module well.   Several teachers appear to have misinterpreted the lessons of the TPD module on conflict sensitive education. All teachers mentioned receiving the conflict sensitive education module, however instead of referring to the content the module provided about methods to teach children from conflict areas, the teachers referred to how it helped them with conflict between children in class. No teachers mentioned its lessons on educating children from conflict areas. Instead, several teachers mentioned that they felt that they were not prepared to meet the needs of children from conflict areas who they observed had learning challenges.

- **SRH Clubs**: Both girls and their caretakers/parents reported that SRH clubs were relevant in addressing knowledge gaps of both girls and their parents in relation to the subjects of puberty and sexual health. The SRH clubs also provided parents of girls with much needed sensitization about the risks of early marriage, early pregnancy, and sexual abuse.

- **SRH Hotline**: The monitoring data showed an increasing number of adults and children called the Child Protection Hotline each quarter for the previous five quarters of a year (the most recent quarter ending on July 15, 2021). Nevertheless, the increase in use of the Child Protection hotline was not uniform across all provinces, and the number of calls from Ituri and Tanganyika was especially low—less than 50 calls were recorded in each province for all of the previous 5 quarters, suggesting there may be limitations in those areas that prevent the implementation of the SRH Hotline from being used.

- **SRH Hotline**: In contrast with the monitoring data, none of the children interviewed for the qualitative surveys had used the hotline, and they noted that the SRH hotline was less relevant than the SRH clubs to children.

- **Child Protection Hotline**: REALISE addressed the lack of channels to report abuse cases in the community previously with a child protection hotline in the six intervention provinces. Teachers said they found the mechanism useful to discover cases of teachers harassing students. The reporting system allowed the pressing of charges and firing of teachers who committed confirmed offenses. However, it should be noted that none of the girls interviewed in Lomami and an MOE representative in Lualaba were aware of the existence of the hotline.

- **Child protection and safeguarding focal point**: The child protection and safeguarding focal points were relevant to the extent that there was no system previously. None of the girls and boys mentioned talking with them in case of any protection and safety issues
- **Support during COVID-19**: REALISE's efforts to address the learning and SRH needs of children and adolescents were validated with some children going into agricultural work during the school closures and not returning, reports of girls becoming pregnant, and mental health problems such as anxiety and depression becoming exacerbated during the pandemic.

Coherence

- As Co-Lead of the National Education Cluster, Save the Children's REALISE project design exhibit a high level of consistency with national policy and other education interventions. There is a close alignment in goals between the goals outlined in the DRC's strategy for the education sector, "Stratégie nationale d'éducation et formation, 2016-2025" and REALISE interventions.[8] The strategy supports the right to a free primary education, a right that is enumerated in Article 143 of the DRC's constitution. In the education plan, the DRC sets out a series of educational policy measures to create the conditions for a quality education, many of which are consistent with REALISE policies:
    a. Update educational programs and methods
    b. Improve the educational environment
    c. Facilitate the integration and reintegration of out-of-school children
    d. Update teacher training and supervision

- REALISE project activities complement the national strategy. Through its TPD programs, REALISE is improving education programs for children and promoting enhanced pedagogical techniques which are gender-sensitive and conflict-sensitive. In its support for AEP programs, REALISE is reintegrating children who are out-of-school and preparing them for a transition back into school or a vocation. By supplying schools with classroom kits with pens, pencils, notebooks, chalk, and textbooks, REALISE improves the educational environment.

- In addition to national policy, REALISE programs are consistent with other education interventions largely without duplicating effort. The Projet d'Amélioration de la Qualité d'Éducation (PAQUE) program funded by the World Bank aims to improve teaching and learning with a focus on primary schools, grades 1 through 4. REALISE shares this focus, however there are important differences to note, including the fact that REALISE also targets grades 5 to 8, and that PAQUE seeks to drive change for teachers and students through performance-based financing, whereas REALISE has a much broader range of interventions. *Accelere!* Is a program funded by USAID and FCDO to improve equitable access to education and learning outcomes for girls as well as boys. The program was initially expansive and covered grades 1 to 3 (eventually expanding to grade 4 as well) in eight provinces in DRC: Haut-Katanga, Lualaba, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental, Equateur, Sud Ubangi, Nord Kivu, and Sud Kivu. The Accelere! project ceased its learning activities for grades 1 to 4 in March of 2019 and subsequently only worked with private schools in Kinshasa. The project

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[8] "Stratégie sectorielle de l'éducation et de la formation 2016-2025," UNESCO, December 2015, https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/en/2015/strat%C3%A9gie-sectorielle-de-l%C3%A9ducation-et-de-la-formation-2016-2025-6259.

closed completely in 2020. Subsequent activities of Accelere!2 focused exclusively on Governance and policy and began in 2021.

- REALISE SRH-related programs were also coherent with the two other SRH-related programs which were being implemented concurrently with REALISE. Bien Grandir Plus!, a program funded by Global Affairs Canada and Save the Children Canada, seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of girls and boys aged 10 to 19 in Kinshasa. The Kitumaini initiative, implemented by UNFPA and financed by Canada, Sweden, the Korea International Cooperation Agency, and FCDO, seeks to integrate comprehensive sex education/family life education in the curriculum of primary, secondary, and vocational education.

Efficiency

- The REALISE project as a whole was able to achieve its objectives within budget. A contributing factor in this achievement was the close collaboration between REALISE staff and other parties involved in the implementation of project activities.

- Data from staff suggests that the most efficient component of the project management was the collaboration and coordination mechanism with stakeholders from different levels.

- Project management was made less efficient by long distances and poor road conditions in some project locations, as staff had to commute frequently to visit schools and to follow-up with teachers.

- Even though it could not have been foreseen, the greatest source of inefficiency was the COVID-19 pandemic. Adaptive management was utilized to repurpose some project resources and maintain the relevance of the intervention, but shifting resources necessarily created inefficiencies as funds were shifted toward COVID-19 safety in the classroom instead of supporting the attendance and learning outcomes of students.

- A few staff reported feeling that the project should have targeted more provinces to have a broader impact. However, those same staff also expressed their awareness that the resources were limited and if the project was expanded to other locations, the quality of the outcomes would have been compromised.

Effectiveness

- **Learning clubs and TPD**: The qualitative data suggests that project activities supported the improvement of children's learning outcomes. The main activities that contributed to this outcome were Learning Clubs and TPD training.

    a. A considerable number of children said they learned to read, write, and calculate because of the learning clubs and the enhancement of teaching methodologies. Parents also acknowledged that their children became more interested in learning and were performing better at school.

- **VSLA, bursaries, TPD**: Even though the *Gratuité* public policy played a great role in improving girls' enrolment rates in school, according to teachers and government actors, project activities partly contributed to this outcome as well. In addition, REALISE activities also supported girls in continuing to attend school regularly, helping to ensure their successful transition from one grade to the next. The project activities that were cited as contributing most to these outcomes were VSLA groups, bursaries, TPD, and to a somewhat lesser extent, learning clubs and sexual reproductive health clubs.

- **SRH Clubs**: The SRH clubs were considered useful and effective in increasing girls' life skills. Premature pregnancies are said to be reduced as a consequence of the education of children about their bodies, and sexual and reproductive health.

- **Adaptation to Policy**: *Gratuité* had both positive and negative effects on project outcomes. The school gratuity policy promoted a large increase in enrolment of children in school, improving access to education. However, schools could not adapt infrastructure, teaching and learning materials, and the number of trained teachers rapidly enough to deal with the increase in the number of enrolled students. As a result, quality of teaching decreased, as classrooms became overcrowded, with insufficient learning resources per student as well as increased student to teacher ratios.

- **Adaptation to COVID-19**: The pandemic increased economic hardship, dropouts, students' feelings of safety, and teacher absenteeism. Additionally, it significantly reduced retention. This all had an effect on the learning and transition outcomes of girls and boys, as shown by the low TENAFEP pass rates of intervention school students. With the closure of the schools due to COVID-19, some children reported that they felt demotivated to go back to school. The suspension of lectures also promoted a setback in the learning outcomes of children, as many reported having forgotten key literacy and numeracy skills because of lack of practice.

- **VSLA**: Although VSLA groups were very effective interventions in increasing household income, most respondents still noted the financial constraints of enrolling girls in school. Poverty and the inability to afford the fees of secondary school fees remain a substantial barrier.

Impact

- The qualitative evidence gathered for this evaluation suggests that the REALISE project had a positive community-level impact by empowering girls and transforming perceptions of gender roles among community leaders, parents, and their children.

   a. Because of learning and SRH clubs, girls reported feeling more secure and comfortable to participate in class.

   b. Several project stakeholders and community leaders said that they believe parents are becoming more supportive of the education of girls.

   c. All of the girls interviewed indicated having the desire to finish primary and to continue their education to the university level. Parents' opinions aligned with those wishes and there was no indication of early marriage plans.

   d. SRH clubs supported changes in sexual health perception, as the discussions during the sessions helped to normalize the dissemination of information, and to demonstrate to parents, girls, and boys the importance of sexual education.

   e. Some girls also reported that when they are older, they intend to pass SRH knowledge on to their children, which implies long-term and potentially sustainable changes as a result of REALISE, as girls are likely to become advocates for SRH education.

- Despite the positive community-level changes, support for girls' education appears to be limited by primarily financial constraints. Some parents raised concerns that though they want to support their girls' studies, they were uncertain how to pay for their girls' education in the absence of project support. More worryingly, some parents indicated if their daughters' fees were not covered, they would likely prioritize keeping their sons in school. Secondary school girls who were interviewed confirmed this concern, reporting far fewer girls in their classes as compared to the number of girls in primary

school. The secondary school girls attributed this drop in girls' enrolment during the transition from primary to secondary school to the cost of school fees.

Sustainability

- **Learning and SRH clubs**: Community members reported that they wish to sustain those activities even when Save the Children's support ends, because they saw the effectiveness of learning and SRH clubs.

- **TPD, learning clubs, and SRH clubs**: Because teachers were trained and equipped with teaching methodologies and established systems for follow-ups with students, REALISE project staff believe that teachers will be capable of spreading these methodologies and replicating learning and SRH clubs in other schools. However, some teachers expressed concern about whether they would be able to obtain the necessary supplies to maintain clubs once the REALISE intervention ends.

- **VSLA**: VSLA groups have already demonstrated some level of sustainability, as the members of those groups – including groups in conflict zones – have taken steps to make their organizations into a legal institution with a statute, and to have their groups formally recognized by the government.

- **TPD:** Regarding TPD, some teachers have formed TPD multiplication networks to spread TPD methodologies beyond intervention schools, and some teachers in non-targeted schools have already received training from inspectors.

- **Bursaries, AEPS**: The likelihood for the bursaries and AEPs to be sustained is low. The bursaries are highly dependent on project resources and, without any partners who are willing to continue the activity, the coverage of school fees will cease once the project is over. In terms of the AEPs, the received resources (such as books and hand washing stations) can last for only a limited period of time after the end of the project.

Recommendations based on report findings

In light of the key findings described above, the below recommendations focus on how future interventions and aspects of project evaluation and learning could be strengthened, key questions left unanswered, and some of the important limitations of this study.

Project Design

Activity	Recommendation	Key finding
TPD	Consider introducing a TPD module about approaches for adapting teaching strategies to better accommodate children living with disabilities.	The data suggested that most teachers do not have experience teaching children living with disabilities. As it is now, the level of education of children with disabilities learning is dependent on the extra effort that their teacher chooses to dedicate to their specialized needs.
TPD	The module on Positive Discipline under TPD should be revisited and reinforced to include demeaning tasks such as kneeling in class as corporal punishment and to provide appropriate alternatives to teachers to having students clean the classroom and school as punishment.	Although children did not classify these incidents as corporal punishment, there were several reports of children saying teachers were making them kneel or forcing students to sweep the classroom, pick up trash, sweep outside the classroom, and bringing chalk to school.
VSLA	Strengthen and develop a more income-generating trainings to support VSLAs and develop skills in farming, raising livestock.	Several community members requested for more capacity building on the topic, including specific skills development (such as farming,

Activity	Recommendation	Key finding
		livestock keeping) that would support on the setting up of the business.
VSLA	Expand outreach of VSLAs to the most vulnerable families and consider providing income-generating activities starting kits to them.	VSLA leaders noted that the most vulnerable families do not have access to credits nor the independent means to set up IGAs.
SRH and Learning Clubs	Continue and include more children, especially to catch up on learning deficits incurred by COVID-19 (for Learning Clubs) and to reinforce the impact made with community-level perceptions change on the value of girls (girls', boys', and parents' sessions with SRH Clubs).	Many teachers noted that the learning clubs could have included more children for greater results.
Child Protection and Safeguarding	There should be awareness raising with students on the types of disciplining allowed according to the school's code of conduct, so they know when and how to report the teachers if there is a violation in class.	There were several reports from children saying that their teachers still make them kneel or do menial tasks as a form of punishment, despite the TPD module on TPD training.
Child Protection and Safeguarding	Spread awareness of the hotlines with children and parents through caregiver session. Consider including a module on child protection for teachers to present at the beginning of the year and hanging posters about it in the schools.	Many girls reported not being aware of the toll free number.
SRH Hotline	SC should conduct an assessment to understand why in Ituri and Tanganyika the number of calls to the hotlines remained so low when compared to the other provinces. This could indicate problems with the effectiveness of the activity in the locations.	Ituri and Tanganyika registered extremely low numbers of hotline calls when compared to the other counties that demonstrated a clear increase in the number of calls over the quarters.
Bursaries	Consider fully or partially covering extra school costs, such as school supplies or uniforms, for the most vulnerable children targeted by the scholarships.	Teachers reported that because some girls could not afford other school-related expenses such as uniforms, some girls were expelled.
Bursaries	Consider increasing the number of bursaries for girls from the most vulnerable families to be able to attend secondary school.	Teachers suggested the number of bursaries should be increased to target more vulnerable families not covered by *Gratuité*.
Beyond the Interventions	Coordinate or partner with food aid NGOs to provide school meals for children enrolled in the targeted schools.	Some teachers said that there are many children who are food insecure and miss class as their household adapts.
Beyond the Interventions	The project and the donor might consider increasing funding for the provision of classroom kits.	Teachers and parents noted that classroom kits were well utilized by children who received them, but teachers also suggested that the supply of such classroom kits was inadequate to meet demand.
Beyond the Interventions	In the future, it may be beneficial to plan and budget for larger numbers of field staff, or to budget for more/better transportation for staff traveling to and from the field.	The long distances and poor conditions of the roads posed logistical challenges for the staff who had to commute often to different and distant locations. Staff noted that the resources available (cars, staff and time) sometimes were not sufficient to cover the visiting schedules.

Activity	Recommendation	Key finding
Beyond the Interventions	The project and donor might consider funding and/or partnering with government and other organizations to repair or build separate school latrine facilities.	Girls said that they do not feel comfortable or secure sharing latrines with boys, in particular, during menstruation. In addition, the evaluation found that many schools lack latrines, which prevent girls from utilizing their menstruation kits at school.
Beyond the Interventions	Coordinate with government and private organizations to construct, rehabilitate, and equip classrooms to accommodate the large influx of children as a result of *Gratuité*.	Teachers and head teachers reported that classroom infrastructure was crumbling, and after *Gratuité*, the attendance of many more students meant that the school's resources were not sufficient to meet demand. There were several reports of children having to sit on the floor.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning of the Project

- The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted many of the weaknesses of conventional face-to-face data collection strategies used for both project monitoring and for external evaluation. Future evaluation strategies would benefit from being designed in such a way as to allow for remote, telephonic or digital data collection, including by equipping trained community monitors to collect and upload data from their own community. Such data collection mechanisms, if standardized into project MEL design would allow for more continuous engagement with beneficiaries and collection of data, even during major crises that preclude monitoring or evaluation teams from traveling to the field.

- GEC projects and interventions are sufficiently complex that they deserve a mixed-methods approach to evaluation, including a well-powered quantitative sample, ideally with a quasi-experimental design, that will allow for the evaluation of effectiveness and impact through the use of difference-in-differences. The donor will want to make certain that the evaluation component of future projects is adequately funded to enable the execution of an appropriately designed study.

- In order to have another point of comparison for the project intervention schools, the project should consider also obtaining the TENAFEP results of non-intervention schools that share similar characteristics such as location, total number of students, proportion of girls in the student body, and number of teachers

1. Background to project

This section contextualizes the findings that will be presented below by providing necessary background to the project, beginning with an overview of the initial context in which the project was undertaken and then transitioning into a description of current context, including the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on project design, as well as on households and girls in DRC. Because the COVID-19 pandemic broke out during the middle of the project implementation window, all planned interventions and evaluation strategies were subject to review and revision. Many important aspects of the project were ultimately modified because schools were closed for an extended period throughout DRC, and many girls and their households faced numerous challenges as a result of the pandemic including displacement, economic hardship, and severe illnesses and deaths in the family.

The first subsection provides an overview of the general DRC context in which the project was conceptualized, and then follows on with a review of how interventions were adapted to the COVID-19 context, along with a review of key interventions that have been selected for evaluation. The second subsection provides an overview of the effects of COVID-19 and the context in which the intervention is now concluding.

1.1   Project context and interventions

Education is recognized as a fundamental right in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). [9] The formal education system is based out of four ministries: the Ministry of Primary Secondary and Technical Education (EPST) and), the Ministry of Technical and Professional Arts (METP), the Ministry of Higher Education and University (MESU) and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MAS).[10] The majority of the school system is made up of private institutions run by religious institutions or other NGOs.

Despite the recognition of the right to an education, many Congolese children do not have access to education. Children's participation in school has increased by more than 50% since 2011 but the net intake rate in the first grade is only 69% of the official school-age population and only 55% of children who start first grade will still be attending school by sixth grade.[11]

While both boys and girls are not able to access education in the DRC, access is far worse for girls. According to the project's ToC, baseline data, mid-point assessment, and end-line evaluation many barriers hinder girls' access to education: poverty, cultural beliefs, conflict, quality of the teachers and of the school infrastructure, sexual health issues, lack of safety, and COVID-19. For more details on the barriers, please see Annex 10.

Réussite et Epanouissement Via L'Apprentissage et L'Insertion au Systeme Educatif (REALISE) is the FCDO-financed Girls' Education Challenge project implemented in DRC by Save the Children in consortium with World Vision and IDS. It is a continuation of the Vas-y-fille (GEC-1) project and is focused on girls' learning, attendance, and transition in the DRC formal education system. REALISE targeted 60,000 girls across six different provinces through a host of interrelated interventions.

Interventions

For the sake of brevity, we do not review the original project design here, but rather focus on the important ways in which project interventions were adapted in light of the COVID-19

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[9] Article 43, "DRC – Congo Constitution", *Constitution Net*, October 12, 2021, https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/DRC%20-%20Congo%20Constitution.pdf.

[10] MAS is in charge of non-formal education through AEPs for children and adults who have fallen too far behind in the traditional education system.

[11] UNESCO Institute for Statistics (uis.unesco.org). Data as of February 2020.

pandemic. These provide the necessary context for readers to understand the interventions that are being evaluated at endline in this report.

The REALISE intervention and evaluation approach was adapted substantially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and summarized in the Medium-Term Response Plan (MTRP) which was submitted on September 4, 2020. The approved plan assessed key risks and proposed revisions to interventions and outputs. The following is a brief summary of key changes that were made to the REALISE project in response to the pandemic:

- Output 3: *Conflict Sensitive Education* was cut as part of budget revision, apart from it being included as a TPD component;

- Output 5: *Community structures address economic & institutional barriers to girls' and boys' education* was cancelled with the exception of bursaries and CVA;

- Learning Clubs were expanded to all primary schools;

- SRH Clubs and Curriculum were expanded to G6 primary schools, and hygiene kits were to be provided to girls;

- Support for AEPs and VSLAs, and TPD were to continue as planned;

- Payment of bursaries at secondary level G7 and G8 was to continue, and bursary support was also provided for girls in G6 in 120 intervention schools during Q16.

The Medium-Term Response Plan (MTRP) can be consulted for a more detailed description of the rationale behind each of these adaptations.

Ultimately, six project interventions have been selected for evaluation on the basis of their continuing relevance to beneficiaries and the fact that it is expected that there may have been measurable impacts as result of these interventions despite the many negative effects of the pandemic. The six interventions that will be evaluated are listed below, along with notes on the operational details of how these interventions were carried out, including adaptations that were made in light of the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. Teacher Professional Development (TPD)

    a. 4 teachers were trained per primary school, 3 teachers per secondary (at the appropriate levels in French and Maths for the cohort girls who were targeted), and 2 teachers per AEP

    b. COVID-19 adaptations included smaller teacher trainings during face-to-face workshops with teachers, as well as the distribution of a self-study module and content on COVID-19 and classroom-safety when returning back to school.

2. Village Saving and Loans Associations / Groups (VSLAs)

    a. 2,672 persons supported, including 1,722 women

3. Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and Learning Clubs

    a. In the revised MTR workplan and budget for the last year of the project, the project expanded SRH Clubs to primary schools and added the distribution of Menstrual Hygiene Kits to all girls in SRH Clubs (30 girls in each G6 primary school club, and 15 girls in each secondary school club). The kits are composed of a small bucket, laundry soap bars, scissors, and cloth material to make reusable hygiene pads, and a small pocket calendar. Meetings with girls and parents were held to discuss menstrual hygiene, including how to make,

wash and reuse pads. An SRH 134 information hotline was set up as well. Due to budget constraints, the intervention is limited in scope (only girls in SRH Clubs in primary schools, boys were included in secondary school SRH clubs) and time (procurement of first kits started in Q15, Oct 2020, but distributions were delayed because of closures of schools and clubs; and continued in Q16 (Jan-Mar 2021) for WV, and in Q16 and Q17 (Apr-Jun 2021) for SCI).

b. Learning Clubs: These after school clubs of 30 children (about 53-57% girls) aimed to provide literacy (reading and writing) and numeracy support for slow learners (with teachers selecting 10 students with poorest performance from G4, G5 and G6) were started up in Q11 (Oct –Dec 2019). The pandemic shut down schools and clubs in March 2020 and delayed the planned expansion to all primary schools. While schools were shut down, caregiver sessions were increased, and reading materials and learning packs distributed through caregivers. In Q15, with the reopening of schools, facilitators were trained, teachers identified students, and Learning Clubs were restarted, expanded to all primary schools, with adaptations for COVID-19. Clubs were stopped again when schools were shut down again between December 2020-February 2021.

4. Child Protection and Safeguarding (including training of CP focal points and RECOPE)

a. Establishment of a Safeguarding 133 hotline in April 2019 as a mechanism for reporting abuse

b. 97 RECOPES trained on safeguarding and referrals. RECOPES are community-based child protection networks.

c. The project also trained Child Protection Focal Points (who were teachers chosen by children) in every primary and secondary school and equipped the Focal Point person with a phone.

d. All staff and partners were trained on GEC Minimum Standards and Safeguarding Referral systems. Support for RECOPEs and CP focal points was reinforced quarterly. COVID-19 sensitisation was provided as per COVID-19 plan

5. Bursaries for girls

a. Bursaries were transferred directly to schools following bursary SOP and documentation and receipts collected

b. Bursaries and grants provided additional funds to ensure classrooms are cleaned and safely maintained as per SB2S COVID-19 guidance

6. Support for AEP Centres

a. Ensured AEP Centres are adapted to the current COVID-19 situation to respond to most vulnerable girls learning needs in safe environment through provision of handwashing station, training of teachers on COVID-19 and provision of SB2S Guide. Support for L2 and L3 boys and girls is maintained.

1.2   Current context and COVID-19

COVID-19

Since March of 2020, the REALISE project implementation and evaluation has taken place in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic. It is not an exaggeration to say that the

pandemic affected nearly every element of the project implementation and evaluation. Most importantly the pandemic also resulted in school closures, job and income loss (especially among women), rising food prices and food insecurity, and a major spike in reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence, which affected people throughout DRC.[12] Each of these negative effects of COVID-19 are important to note because they, individually and jointly, can be expected to lead to higher dropout rates from school, reductions in safety for women and girls, reductions in access to sexual and reproductive health support services, and increases in pregnancy among school-aged girls who are the primary, direct beneficiaries of REALISE.

It is our expectation that the COVID-19 pandemic had the effect of heavily attenuating progress on most key project indicators or outcomes of interest. It may even be the case that there was negative progress toward the achievement of the outcomes that were likely to be most heavily affected by the pandemic, namely attendance and dropout rates. The findings reported below should be interpreted in light of these expectations and there will be cases in which the simple lack of negative progress should be interpreted as an important impact and a major achievement, given expectations of substantial backsliding in attendance and a higher than normal likelihood of dropout due to pregnancy or marriage, family economic hardship, or fear about returning to school because of disease or violence.

The remainder of this section provides additional context by way of an overview of the timeline of the COVID-19 pandemic in DRC. Throughout this timeline, we describe how the unfolding phases of the pandemic and government responses ultimately affected REALISE interventions.

The COVID-19 epidemic in DRC was declared on March 10, 2020, with the first cases confirmed in Kinshasa. Since that time, the pandemic has spread to all of the 26 provinces. Testing services have remained extremely limited throughout the duration of the pandemic, and only confirmed cases have been reported. The DRC government ordered schools to close on March 19, 2020, in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As a result, students were unable to attend school and missed approximately six months of their ongoing school-year, during which classes would have normally ended in May, and exams would have been completed by the end of June.

As of October 12, 2021, the country reported 57,174 confirmed cases, of which 50,947 recovered, and 1,089 confirmed deaths. Kinshasa remains the epicentre with 59.6 % of all confirmed cases. The six REALISE provinces are currently affected by the pandemic: Haut Katanga (4,274 cases), Lualaba (2,770 cases), Ituri (1,126 cases), Tanganyika (23 cases), Lomami (36 cases) and Kasai Oriental (127 cases). COVID-19 vaccination campaign started on April 19 in Kinshasa with AstraZeneca vaccine—as of October 8, a total of 88,552 people in 14 provinces have received first dose with 37,644 came back for the second dose. The COVID-19 Vaccination campaign restarted on Aug 17 with arrival of new vaccines in small batches; 220 vaccine sites are open in 14 provinces. Since September 12, 4,516 people have received the first dose of Moderna (mRNA 1273), and 114 people the first dose of Pfizer (COMIRNATY TOZINAMERAN) since October 6 in Goma.[13]

Despite the declaration of the end of the third wave, most of the COVID-19 measures taken to mitigate risks and strengthen the response remain in place, including the 11 p.m. to 4 a.m. curfew, the correct and mandatory wearing of masks, respect for physical distance, regular hand washing, taking of temperatures, and no gatherings of more than 20 people in public places. Universities and schools remain open with the enforcement of the strict respect of the barrier gestures.

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[12] See, report from CASS, *The impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak response on women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.* Accessible at: https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/impacts-covid-19-outbreak-response-women-and-girls-democratic.

[13] Comité Multisectoriel de la riposte à la pandémie du COVID-19 (CMR-COVID19).

The planned midline study for REALISE was cancelled, and replaced with a mid-term assessment, in agreement with the FM as it was recognized that a full, face-to-face midline could not be conducted in the midst of school closures and significant COVID-19 infection risk.

As a result of school closures, it is known that most cohort girls had limited learning opportunities as from March through mid-October and again from January to mid-February. The government also issued a directive that no direct contact with children was permitted either through small groups or home visits by teachers or others, which further curtailed potential retention activities. There may have been some loss of key reading and numeracy skills during this timeframe due to lack of practice.

Economic factors were important to both students and teachers in terms of their abilities to return to school, and so the policy of the MOE toward collecting school fees and paying teachers was highly relevant. The MOE announced a new school fee policy. Primary education was to be free (without student fees), and teachers were paid by the MOE. On the other hand, the MOE stated that it would not pay "new" teachers who had been recently hired directly by secondary schools. This was a reversal of the MOE's announced policy from 2019. Current MOE policy suggests that they intend to continue to pay all teachers at primary and secondary schools with permanent MOE contracts (hired by MOE). However, new secondary school teachers hired by schools are not being paid by MOE due to budget and administrative constraints. Therefore, many secondary schools raised school fees for the 2020-21 school year to cover teacher salaries.[14]

The continued intercommunal conflict in Ituri province has created a humanitarian crisis and has severely disrupted development interventions such as REALISE. The conflict between the Hema and Lendu communities renewed in December 2017 has left nearly 1,000 dead and half a million dead.[15] As the evaluation team observed in the TENAFEP data, the conflict appears to have had substantial negative effects on children in Ituri.

Save the Children and Forcier jointly assessed the COVID-19 situation in the DRC in September of 2020 and reached an agreement that the situation was sufficiently safe in certain provinces that it would allow for limited face-to-face data collection, provided that collection was carried out by REALISE MEL and Project staff as part of their planned site-visits. A mid-term assessment was conducted in early October of 2020 in order to provide rapid access to information about barriers to returning to school so that Save the Children and partners could act quickly to reduce barriers in anticipation of the re-opening of schools in October.

The mid-term assessment was unable to measure girls' learning outcomes directly but found significant evidence of learning retention activities being performed by the most motivated and supported girls in the sample. Evidence suggested that girls and teachers were likely to return to schools when they re-opened. COVID-19 was cited as a potential barrier to continuing attendance, but most teachers and learners reported that they intended to resume attending school as soon as schools reopened.

Immediately following the completion of the mid-term assessment, schools were reopened on October 12th of 2020. Somewhat in contradiction to the findings of the mid-term assessment, re-enrolment was slow, and teachers returned to school, but teacher's strikes were announced due to delayed pay and also concerns that schools had made insufficient preparations for operating under COVID-19.

On December 16, 2020, the DRC government introduced new COVID-19 restrictions nationally due to a rise in confirmed cases, especially in Kinshasa. Measures include a 9 pm

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[14] See report from IDS and ISP, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Education in South Kivu, DRC*, Oct 2020.
[15] "DR Congo: Ending the Cycle of Violence in Ituri," July 15, 2020, *International Crisis Group*, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/292-republique-democratique-du-congo-en-finir-avec-la-violence-cyclique-en-ituri.

to 5 a.m. curfew, reduction of meeting size to a maximum of 10 people, and the early closure of schools ahead of the holiday. Schools were set to resume on January 5, 2021, but the MOE on January 4 delayed the reopening of schools for a few weeks. School reopened on February 22, 2021, and classes have resumed their normal schedule as of the writing of this report.

Policy Context

To provide further context for the REALISE operating environment, it is necessary to briefly review the national governmental policy context in which the project was undertaken. This context is particularly important for the analysis of external coherence – i.e., the extent to which project interventions were consistent with or complementary to relevant government policies.

Perhaps the single most important aspect of government policy in relation to REALISE programming is the funding that the Ministry of Education (MOE) provides to support teachers' salaries and operating costs. As of the writing of this report, MOE policy suggests that the ministry will pay new teachers at the primary level from grade 1 to grade 6. However, secondary school teachers' salaries will not be supported by the MOE, meaning that teachers will be paid by the collection of school fees from students. Thus, current policy makes education effectively free to students in primary school, but secondary school students will be required to pay student fees. This policy is important to note because it creates an additional barrier to girls who are transitioning from primary to secondary school. Not only must they perform well and pass exams, but they must also be financially supported by their caretakers to pay the school fees necessary to continue on to secondary school. During the final year of the project, the project has paid bursaries for girls in early secondary, i.e., grade 7 and grade 8, in order to mitigate this challenge. However, MOE policy to not fund teachers' salaries or provide operating costs at the secondary-school level will make transition outcomes difficult to sustain once the project support ends.

In addition to ongoing changes in MOE policy that affect the project, there is an underlying structure of formal government policies that relate in various ways to REALISE interventions. While a detailed description of each of these policies goes beyond the scope of this report, we briefly summarize the relevant policies here in terms of their correspondence to key REALISE activities. The table below presents this summary.

Table 1 REALISE activities and corresponding government policies

REALISE activities	DRC policies related /used
TPD	● Stratégie Nationale de formation des enseignants en RD Congo - Référentiel des compétences ● Forum D'Echange Pédagogique (SERNAFOR) ● Programme national de l'enseignement Primaire, version 2011 ● Stratégie nationale d'éducation et formation", 2016-2025
Literacy	● Programme Nationale de lecture et écriture ● Stratégie nationale d'éducation et formation", 2016-2025
COVID-19	● Protocol National de lutte contre la COVID-19 en Milieu scolaire

Bourse	● Note circulaire du SG EPST sur la Gratuité ● Constitution de la RD Congo, Art 143
Protection	● La loi n°09/001 du 10.01.2009 portant protection de l'enfant)
SRH	● Programme national d'éducation à la vie familiale
AEP	● Programme national d'éducation non formelle

2. Theory of Change

This section briefly presents a narrative summary of the project's Theory of Change (ToC), followed by a graphical representation of the ToC. All italicized material below (along with the visual mapping of the ToC) is excerpted directly from the Endline Terms of Reference. This review of the ToC is essential in setting the stage for understanding the primary barriers or "restraining factors" that were identified during project design and that inform our discussion of both *relevance* (examining whether or not barriers were correctly identified and addressed) as well as *effectiveness* (examining whether or not outcomes were accomplished through the key pathways of change that were originally hypothesized.)

Narrative: the change envisaged

In the DRC, girls' first steps towards school are too often undermined by families and communities who do not recognize the value of educating them; by high costs and low household incomes; and by an array of threats to their wellbeing, from child marriage to gender-based violence (GBV). The REALISE project has aimed to help girls to access school through a suite of interrelated interventions. Through Citizen Voice and Action (CVA), families learnt how their girls will benefit from education, and are given the advocacy tools to see institutions supporting them. At the same time, village savings groups (VSLAs) and bursaries increase families' financial capacity to provide for their girls' education.

The majority of girls we support have been young enough to access primary school; older girls will be able to follow an Accelerated Education route (via AEPs). In both cases, the costs of education remain a restraining factor: classrooms may have few textbooks and lessons may be taken by under-trained and demotivated teachers. Girls' time spent in school and their wellbeing whilst at school are often cut short by social challenges including the widespread conflict that affects the country. We have helped to resource the classrooms we are working in; build teachers' competencies and motivation through quality professional development; and to help schools protect girls by preparing for conflict, helping with education at times of displacement, and providing psychosocial support to learners and teachers dealing with the after-effects. Through this resilient, better-resourced foundation, specific literacy and numeracy interventions have help girls to develop the fundamental competencies at the heart of the GEC project. From here, girls will be in a strong position to pass their primary school-lever exams.

Girls are most at risk of dropping out of education as they transition from primary or Accelerated Education to secondary education. The restraining factors identified above repeat and compound at this stage as girls are expected to marry and are more at risk of SGBV and recruitment by armed groups. **All our enabling interventions** come into play to help girls overcome these challenges, to help them transition to secondary education; receive financial support to stay in school; and benefit from better-quality education. We are theorizing that, by particularly concentrating interventions between Grade 4 and 8, we can build girls' resilience to the factors threatening their education and reduce the sharp rates of dropout. We continue to support the cohort of girls through their secondary education by working with their teachers to undertake professional development and by improving the quality of literacy and numeracy resources at these levels.

The TOC diagram below provides more detail on the range of barriers (restraining factors) that girls face to continuing their education journey through formal schools and/or accelerated education, and how the project interventions target and address each of these barriers to facilitate girls' access to school and increase their learning when there.

Main assumptions and limitations

Families do not always value girls' education

Families might value girls' education, but not as much as their capacity to generate an income, to support with household chores, or to fulfil societal norms (like early marriage). The Vas-y-fille Endline evaluation found that most children work between 2 and 3 hours a day, while it was often not impacting on schooling, there were examples (not quantified) of labour that did interfere with schooling (e.g., working during school hours) or that qualified as the worst forms of labour or exploitative child labour (particularly in the case of marginalized children).

Household income is too low to send girls to school

In DRC over 63% of the population is below the national set poverty line. This percentage is even greater in rural areas that are often difficult to access where many of the REALISE schools are located. Parents often are not only unable to pay school fees for children, and other related expenses (uniforms, school supplies) but children are also required to work to provide additional family income to meet basic needs such as food, and water, rent and medical expenses.

School costs are too high to send girls to school

School fees can include a range of different items including more than 20 individual fees to be paid to different actors. Given the number of bodies perceiving benefits from school fees tackling this issue is very complex as many stakeholders are involved. In some cases, fees that are ineligible according to government legislation are charged to parents as systems to monitor the setting of fees at the school level are weak. Parent's Assemblies where school fees are set are often not aware of their rights and what is not eligible causing them to accept higher fees than required placing an additional burden on the most marginalized children who are unable to pay. While school fees were abolished for primary school and reduced greatly at secondary level with the introduction of Free Education policies in 2019, other direct and indirect costs remained (uniforms, IDs, registration fees, school supplies, certain exam fees). The government again revised its Free Education policies for the 2020-21 school year following the outbreak of the pandemic, and its own inability to provide sufficient operational costs and pay all teachers as it had planned. New policies allow schools to charge additional fees and in some provinces school fees have doubled or tripled.

REALISE TOC (v8)
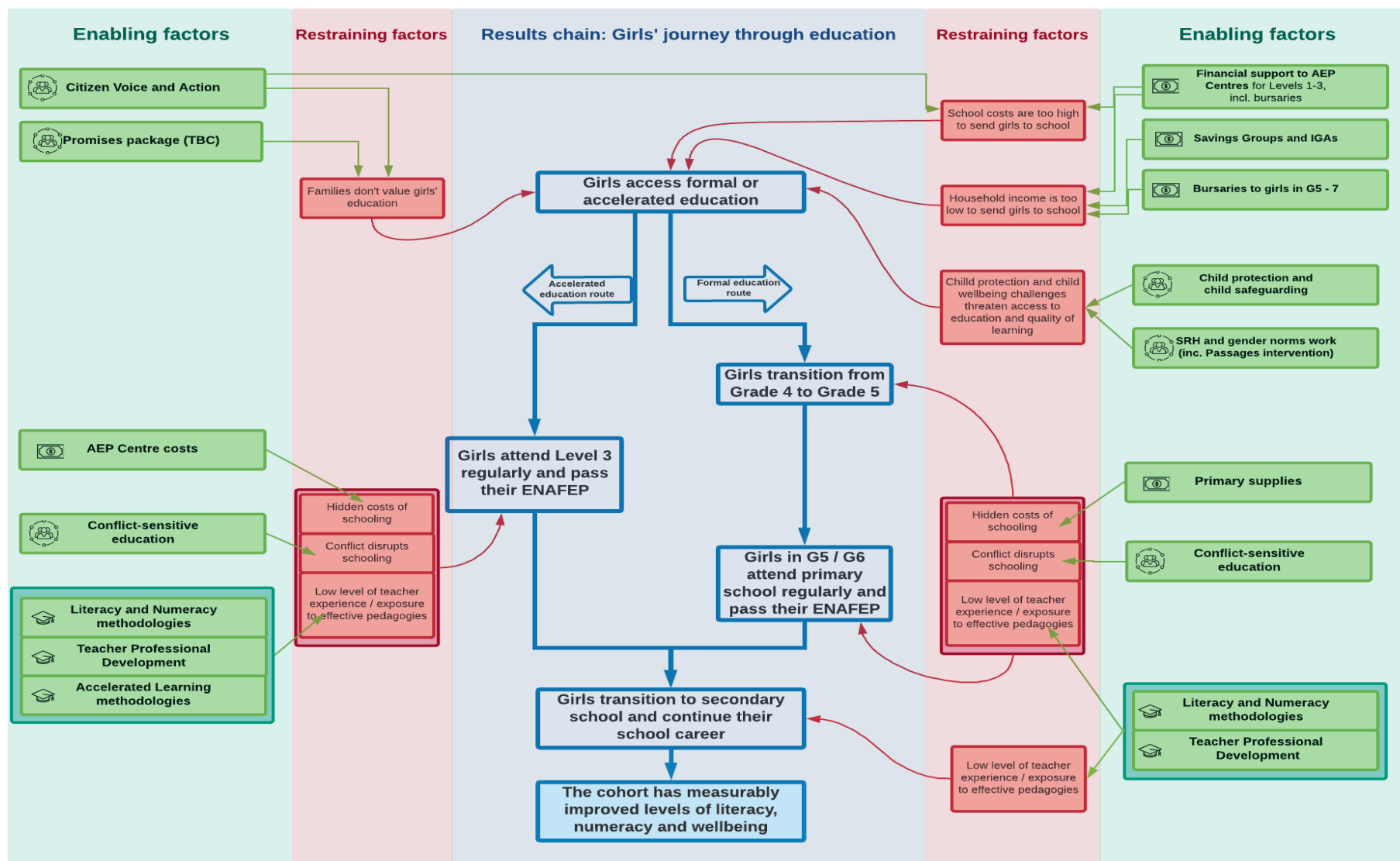
3. Evaluation Approach and Methodology

3.1 Overview of evaluation design

The endline evaluation design is exclusively a qualitative study, focusing on using a sample of 87 purposively selected qualitative interviews to construct the most comprehensive picture possible of REALISE project outcomes in the absence of a representative quantitative sample. This qualitative evaluation is organized thematically around the OECD-DAC criteria and subsets of evaluation questions corresponding to each of the criteria. Thus, the main findings sections are: 1) relevance, 2) coherence, 3) efficiency, 4) effectiveness, 5) impact, and 6) sustainability. While the report will comment on each of these criteria, the qualitative data is more suited to the evaluation of some of these criteria, e.g., sustainability, and is much less suited to the evaluation of effectiveness or impact, where quantitative, longitudinal measures are often preferable in terms of being able to make valid causal inferences about the impact of a given intervention or activity.

The endline evaluation design is sufficiently different from the baseline sample design in terms of both scope and methodology that our analysis does not attempt to draw direct comparisons between baseline and endline data because, in most cases, these comparisons would not be valid or might even be misleading. The baseline findings are only referenced when appropriate to broadly contextualize the endline findings. For now, it will suffice to summarize that the initial intention of the endline was to replicate the baseline in such a way as to allow for longitudinal comparison and a mixed-methods approach to evaluating effectiveness and impact. However, due to severe budget reductions the endline design was reduced to a purely qualitative study with emphasis on the ability to collect qualitative data that would allow for triangulation of sources and perspectives to provide the best summative evaluation possible in light of budget restrictions.

For more detail on the evaluation design as well as changes and adaptations that were made since the baseline, please see Annex 2.

3.2 Evaluation criteria and questions

This section begins with a review of the main interventions and main evaluation questions articulated in the REALISE Endline TOR. For ease of reference, there were six interventions that were selected for evaluation:

1. Teacher Professional Development (TPD)

2. Village Saving and Loans Associations / Groups (VSLAs)

3. SRH and Learning Clubs

4. Child Protection and Safeguarding

5. Bursaries for girls

6. Support for AEP Centres

These interventions all have specific, observable inputs and outputs that respondents were asked about in the qualitative interviews. For more detail on tools and how various questions in tools correspond to broader evaluation questions, please see the Analysis Plan in Annex 2. By inquiring about specific interventions and respondents' experiences with those interventions – including

stories of observed individual, local, and systemic changes as a result of those interventions – we have developed a detailed picture of the REALISE project as a whole and allowed for concrete answers to the key evaluation questions. The evaluation questions are organized around the OECD-DAC criteria and provide a set of important cross-cutting themes that will guide analysis. In the table below, the right-most column presents the relevant interventions or project activities that formed the basis for gathering process-based evidence to support analysis of a given criteria and the related evaluation questions.

Table 2 Evaluation criteria and questions

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Questions	Interventions
Relevance	a) Was the project soundly designed and relevant to the targeted beneficiaries? To what extent were the objectives and design of the project, including the underlying theory of change, valid and did they respond to the needs, priorities and policies of intended beneficiaries, partner organizations (e.g., schools) and the country? b) To what extent has the project been relevant to the priorities, needs and barriers of the specific subgroups of marginalized girls (list and definitions to be provided). Do girls who were involved in and/or supported by different intervention feel the project met their educational needs and priorities? c) To what extent did they remain responsive to the needs, priorities, and policies of these groups when circumstances changed? Did the project apply adaptive management to ensure that interventions maintained their relevance?	TPD VSLA SRH club Learning Clubs Ed Kits CP&SG Bursaries
Coherence	a) External coherence: To what extent were the project and its interventions consistent with and complementary to other interventions and policies? Where relevant, to what extent did the project adapt to changes in the policy environment? b) Internal coherence: Did the project achieve coherence, interlinkages, and synergies between the different interventions and across the education pathways supported?	TPD VSLA SRH club Learning Clubs Ed Kits CP&SG Bursaries
Efficiency	To what extent did the project deliver the intended results in an economic and timely way? To what extent did the project adopt and apply 'adaptive management' practices that would support improved efficiency in the delivery of interventions? Was the project managed efficiently? Were the coordination and collaboration mechanisms established by the project efficient? What could have been improved and what worked well?	
Effectiveness	What impact did the project have on the learning and transition of marginalized girls, including girls with disabilities? What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives and intended results? To what extent did the project design / ToC address those factors successfully, including through its adaptations? What impact did COVID-19 have on the achievement of these results? To what extent were the objectives and intended results (outcomes and IOs) of the project achieved, including differential results across groups? What are linked organizational and contextual contributing variables to explaining this? What worked (and did not work) to increase the learning and transition of marginalized girls? (i.e., which interventions were most correlated with girls' learning and transition)	TPD VSLA SRH club Learning Clubs Ed Kits CP&SG Bursaries
Impact	To what extent did the project generate or contribute to the generation of significant higher-level effects (social, environmental, and economic), whether positive or negative, intended or unintended?	TPD VSLA SRH club Learning Clubs Ed Kits

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Questions	Interventions
		CP&SG Bursaries
Sustainability	a) What project interventions / approaches have already demonstrated sustainability (or 'traction')? b) What is the likelihood that key interventions will be sustained? c) To what extent will the net benefits (whether financial, economic, social and/or environmental) of the project continue? d) To what extent was the project successful in building sustainability within the enabling environment for change at the following levels: community level, school level, government system level e) How successfully has the project leveraged its learning and work to impact policy level dialogue (from the views of stakeholders, communities, and project staff)? And which focus areas of policy advocacy have gained traction? f) What were the major factors which are likely to influenced take-up and/or sustainability of the key activities?	TPD VSLA SRH club Learning Clubs CP&SG

3.3 Evaluation sample design

Qualitative tools, including focus groups and key informant interviews, were conducted in the five provinces of Haut Katanga, Kasai Oriental, Lomami, Lualaba, and Tanganyika, by a trained qualitative moderator. Project activities also occurred in Ituri, but data was not collected from Ituri because this drastically reduced the logistical costs of fieldwork and because Ituri was also not subject to baseline evaluation. While the qualitative sample is not formally representative of project locations, the broad geographic scope of the endline sample, along with the high diversity of respondent types in the sample helps to ensure that endline analysis can triangulate from multiple datapoints, and that the endline data will ultimately be emblematic of the diversity of different populations and sub-populations that participated in, and were affected by, the project.

In order to maximize the diversity of the sample at each level, two schools were selected in each province from among the schools surveyed at baseline – with one school in each province being selected from a larger or more urban community and one school from a smaller or more rural community (where these differences exist). Qualitative moderators conducted each of the beneficiary-related qualitative tools at those schools to ensure that comparable evidence was gathered from beneficiaries. A full description of the sample and sample locations is provided in Annex 2. In addition to the school- or community-level sample, the provincial MINAS officials in each of the five provinces were interviewed, along with one MOE staff-person in each province and one project staff-member in each province. Finally, a set of interviews were conducted with higher level officials in Kinshasa: 1) the Focal point in the SG's office, 2) the Head of Education for Life (SRH), Dept of MOE, 3) DG of Non-Formal Education, Dept. of MINAS, and 4) a Member of Inspectorate in charge of training.

The qualitative tools targeted a wide range of respondents over a broad geography. The table below describes the respondent groups included in specific qualitative interviews, and the number of interviews of each type that were conducted in each location.

Table 3 Qualitative interviews by respondent type and province

Province	Haut Katanga	Kasai Oriental	Lomami	Lualaba	Tanganyika	Total
FGD Girls	4	4	4	4	2	**18**
FGD Boys	2	2	2	2	1	**9**
FGD Parents	2	2	2	2	1	**9**
KII Teacher	2	2	2	2	1	**9**
KII Headmaster	2	2	2	2	1	**9**
KII Religious Leader or Community Leader*	2	2	2	2	1	**9**
KII Leader VSLA	1	1	1	1	1	**5**
MINAS Provincial Officer	1	1	1	1	1	**5**
Project staff at provincial level	1	1	1	1	1	**5**
MOE staff at provincial level	1	1	1	1	1	**5**
And a total of 4 interviews in Kinshasa:						
1. Focal point in the SG's office						
2. Head of Education for Life (SRH), Dept of MOE						
3. DG of Non-Formal Education, Dept. of MINAS						
4. Member of Inspectorate in charge of training						

* Either the Religious or the Community Leader were chosen based on whoever was said to have the most influence in a given community.

All the planned interviews in the sampling table above were conducted successfully. Thus, the planned sample precisely matches the achieved sample.

Respondent Selection

Selection of respondents for community-level interviews was purposive, with the main objective being to maximize the diversity of each subsample. For FGDs with girls, maximizing diversity involved attempting to include girls across the target age-ranges (11-14 years of age, and 15-17 years of age), and to include (whenever possible) girls with disabilities. For FGDs with parents, maximizing diversity involved recruiting both male and female respondents and ensuring diversity in the age range of parents or caretakers, as well as diversity in their social, economic, and disability characteristics wherever possible.

In the case of community-level interviews girls, boys, parents/caretakers, and teachers, these individuals were all recruited from among baseline respondents, where possible. While the endline sample (as noted earlier) is not held to be comparable with the baseline sample, recruiting baseline respondents into the endline allows for a level of continuity in the qualitative opinions gathered, and helps to ensure that the diversity of the endline sample is still broadly emblematic of the diversity of the baseline sample (which was taken to be highly representative of the overall set of project beneficiaries).

For most other community-level interviews, there is a one-to-one correspondence between respondent types and individuals who hold those positions in the relevant community or school – e.g., school headmasters, VSLA leaders, and religious and community leaders. In these cases,

selection is not necessary, and researchers simply located and interviewed the individual in the community who occupied the relevant position. In the case of religious and community leaders, the researcher had to select one or the other, and this selection was done based on local opinions about which individual might prove to be a more informed respondent and based on perceived influence in the community. This recruitment principle also applied to provincial- and the national-level interviews conducted in Kinshasa. The Kinshasa interviewees were as follows: 1) the Focal point in the SG's office, 2) the Head of Education for Life (SRH), Dept of MOE, 3) the DG of Non-Formal Education, Dept. of MINAS, and 4) the Member of Inspectorate in charge of training. Each of these individuals was contacted and interviewed by Forcier's researcher in Kinshasa.

3.4   Challenges and limitations

Fieldwork challenges and limitations

The qualitative-only research design made fieldwork significantly simpler and more straightforward than the more elaborate quasi-experimental, cohort-tracking design that was established at baseline. The limited number of qualitative interviews prescribed in the research design allowed for the recruitment of highly qualified qualitative researchers who were well-trained in a central training with strong attention to detail. As a result, there were very few logistical or methodological challenges during the course of fieldwork.

The following is a list of noteworthy challenges that were encountered during the course of fieldwork (please refer to annex 11 to a more detailed description of the challenges):

- **Fieldwork delays;**
- **Conflict with exams;**
- **Insufficient respondent knowledge/understanding**;
- **Data processing delays;**
- **Logistical delays**.

While the logistical delays noted above had a substantial cumulative impact on the evaluation timeline, we do not have any reason to suspect that these delays in any way reduced the quality of the data collected or created any bias in that data.

On the other hand, the problem of respondents (namely educators) not fully understanding relevant project interventions may have introduced some measurement error to our analysis of interventions involving school clubs. Some level of misunderstanding on the part of educators is understandable because SRH and learning clubs were after-school activities that of which teachers may have only had a peripheral awareness. We could not always be certain in our analysis which club some teachers had in mind when they are answering a question, as in some cases they would refer to the clubs as a whole, not specifying the modality. This uncertainty should not result in biased interpretation or results, but it has made us cautious when interpreting data form those teachers and it has correspondingly lessened our confidence in findings or inferences that draw on those interviews.

Methodological challenges and limitations

A few broader methodological limitations apply, including complications arising from the COVID-19 pandemic (please refer to annex 12 for a more detailed description of the limitations):

- Limited measurable impact due to COVID-19;
- No measurement in comparison sites;
- Social desirability bias in survey responses; and
- Respondents' understanding of interventions.

4. Key Outcome Findings

4.1 Relevance

This section aims to answer the evaluation questions pertaining to relevance:

- Was the project soundly designed and relevant to the targeted beneficiaries? To what extent were the objectives and design of the project, including the underlying theory of change, valid and did they respond to the needs, priorities and policies of intended beneficiaries, partner organizations (e.g., schools) and the country?
- To what extent has the project been relevant to the priorities, needs and barriers of the specific subgroups of marginalized girls (list and definitions to be provided). Do girls who were involved in and/or supported by different intervention feel the project met their educational needs and priorities?
- To what extent did they remain responsive to the needs, priorities, and policies of these groups when circumstances changed? Did the project apply adaptive management to ensure that interventions maintained their relevance?

The section outlines the relevance of the project activities according to how well they have addressed girls' barriers to education and children's educational needs. The main restraining factors to education are presented first along with the challenges that schools face in providing quality education. The main project activities related to those challenges are presented along with an assessment of the degree to which each activity has targeted the barriers identified. Whenever possible, the analysis highlights how certain activities were designed under the project's theory of change and their links to the restraining factors. The activities were grouped according to the project outcome groups presented in the endline evaluation ToR.[16]

The identified barriers are interrelated in complex ways wherein household-level and broader environmental or contextual factors can interact and combine to create vicious cycles in which girls facing many barriers are increasingly likely over time to drop out of school. REALISE project targeted the barriers through a set of complementary interventions that aimed to achieve improved learning and transition outcomes for girls as primary outcomes. This section analyses how each barrier was targeted by the key activities evaluated in the report: learning clubs (LCs), school kits, book banks and TPD, bursaries and VSLA groups, sexual and reproductive health clubs (SRH clubs), child protection and safeguarding and support for AEP centres. The relevance of each of these activities will be analysed below with reference to the barriers (Annex 10). A summary table of which barriers each intervention/activity was designed to target and its relevance is found at the end of this section.

As a note of caution when reading the findings presented below, it should be remembered that, unlike previous evaluations of the REALISE project, the endline study is a wholly qualitative study and while causal stories are described in the findings, these narratives should not be understood to be rigorous proof that these narratives are shared among all or most beneficiaries and certainly should not be understood as proof of causality. To be specific, the findings will describe how respondents attribute effects in their lives, schools, and communities to the intervention and where possible will triangulate findings from multiple respondents on the same subject to provide greater evidence for that finding. However, these findings should not be understood to be proof that the

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[16] Save the Children, 2020. Terms of Reference: Endline study and final evaluation of 'Reussite et Epanouissement via l'Apprentissage et l'Insertion au Systeme Educatif' (REALISE) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

program's effects are generalizable to all beneficiaries or proof that the program caused the described effect.

Poverty and cultural beliefs

Household income is too low to send girls to school:

The high costs of schooling are a great obstacle hindering girls' access to education, as many families do not make sufficient income to cover school fees. The ToC theorizes that providing bursaries to girls from G5 to G7 and supporting the formation of VSLA groups, the project would result in an improvement in girls' access to formal and accelerated education.

In general, several parents, head teachers and MOE representatives reported that bursaries given to the schools were relevant to keep girls in school, mainly because most parents said that they struggle to make sufficient income to fulfil the basic necessities of their families. Although the *Gratuité* policy rendered bursaries for primary school girls irrelevant, it remained important to encourage girls' transition from primary to secondary school. The intervention addressed the problem of dropout rates resulting from lack of school fees, and the problem of girls falling behind and thereby having a higher risk of dropout. As an illustration of the relevance (and effectiveness) of bursaries, one parent explained: "*If we look at the past, the boys were more numerous than the girls in the schools; then it is not like that anymore. Because of the scholarships that the project had given, many of the girls are in classes; it gave them joy and gave them a great desire to go to school and study.*"[17]

In addition to the bursaries, VSLA groups were also set up as an attempt to allow parents to afford paying for their children's needs and for any additional costs of education. In the beginning of the project, REALISE sensitized the parents to form the groups, with each group comprising at least 25 members. A project agent was also trained to accompany and support the groups' progression from the beginning to the end of the project.

According to many respondents, VSLA groups were also relevant to improving girls' access to education. Along with the scholarships, the VSLAs helped address the financial challenges parents had to pay for school fees and materials. As part of the VSLAs, REALISE also offered training on income generating activities (IGAs), so caretakers could set up businesses to improve the household income and to help pay for loans taken. Parents explained that the groups fostered a savings mentality that was not present in the community before. Several parents reported that the savings share outs or credit taken from the groups supported the payment of school fees and the buying of school materials that they would not have otherwise been able to afford. If it were not for these groups, many parents reported they would not be able to send all of their children to school.

1.   Additionally, a religious leader said that there were multiple VSLA groups in his community as of the endline study, but that in the beginning of the REALISE project the participation rate was low. Once the groups started to show their relevance through tangible results, other community members became interested in participating as well.[18] Additionally, some VSLA leaders report that they used the VSLA meetings to remind the members of the value of their children, and most notably their daughters, education. This indicates the groups have, to some degree, been relevant in addressing families' value of girls as well.

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[17] Parents FGD in Lomami.
[18] Religious leader KII in Kasai Oriental.

According to parents, community leaders, teachers, head teachers and representatives from the MOE, VSLA groups and bursaries were relevant to address girls' economic barriers to access to education, however the first showed a higher level of relevance than the latter. Both interventions targeted low household income that prevents girls from going to and staying in school. Based on parents' perspectives, VSLA groups were relevant to support households' income generation, improving their capacity to pay schooling costs. Even though bursaries did not promote changes in the household income, according to parents, it lifted the economic burden resulted from school fees, allowing families to send their daughters to school.

School costs are too high to send girls to school:

To many families that struggle to make a liveable income, school fees are prohibitively expensive to send children to school. Based on that, the ToC draws on the hypothesis that in providing bursaries to girls, the project would lift the economic burden pertaining the high costs of education, increasing girls' enrolment and transition in school.

As an output, bursaries were intended to facilitate girls' access to education by paying for their school fees, and to thereby make it affordable for all parents to send all of their children to school. According to project staff, in the beginning of the project, REALISE was paying the fees for girls in primary and secondary school. With the introduction of the *Gratuité* government policy, REALISE shifted to paying fees for secondary schoolgirls only because there were no more primary school fees. The bursaries, however, only paid for girls' school fees, any additional costs related to schools had to be covered separately. Teachers and head teachers raised concerns regarding this practice, as to some families the coverage of school fees only is not sufficient. It was explained that the most vulnerable families cannot afford to pay for other school supplies, such as uniforms and, as a result, the child is not allowed to join the classes.

Food insecurity:

In the end-line evaluation, food insecurity was a barrier raised by project staff, government representatives and parents as a barrier hindering girls' access to school. However, in the design of the ToC, this restraining factor was not listed. According to a Divas official, to help provide enough means to their families, many girls are required to work in the fields, during the harvest period. A MINAS representative explained that many vulnerable children do not have what to eat, which leads to them missing classes. An appropriate food intake is necessary to guarantee the means to better school performance. Even though VSLA groups aim to improve household's financial situation as a whole, which can potentially also improve their diet, the REALISE did not design interventions that were directly connected to food security. Project staff noted that school canteens and school meals are an interesting strategy to improve children's attendance in school and enhance their food intake.

Families do not value girls' education:

As a result of poverty, parents often have to choose which children will be sent to school. Due to gender-biased attitudes that have been passed from generation to generation, some parents favour boys' education over girls' education, as boys are seen as being more likely to grow up to be household providers. Three main activities in REALISE project targeted this barrier: SRH clubs, VSLA groups and TPD.

Across all stakeholders in all locations, it was reported that the SRH Clubs addressed the gender norms and specifically the value of girls' education. Many girls, teachers and head teachers report that these clubs talked about, and *changed*, the ideas of their community members about girls

and their abilities to study and work in different professions. This is also confirmed by a religious leader. Many parents reported it had affected their own ideas. As one parent noted, "*Like my daughter for example once told me that according to what they were taught in school today, even a woman can become a car driver. She told me that in her life she could go to pilot school, that there are no professions for men and professions for women, because you can study everything. In fact, even a girl can study architecture, learn to drive a car. That also benefited me because I thought there were studies that were only suitable for girls, but in fact a girl can study anything, and all girls are equal.*"[19]

The SRH Clubs parental sessions also included awareness raising for the need of girls to be less involved in housework and to divide the chore burden amongst all children, not only the girls. Several parents mentioned that this was relevant information as they did not know and previously did burden their daughters with housework.

To a lesser extent, VSLA also targeted the lack of value on girls' education and supported a shift in parents' mentality. According to VSLA leaders and parents, the awareness raising done before the groups' share outs and the start of the school year, served as a mechanism to show parents the value in girls' education. Some parents acknowledged that through VSLA groups they understood the importance to sending their daughters to school, because the groups set girls education as the main priority.

As part of the TPD, the training provided the teachers with a module on gender and inclusion. This component targeted teachers' lack of awareness on gender equality, which previously made them reproduce gender-biased behaviours. School stakeholders reported that before the training, teachers were not attempt to girls' schooling needs, as many did not value their education as much as boys'. According to boys' and girls' perception on the changes of teachers' attitudes in class, the component was relevant, as many noted that it was previously only the boys who answered questions in class. As one girl says, "*before it was the boys who answered, now it's all the girls and boys who answer.*" [20]

Conflict

At the baseline evaluation and ToC, it was suggested that a lack of teachers' ability to make special accommodations for conflict-affected children is a barrier to girls' access to education. In the end-line evaluation, some teachers also reported that children coming from conflict affected areas do not study well.

When asked about the conflict sensitive education module, all teachers answered they had received it, but they only referred to the way it helped them with conflict between children in class. One teacher in Haut Katanga gave the following example to show his improved skills in conflict sensitive education which were similar to the examples of all other teachers: "*there were two students who were quarrelling, but I saw that I calmed them down and then gave advice.*"

School facilities

Schools have insufficient learning materials:

A significant barrier to girls' access to education concerns a lack of school supplies and materials. As stated by many MOE representatives, teachers, head teachers, parents, boys, and girls alike, the influx of students in primary schools increased the need for more school materials, which were

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[19] Parents FGD in Tanganyika.
[20] Girls FGD in Lomami, 15 to 17 years old group.

already lacking. To target this restraining factor, REALISE project provided intervention schools with classroom kits and support to AEP centres.

of the distribution of classroom kits was particularly relevant to target schools' lack of supplies. Among the items reported in the kits, there were books, notebooks, chalk, pens, crayons, rulers, and a compass. The project provided recreation kits including balls and jump ropes only to AEPs. All students and teachers acknowledged their school had received the kits and that they were of great value to improve the learning process. Students said that before REALISE they were not able to practice the lessons or to take notes because they did not have notebooks, workbooks, or pens. In addition, parents noted that their children started bringing workbooks home to practice lessons after school hours.

During FGDs, several girls who attend AEP centres acknowledged that the school kits were useful in their learning process. For example, one girl explained: "*I got a notebook though I didn't know how to read. I learned how to read. Although I didn't know how to write, I learned how to write using the books we received.*"[21] This indicates that the support for AEP centres were relevant to tackle insufficient learning materials at school.

Hence, according to students and teacher's perspectives, school kits were relevant as they targeted well the necessities of schools and students in terms of school supplies. According to the reports, the material also contributed to an improvement in the quality of teaching and in the students' learning process.

Insufficient school infrastructure:

Even though it was not included in REALISE project ToC, insufficient infrastructure is another challenge schools face when attempting to provide quality education and safe spaces for children. As stated by several government stakeholders and head teachers, classroom infrastructure is, in some cases, deteriorating and this can negatively influence the pupils' learning experience. According to a MOE representative, the construction, rehabilitation, and equipment of classrooms should be a priority to improve the quality of education.

Even though Gratuité was an unforeseen factor, it worsened the problem pertaining schools' poor infrastructure. According to MOE representatives, teachers, head teachers and parents alike, the massive (re)enrolment resulted from the public policy stressed schools' capacity to accommodate students. Schools became overly crowded, as parents, boys, girls, teachers, and head teachers expressed that there were not enough benches and tables to serve everyone, which led to children often sitting and writing on the floor.

School latrine facilities can be another factor influencing girls' attendance or school dropouts. According to a representative from the MOE, girls do not feel comfortable or secure sharing latrines with boys. This is particularly relevant during their menstruation, when girls often go home to get changed due to the lack of gender-separate facilities at school (and lack of proper materials). A complete lack of school latrine facilities, a need for separating the latrines or a need for reparations were mentioned by many MOE representatives, several parents, a community leader, and a girl, in different locations. This is a concerning barrier to REALISE, as it is directly connected to girls' hygiene (another barrier that will be detailed below). Even though REALISE provides menstruation kits to girls, it is important that schools provide safe and adequate facilities in which they could utilize the kits. Otherwise, this can partly compromise the effectiveness of the kits.

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[21] Girls FGD in Tanganyika, 15 to 17 years old group.

The infrastructure present in the school centres is also not adapted to accommodate children who have movement-related limitations, and this limits the abilities of those students to access school facilities. Several head teachers, teachers and MOE representatives said that the way that the buildings were designed are not inclusive in terms of accessibility, as most schools have stairs or platforms.

Overall, the REALISE project did not design interventions related to the rehabilitation, adaptation, or construction of school infrastructure. For future projects like REALISE, the organization should consider designing interventions to provide more classrooms, benches, tables, and gender-separated bathrooms.

Teacher quality

Low level of teacher experience:

Low levels of teacher experience and teacher training are among the main challenges for quality education. At the baseline, fundamental learning skill gaps existed in literacy at the level of letter-sound identification and in numeracy at the level of subtraction. To target this gap, REALISE's ToC theorizes that in providing teachers with appropriate training on teaching methodologies and on strengthening their knowledge, quality of teaching would enhance, leading to an improvement on the attendance and grades transition of girls as well.

Overall, TPD targeted the needs that teachers had for capacity-building and sensitization to provide quality education. Several head teachers, parents and project staff highlighted the need for teachers to increase the knowledge and skillset of teachers. The head teachers added that this was needed to keep them engaged and to foster an environment in which teachers want everyone to succeed. Some MOE representatives and project staff mentioned that there is no funding from the government to strengthen the capacity of teachers, which further highlights the relevance of the TPD by REALISE to improve the quality of education. One head teacher in Lomami summarized how important he thought TPD was: "*The training met the needs of the teachers. For example, the teacher who could only be interested in gifted (high performance) children in his room might not have the time to refer to the weaker ones. With the training, we invited this teacher to take an interest in everyone. First of all, to start with the less gifted, to strengthen their capacities and to give them the courage to express themselves. Not to discriminate against the girl and to avoid any abuse in the classroom: whipping, using foul language that stings the child or young girl. REALISE has thought about the protection of the girl at all levels.*"[22]

Fundamental learning skill gaps:

According to parents, boys, girls, teachers and head teachers, many boys and girls had trouble reading, writing and calculating as before the start of REALISE. The MINAS and DIVAS representatives confirmed that this is similar at the AEP centres.

According to project staff, the learning clubs were structured to help the weakest students in reading, writing and mathematics, and to improve their literacy and numeracy levels. The students are selected by the teachers, who forward them to the activities' facilitators, who work on a volunteer basis and are chosen by the communities. In cooperation with field officers, the facilitators evaluate the student's level and needs before inserting them in the club. After three months, the students are evaluated to assess the improvement in their reading, writing and

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[22] Head teacher KII in Lomami, female, 31 years old.

mathematics levels. To support the groups, REALISE also provided schools with book banks (which particularly supported learning clubs as well as literacy/numeracy teaching in class) and classroom kits.

Box 1: Stakeholders' perceptions on the relevance of learning clubs.

"*It helped us to know how to count, to know how to write and to continue in school*" (Girls FGD Tanganyika, 11 to 14 years old group).

"*It also continued helping us to know how to read and write and counting. When going to the market, we now know how to buy things and count the money*" (Girls FGD Tanganyika, 11 to 14 years old group).

"*When my elder sister started learning, she was taught but she did not come to know how to read and write, but when their professor started teaching them mornings and evenings is when we saw she started reading and writing*" (Girls FGD in Haut Katanga, 15 to 17 years old group).

"*I have a friend who together we used to attend school. He never knew how to read, or even how to write. But when he went to the club he started understanding, started raising his hand [in class] and started to learn how to read*" (Boys FGD in Tanganyika).

"*I saw things changed, a child is now able to read a Tshiluba letter, she knows how to calculate mathematics and reading herself*" (Parents FGD in Kasai Oriental).

"*Even a small calculation we could give her 1000Fc to go buy something and there will be money remaining, but she didn't know. But from this learning club, it helps the children a lot. Today you can give 2000Fc to a child and send her to the market, she will buy things and come back with the rest of the money*" (Parents FGD in Lomami).

All girls and teachers interviewed reported there was a learning club (LC) present in their schools, apart from an AEP school in Kasai Oriental. Several teachers and head teachers noted that the clubs are especially important to preventing students who have fallen behind in their learning from dropping out. One head teacher summed it up: because of the LC, "*the girls felt really belonging to the education, [..] because in the old times the girls thought that perhaps they cannot make long studies or to finish their studies, but with these clubs the children became open such as the girls, they stay in [school].*"[23] Box 1 shows several examples of direct testimony from different stakeholders about the usefulness of learning clubs. REALISE also provided books for book banks to increase the quality of teaching. The book banks aimed to particularly support learning clubs as well as literacy/numeracy teaching in class. The monitoring data on the book banks showed that 91% of students use these books, see graph below. Furthermore, the data showed that 91% of the teachers use the books in class.[24] This is confirmed by the qualitative interviews of teachers during the endline, as almost all teachers mentioned using the books.

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[23] Head Teacher KII in Lualaba, male, 47 years old.
[24] See REALISE Utilisation_de_book_banks, May and June 2021.

Figure 1 Use of book banks by students[25]

Use of book bank by students

- ■ Yes, always ■ No ■ Yes, sometimes
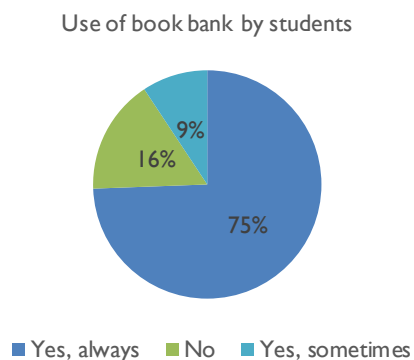
Overcrowded classes due to fee-free primary school decreases quality of teaching:

Rapidly growing class-sizes followed by the *Gratuité* policy also affected teachers' capacities to maintain orderly classrooms and to teach effectively. Although many parents, boys and girls said they are happy with the opportunities that *Gratuité* policy offer them, many spoke of uncontrolled classes, children talking through class, children sitting on the floor, children quarrelling and fighting, and a lack of personal attention of the teacher for each child which affects learning. Teachers also felt the increase in the pressure in work, as they had to manage much larger classes.

To adapt to the new conditions introduced by the policy and maintain relevance, REALISE introduced a new module to TPD on large classes management. According to some teachers' perspectives, the training was relevant to their needs, as they learned different strategies to maintain order in large classes and keep the students interested. There were no negative mentions about the relevance of the module.

School curriculum is not adapted to blind, deaf or mute children:

Classroom learning can be challenging to blind, deaf or mute children as the school curriculum (and the classroom environment) is not adapted to them. As a result, such students need large amounts of extra attention that teachers in crowded classrooms are unlikely to be able to provide. Many teachers said they usually place children with disabilities in the front seats of the classroom, so they can pay close attention to them and promptly respond to their needs. However, given the circumstances, it was clear that the success of the education of these children is highly dependent on the level of effort teachers choose to dedicate to it. In the conception of REALIASE, the project did not plan interventions targeting the specific curriculum needs of these children.

Sexual health issues

Period poverty:

Period poverty (meaning a lack of necessary resources and accurate information around menstruation) is a common problem that negatively affects girls' attendance in school.[26] The

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[25] See REALISE Utilisation_de_book_banks, May and June 2021.
[26] Rossouw, L. & Ross, H. (2021). *Understanding Period Poverty: Socio-Economic Inequalities in Menstrual Hygiene Management in Eight Low- and Middle-Income Countries.* Accessed at: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33806590/

school days missed as a result of this can lead girls to fall behind in school, become demotivated to continue attending classes, and even to drop out. Taking this barrier into account, REALISE distributed, as a supplementary activity to SRH clubs, menstruation kits to girls.

Girls who received the kits said that the kits were highly relevant, because the girls would not have had sufficient financial means to purchase the kits themselves. According to the descriptions, the kits were comprised of handkerchief, scissors, a hygienic kit, soap, and a calendar to keep track of the menstrual cycle. Teachers who referred to the intervention also rated it as relevant, as girls usually miss class when they are menstruating because they do not have accurate information on how to care for themselves during that period, and they often do not have adequate supplies to manage the bleeding.

Safety

Child protection and child wellbeing challenges threaten access to education and quality of learning:

Gender based violence (GBV) in the school environment is another threat that discourages girls from attending classes. According to several representatives from the MOE and project staff, some teachers and classmates can openly ridicule girls who are older, married or have children, and public humiliation can lead girls to drop out. More severe forms of GBV, including sexual harassment or rape perpetrated by teachers or boys at school, is also a problem that makes girls feel unsafe at school and that can also lead to underaged pregnancy through sexual assault. To target barriers related to child protection and wellbeing, REALISE proposed SRH clubs and child protection and safeguarding activities.

Child protection and safeguarding is key integrated component of the project and was also intended to address basic threats to children's abilities to safely access education. As part of the activities, protection focal points were trained in the schools to enhance the reporting of harassment and sexual violence at school. The focal points are the ones who follow-up on the abuse cases committed against school-children. Given their sensitive role, they were chosen by the children, as it was imperative that the pupils trusted the focal point enough to report any instances of abuse to that person. According to one project staff-member, "*these focal points take these abuses or cases committed by teachers or students themselves and refer them to the [MOE representatives]*",[27] who help in the referral of the cases. To guarantee the safety of students in class, teachers were also trained in violence prevention and awareness. In addition, the project provided a hotline in which community members could report cases of abuse committed against children.

According to a few MOE representatives, the training for violence prevention was relevant to avoid verbal and physical abuses of students, as teachers had previously lacked awareness around how teasing and humiliation of children could lead to discouragement, potential trauma, and a much higher risk of dropout. The training tried to fill the gaps in teachers' understandings by explaining the different types of violence (not merely physical) that might occur, and by explaining the code of conduct teachers should follow when working. The activity was necessary to address the misconduct of some teachers, as there had been numerous reports of teachers' verbal and physical abuse against students prior to the start of the project. However, apart from by a few MOE representatives, the training for the teachers is not mentioned in the qualitative interviews.

The protection hotline offered a safe channel for children and other community members to seek guidance and to report abuses committed against children. A religious leader said that the hotline was useful because prior to the start of the REALISE project sexual harassment cases were usually not reported at all. Prior to the start of the project there had been no clear means or channel to report abuse anonymously and with assurance that action would be taken.[28] An MOE representative noted that the awareness-raising done in the schools about the hotline was useful to help the schools identify teachers who were abusing students. In this way, the schools were able to press charges against the abusive teachers and fire them.[29] Most head teachers and teachers reported being aware of the hotline and its purpose. However, a few teachers, head teachers and MOE representatives mentioned it was not useful because there are "*no cases to report because the children were already safe*."[30]

On the contrary, the monitoring data shows that there were a number of calls made (8,400 total calls from Q13 – Q17) and that the number increased over time. The majority of calls concerned requests for information but there were also a number of cases related to child protection and safeguarding.[31] This implies that the hotline was relevant and used to report abuses. Furthermore, several girls reported calling the hotline or knowing others who called to report cases of abuse. One girl said: "*A girl from us had called that number. Because a boy had touched her in her clothes, her daddy wasn't there, so she had to call so they could come and arrest this boy*."[32]

Moreover, despite reports of many girls knowing and some even using the number, none of the girls interviewed in Lomami did not know about the existence of the toll-free number, which suggests some problems of efficiency.[33] Curiously, a community leader in Haut Katanga said that some people did not want to use the hotline, because they were afraid of being seen as a "snitch" by the community. Instead, some parents said that they still prefer to not report the cases and solve the problem privately.

However, a religious leader said that "*At first, we did not disclose cases of abuse, and when we knew that there is a free phone line, now we report them*."[34] He also added the relevance of the hotline in preventing future cases: "*It has taught a lesson to those who were committing these abuses. It was frequent, with the intervention as we underlined it here, well those who committed the abuses are already afraid now [..] [that] they will be arrested and so on*."[35] This was echoed by several others, including a religious leader who stated: "*That helped a lot! In the times when we saw lots of violence, one could just use the number, call and they would respond, and you would inform them on the problem at hand.*"[36]

None of the respondents mentioned the child protection and safety focal points nor talking with them in case of any protection and safety issues. The hotline monitoring data showed that the percentage of child protection cases reported by the focal points is 14% (Q16) and 13% (Q17), which does indicate relevance to some extent.[37] Even though there are ambivalent responses to the hotline across the communities, many respondents mentioned their relevance in case of emergencies and as a prevention as well.

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[28] Religious leader KII in Kasai Oriental.
[29] MOE representative in Lomami.
[30] Teacher KII in Tanganyika.
[31] See REALISE 133 HOTLINE Analysis Q15, Q16 and Q17.
[32] Girls FGD in Lomami, 11 to 14 years old group.
[33] Girls FGDs in Lomami, both 11 to 14 years old group and 15 to 17 years old group.
[34] Religious leader KII in Kasai Oriental.
[35] Religious leader KII in Kasai Oriental.
[36] Religious leader KII in Tanganyika.
[37] Ibid.

SRH clubs were designed to address child protection challenges and threats to child wellbeing, which ultimately threaten children's access to education. These clubs were established to improve girls' and boys' knowledge of puberty, menstruation, and sexual heath. Project staff said that in the first year of the project, the club worked with the 7th and 8th grades, but in 2020 they extended the activity to the primary level as well, as they thought it was important that primary grade students had access to accurate information about their sexual and reproductive health (and to boost transitions of the cohort with the project coming to an end). In each primary school, the SRH club included 30 girls. In each secondary school, the clubs consisted of 30 members who were divided into two groups: 15 girls and 15 boys. The project selected facilitators who would hold the club sessions once a week. Specifically for the primary grade sessions, the facilitator was from the same gender as the group to allow the girls to be more comfortable talking about sensitive subjects such as menstruation.

All girls and teachers confirmed that there is an SRH club present in their school, apart from an AEP school in Kasai Oriental. Most parents and boys were also aware of the existence of the clubs. All girls agreed it is relevant learning about body care and hygiene. There were many reports of girls saying that they did not previously know how to handle their menstruation, but the club taught them how to use sanitary pads, how to clean up and how to control the menstrual cycle. One girl the following example of what she learned: "*The important thing we learned is to take care of our bodies. In the morning, you carry a bucket of water and go with it to the bathroom. Then take a bath and wash your underwear. After that, you hang them and wear another one. If you see blood in your underwear, you change it. If it is too heavy (the menstruation flow), you wear a tissue.*"[38]

Even though most boys were aware of the presence of the clubs, the majority of those interviewed did not participate in the activity. The ones who did participate thought the sessions were important and relevant to them, as they learned about what to expect from puberty and body changes and how to improve their body hygiene.

According to all teachers and head teachers, the sexual and reproductive education provided by the project is particularly relevant, as most parents do not talk to their children about those subjects, either because parents do not have the requisite knowledge themselves or because they do not feel comfortable. The importance of the SRH clubs is highlighted by a teacher who said "*when these girls are in the age of puberty, these are such girls that we have here, it is very important from the eleven ten, eleven, twelve and more, in this gap of age, it is very important, when they grow up, they will start to see things on their bodies, they must not be surprised*."[39]

A head teacher added that the safe environment for discussion that the clubs provide is useful to foster a change in mindset of community members, as it normalizes discussions about sexuality and reproduction. Most teachers and head teachers agreed that there were no opposed groups in the communities, but a few teachers suggested that one source for reproducing the taboo against SRH topics is that some parents and community elders condemned such discussions. The lack of sexual education and education surrounding puberty is dangerous to children's wellbeing. A head teacher from Lomami gave a shocking example: "*In one territory, there was the student who was not informed that there could be some appearances on her body after a certain age. When the child saw that there were breasts growing, it was really abnormal for her. When this evolved and she was in a lower class and was teased, the child went to cut them off with a*

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[38] Girls FGD in Tanganyika, 11 to 14 years old group.
[39] Teacher KII in Haut Katanga.

razor blade. She cut her breasts. There, the parent had not done their job. That's how we say that the club has an impact because the children are informed about the development of the body." [40]

The SRH hotline was operational since April 2019 and was set up to offer additional space for girls (and boys) to ask questions about sexual and reproductive health. The monitoring data showed that there were some calls made to the SRH hotline (2,528 in Q16 and Q17), most notably in Kasai Oriental. The hotline reports show that while calls from children were low, the percentage increased, especially while schools were closed. Most of the calls concerned requests for information, followed by information on puberty, information on everyday life and some information on menstruation.[41] About half of the girls and boys reported knowing about the existence of the hotline, however very few said they had called it themselves. Some girls and boys reported they knew someone who had called the SRH hotline.

Additionally, most parents were aware of and participated in the parental sessions of the SRH clubs. Many parents noted that their daughters became more aware of body-care and cleanliness, and some parents even said that they learned new information alongside their children, suggesting that the intervention was relevant for parents as well as their girls. As one parent noted "*they improved our knowledge because there were other things that I didn't know, when I got in these groups, I felt my knowledge improved, why? Because I'm talking easily with my children, things I was ashamed to discuss with them, now it becomes easy to talk with them.*"[42]

TPD also played a role in raising teachers' awareness about child protection and violence prevention. Many teachers and head teachers said that the training was relevant, as it enhanced their teaching methods to keep the children interested in the classes, even with overcrowded classes due to *Gratuité*. The training on positive discipline and conflict sensitivity was particularly relevant to address physical punishments in class and GBV. Many boys and girls confirmed that the way they were previously regularly physically punished in class. This is confirmed by several parents. However, even though evidence suggests that teachers largely stopped discriminating or insulting girls, corporal punishment is still a problem that some respondents noted. We will return to this in the Effectiveness section. The below table shows which barrier each TPD module addressed.

Table 4 TPD modules designed to address barriers of girls' access to quality education

Barrier[43]	TPD module[44]
Low level of teacher experience / exposure to effective pedagogies**	- Supporting the wellbeing and learning of all children (Gender and Inclusion) - Use of classroom resources (teaching materials) - Conflict sensitive education - Large Class Size Management - Positive Discipline in a crowded classroom - Cross-curricular skills cycle 1 - Transversal skills - Differentiated learning in reading and math
Fundamental learning skill gaps exist in literacy at the level of letter-sound identification and in numeracy at the level of subtraction*	- Literacy L 1-3 (Phonemics, Fluency and Vocabulary) - Maths: Introduction to Maths - Reading Assessment - Math: Problem solving in the form of statements - Refresh Literacy Module Literacy 1-3 (Digital)

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[40] Teacher KII in Lomami, female, 31 years old.
[41] See REALISE SRH 134 Hotline Analysis Q16 and Q17.
[42] Parents FGD in Kasai Oriental.
[43] A complete list of barriers can be found in the relevance summary table below.
[44] See TPD Modules & competencies.

	• L 5-6 - Reading Comprehension & Writing • Differentiated learning in reading and math
Overcrowded classes due to fee-free primary school decreases quality of teaching****	• Large Class Size Management • Positive Discipline in a crowded classroom
Child protection and child wellbeing challenges threaten access to education and quality of learning	• Child Protection • Supporting the wellbeing and learning of all children (Gender and Inclusion) • COVID-19 III
Sexual health issues and gender-based violence*	• Child Protection • Supporting the wellbeing and learning of all children (Gender and Inclusion)
COVID-19 demands adjustments of classroom management and materials***	• COVID-19 III

*Barrier from baseline evaluation[45]
**Barrier from ToC supported by baseline evaluation
***Barrier from mid-point assessment[46]
****New barrier from end-line evaluation

COVID-19

As a last, during the mid-point assessment, many teachers indicated that the biggest challenges to returning to regular in-person schooling are related to COVID-19 measures. The most commonly cited challenge among surveyed teachers was difficulty maintaining social distancing while at school and the challenge of wearing masks in school.[47] During the endline, many teachers and head teachers reiterated the relevance of the COVID-19 modules on how to provide safe schooling.

Some primary school head teachers reported that the bursaries were relevant, albeit merely on the short term, to cover the costs for some of the necessities for the school. Amongst others, they mentioned items such as chalk, benches, rehabilitation of the ceiling and salaries of the administrative team.

Summary

This summary seeks to answer the evaluation questions corresponding to relevance.[48] Based on the perspectives of girls, parents, teachers, head teachers, and government representatives, the REALISE project and its interventions were well designed and relevant for the targeted beneficiaries. The mapping on barriers to girls' education done in this research suggests that the objectives and design of the project, including the underlying ToC were valid and generally responded to the needs and priorities of the schools and the beneficiaries, including girls. Additionally, there has been a relevance in the compounding factor of each of the interventions in addressing the importance of girls' access to education as we found that the opportunities created by the separate interventions were used to also touch upon other barriers, such as the VSLA groups speaking about the value of girls and the importance of their education.

The below table summarizes all barriers from the ToC, and baseline, mid-point and endline evaluations, which intervention or activity was designed to target the barrier and how relevant those interventions or activities were in targeting those barriers. The relevance of the interventions is considered high when many respondents, and many different types of respondents across the

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[45] Forcier, Baseline evaluation, October 2018.

[46] Forcier, Rapid mid-point assessment, November 2020.

[47] Forcier, Rapid mid-point assessment, November 2020.

[48] See Annex 2 for the evaluation questions in the analysis plan.

regions classified it as relevant. The relevance is considered medium when several respondents and several different types of respondents or many respondents of one type considered the intervention as relevant. The relevance is considered low if mentioned as relevant only a few times or not at all and if many respondents classify it as irrelevant.[49]

Table 5 Relevance of each project intervention in addressing barriers

Barriers[50]	Project Interventions / components	Relevance of intervention (high, low, medium)	Relevance of project to barrier?
Household income is too low to send girls to school**	Village saving and loans associations / groups (VSLAs)	High	High
	Bursaries	Medium	
School costs are too high to send girls to school**	Bursaries	Medium	Medium
Hidden costs of schooling	Support for AEP centres	High – limited data	High
	Classroom kits	High	
Families don't value girls' education**	Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) clubs	High	High
	VSLAs	Medium	
	Teacher professional development (TPD) – Gender and Inclusion	High	
Conflict disrupts schooling**	Teacher professional development (TPD) - Conflict-sensitive education	Low	Low
Schools have insufficient learning materials*	Support for AEP centres	High	Medium
	Classroom kits	High	
Insufficient school infrastructure such as separate latrines for girls****	-	-	-
Low level of teacher experience / exposure to effective pedagogies**	TPD	High	High
Fundamental learning skill gaps exist in literacy at the level of letter-sound identification and in numeracy at the level of subtraction*	Learning clubs (LCs)	High	High
	TPD	High	
Overcrowded classes due to fee-free primary school decreases quality of teaching****	TPD	High	Medium
Teacher absenteeism*	-	-	-
Child protection and child wellbeing challenges threaten access to education and quality of learning**	Child protection and safeguarding focal points	Low	Medium
	Teacher professional development (TPD) – Child Protection	Medium	
	Child protection and safeguarding hotline	High	
	SRH clubs	High	
	SRH hotline	Low	

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[49] Please note that this concerns relevance as perceived by the respondents.
[50] List of barriers identified in ToC, and during baseline, mid-point and endline evaluations.

Barriers[50]	Project Interventions / components	Relevance of intervention (high, low, medium)	Relevance of project to barrier?
School closures due to COVID-19 affect girl's learning retention***	LCs	High	High
	TPD	High	
School closures due to COVID-19 affect girl's return and risk of dropout***	-	-	-
COVID-19 demands adjustments of classroom management and materials***	TPD – (Safe Back to School module)	High	High
	Support for AEP Centres	High	
School closures due to COVID-19 affect girl's chore burden such as income-generating activities, household upkeep, and childcare***	SRH clubs	Medium	Medium
School closures due to COVID-19 affect self-care, cognitive and mental health-related impairments***	SRH clubs	High	High

*Barrier from baseline data[51]
**Barrier from ToC supported by baseline data
***Barrier from mid-point assessment[52]
****New barrier from end-line evaluation

4.2   Coherence

The following section discusses the external and internal coherence of the REALISE project's activities. The coherence OECD DAC evaluation criteria seeks to identify the extent to which duplication of efforts or non-complementary activities across various implementers undermine progress. Specifically, external coherence is concerned with two factors, alignment with external policy commitments and alignment with interventions by other actors.[53]

As such, the main research questions regarding the **external coherence** of the REALISE project are:

- To what extent were the project and its interventions consistent with and complementary to other interventions and policies?
- Where relevant, to what extent did the project adapt to changes in the policy environment?

Internal coherence has two considerations, the alignment with wider policy frameworks of the institution and the alignment with other interventions implemented by the institution.[54] The primary research question related to internal coherence is:

- Did the project achieve coherence, interlinkages, and synergies between the different interventions and across the education pathways supported?

[51] Forcier, REALISE Baseline evaluation, October 2018

[52] Forcier, REALISE Rapid mid-point assessment, November 2020

[53] "Understanding the six criteria: Definitions, elements for analysis and key challenges," *OECD iLibrary*, September 23, 2021, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/543e84ed-en/1/3/4/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/543e84ed-en&_csp_=535d2f2a848b7727d35502d7f36e4885&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book&_ga=2.234470620.319708757.1633639762-19576642.1632410389#section-d1e2935.

[54] Ibid.

This section provides evidence to answer these questions first by discussing the REALISE project's consistency with interventions from other development organizations supporting education of children in the DRC. The section will then detail the ways in which the REALISE project supports and aligns with national education policies and concludes with a discussion on the internal coherence of the project.

4.2.1 Coherence with Other Education Interventions

Save the Children is closely involved with the development of policy and interventions both at a national level and provincial level and as such REALISE's policies exhibit a high level of external coherence with other interventions and policies. At the national level, Save the Children co-leads the National Education Cluster and Child Protection Working Group with UNICEF. As co-lead of the Education Cluster, Save the Children partners with the MOE to ensure children's right to education is fulfilled and that girls are protected. Save the Children coordinates with the UN, World Bank, donors, and international/national NGOs. At the provincial level, Save the Children and World Vision are active members of provincial working groups to which they provide coordination and technical support. The table below presents the location and primary interventions of the REALISE project alongside concurrent interventions of other education projects.

Table 6 Coherence of interventions with other education projects in DRC

Project	Geography	SRH	TPD	Bursaries	VSLA	AEP
REALISE	• Save the Children in Ituri, Kasai Orientale, and Lomami provinces and World Vision in Tanganyika, Haut-Katanga, and Lualaba	• Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Clubs for girls • Hygiene kits • Age appropriate curriculum in G6 primary and secondary school	• Literacy and numeracy methodologies • Gender- sensitive and conflict-sensitive pedagogy • Continued TPD during COVID-19 shutdown	• Bursaries to girls in G5-G7	• Parents of primary school students encouraged to join savings and loans group	• Material and financial support to 16 AEP Centres for girls and boys
Bien Grandir Plus!	• Kinshasa only	• Boys and girls provided age-appropriate information on SRH				
Kitumaini initiative	• Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, and Goma	• Sex education and family life education in primary, secondary, and vocational education.				
Accelere!	• Kinshasa, Haut-Katanga, Lualaba, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental, Equateur, Sud Ubangi, Nord Kivu, and Sud Kivu Provinces • Primary schools G1-4 only—moved to Kinshasa in March 2019		• Early-grade reading curriculum • High-quality teaching materials • Conflict- sensitive pedagogy			• Non-formal learning programs • Vocational apprenticeship programs
PAQUE	• -Kasai, Kasai Central, Mongala, Tshuapa, Sud-Ubangi, Nord-Ubangi, Ecuador, Lomami, and Tanganyika provinces • Primary Schools only G1-4					

In the area of sexual and reproductive health, there was a high level of external coherence between REALISE's interventions and those of other organizations. REALISE supported the creation of Sexual and Reproductive Health Clubs for secondary school female students to discuss gender norms, empowerment, and life skills. Girls were also provided with hygiene kits, sessions were organized for parents/caregivers, and REALISE established a sexual and reproductive health hotline. Two programs mentioned by key informants during interviews also aimed to improve the sexual and reproductive health of students in the DRC in different geographic areas and using different methods.

Bien Grandir Plus!, a program funded by Global Affairs Canada and Save the Children Canada, seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of girls and boys aged 10 to 19 in Kinshasa. Both boys and girls are provided age-tailored information on sexual and reproductive health and rights, sexual and gender-based violence, response services for sexual and gender-based violence, safe sexual activity, use of contraceptives, parent-child communication about sexuality, and positive gender norms. The program's expected duration is from 2018 to 2021.[55] Since the program is in part funded by Save the Children, this may also be considered an instance of internally coherent interventions.

The **Kitumaini initiative**, implemented by UNFPA and financed by Canada, Sweden, the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), and FCDO, sought to integrate comprehensive sex education/family life education in the curriculum of primary, secondary, and vocational education. Kitumaini aimed to develop life skills of adolescents and young people to make informed decisions and provide them with access to quality sexual and reproductive health information and services adapted to their specific needs. Access to sexual and reproductive health information were located near schools and places of residence of young girls. The program was launched in 2018 and is active in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, and Goma. While the Kitumaini initiative and REALISE shared similar aims and methods, the only potential overlap between the two programs would have been geographic in Haut Katanga, although REALISE did not have any schools within Lubumbashi itself.[56]

Concurrent with REALISE, there were a number of other interventions that sought to improve teaching and learning. One such program is the **Projet d'Amélioration de la Qualité d'Éducation (PAQUE)** program. One of the main differences however is that PAQUE seeks to drive change for teachers and students through performance-based financing. Under performance-based financing, schools will receive payments based on their performance along key quality and quantity indicators such as the number of girls that have enrolled and been retained during a school year, the number of girls that have successfully finished primary education, availability of teachers, and presence of teaching materials. The donors for PAQUE target gender disparities in school.[57] Specifically, PAQUE incentivizes schools to focus on girls' school attendance by paying schools more for the enrolment of a girl than for that of a boy. The PAQUE program, begun in 2018 and active until 2021, is implemented by Cordaid and the DRC's MOE and financed by the World Bank. The PAQUE program focuses its intervention on students

[55] "Bien Grandir Plus!" Institute for Reproductive Health, Georgetown University, September 23, 2021, https://irh.org/projects/bien-grandir-plus/.

[56] "When the 'Kitumaini initiative' enables Ruth KALENGA to move from despair to hope," United Nations Population Fund, September 23, 2021, https://drc.unfpa.org/en/news/when-%E2%80%9Ckitumaini-initiative%E2%80%9D-enables-ruth-kalenga-move-despair-hope.

[57] "Better education for half a million girls and boys," ReliefWeb, June 4, 2018, https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/better-education-half-million-girls-and-boys.

and schools, monitored through frequent inspector visits, and allows schools to choose how to spend the funding they receive. The REALISE project takes a more broad and guided intervention approach with interventions for the local economy of the local community through VSLAs, community outreach in Citizen Voice and Action Groups, curriculum and groups for sexual and reproductive health, and bursaries for girls.

Accelere! is a program funded by USAID and FCDO and implemented by Chemonics and UNICEF to improve equitable access to education and learning outcomes for girls and boys. The project's goals are to increase enrolment and retention, help the MOE to develop and deliver an evidence-based, early-grade reading curriculum, improve reading outcomes with high-quality teaching materials and enhancing teacher effectiveness, and foster effective learning environments in a conflict-sensitive setting.[58] Like REALISE, Accelere! supports alternative/accelerated learning programs and non-formal education centres. Unlike REALISE, Accelere! also supports vocational apprenticeship programs. During COVID-19, Accelere! pivoted to distance learning and developed interactive radio lessons.[59] The program is expansive and aimed to eight provinces in DRC, Kinshasa, Haut-Katanga, Lualaba, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental, Equateur, Sud Ubangi, Nord Kivu, and Sud Kivu, however field activities closed in March 2019 and the project moved to Kinshasa to work with private schools. Accelere! began in 2015 and ends in 2021.

There were various ways in which other organizations supported accelerated education programs mentioned by key informants. REALISE staff said that they collaborated with UNICEF to create exercise books for distribution to children while schools were closed. To help students prepare for TENAFEP exams, REALISE distributed the learning packs with exercise or home workbooks to L3 students of the 16 AEP centres supported by the project, all G6 students in primary schools, and students in all learning clubs. The REALISE project staff noted, "We had to collaborate with UNICEF for the exercise book, and it was what UNICEF developed that was distributed. The exercise books are uniform, and there were not so many supplemental tools to confuse the children."[60] A representative of the Division of Social Affairs (DIVAS) reported that DIVAS worked with World Vision on an accelerated education program for adolescents (aged 14 to 17) who are mothers. Lastly, a representative of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) cited War Child Canada's work on accelerated education programs as another instance of programs which are working on the same issues as REALISE. The MINAS representative reported that War Child Canada rehabilitated accelerated education program centres, equipped 10 centres, and supports the teachers who teach in the centres.

4.2.2 Coherence with National Policy
Given the close collaboration of Save the Children with the MOE as Co-Lead of the Education Cluster, there is a close alignment in policy between the interventions of REALISE and the goals outlined in the DRC's strategy for the education sector, "Stratégie nationale d'éducation et formation, 2016-2025."[61] In the education strategy, the government sets out a series of educational policy measures to create the conditions for a quality education, many of which are

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[58] "Accelerating Access and Learning in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," Chemonics, September 23, 2021, https://chemonics.com/projects/accelerating-access-learning-democratic-republic-congo/.

[59] "Improving Reading, Equity, and Accountability in the DRC (ACCELERE!)" EducationLinks, September 23, 2021, https://www.edu-links.org/about/education-programs/improving-reading-equity-and-accountability-drc-accelere.

[60] Project staff KII in Haut Katanga, male, 60 years old.

[61] "Stratégie sectorielle de l'éducation et de la formation 2016-2025," UNESCO, December 2015, https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/en/2015/strat%C3%A9gie-sectorielle-de-l%C3%A9ducation-et-de-la-formation-2016-2025-6259.

consistent with the REALISE interventions. The table below presents area in which the national education strategy and the REALISE activities intersect.

Table 7 Coherence between national education strategy and REALISE interventions

National Education Strategy	REALISE activity
3.1.1 Offer all children a complete and free primary cycle	• Enrolment campaigns
4. Create the conditions for a quality education system	
4.1.1 Update programs and teaching methods	• TPD training • Remote learning support through workbooks
4.1.2 Establish a quality assurance system	• Support ministry in conducting observations in primary schools, secondary schools, and AEP centres.
4.1.3 Improving the educational environment	• Procurement and distribution of class kits • Provision of teaching and learning material • Learning clubs • Caregiver sessions • Supplying schools with classroom kits with classroom supplies with pens, pencils, notebooks, chalk, and textbooks • Provision of handwashing stations and soap • Community-based child protection networks (RECOPE) and protection focal point supported
4.1.5 Facilitate the integration and reintegration of adults and children out of school	• Accelerated Education Program centres
4.1.6 Update teacher training and supervision	• TPD training
5. Improve governance and management of the sector	
5.1.1 Strengthen decentralization and de-concentration	• Close engagement with local ministry officials • Capacity building and coordination with PROVED
5.1.2 Involve communities and civil society in the management of establishments	• Support management committee (COGES) advocacy planning meeting (1 meeting per quarter) • VSLA follow up and support

Through its TPD programs, REALISE is improving education programs for children and promoting enhanced pedagogical techniques which are gender-sensitive and conflict-sensitive. In its support for AEP programs, REALISE is reintegrating children who are out-of-school and preparing them for a transition back into school or a vocation. By supplying schools with classroom kits with classroom supplies with pens, pencils, notebooks, chalk, and textbooks, REALISE improves the educational environment.

The REALISE project's emphasis on promoting literacy as a foundational skill is consistent with the DRC's language program, "Programme Nationale de lecture et écriture." The literacy program recognizes the deficits in reading among Congolese children following educational assessments

completed using the Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la CONFEMEN (PASEC) framework.[62]

Given these deficits, the "Plan Intérimaire de l'Education" (PIE) includes the strengthening of learning to read and write in the first years of primary school. After the completion of primary school, students will be expected to have learned the following skills:

- express themselves orally and in writing in an appropriate and precise vocabulary
- speak while respecting the appropriate language level
- read a text with ease (aloud, silently)
- read alone texts from the heritage and complete works of children's literature, adapted to their age
- read alone and understand a statement, an instruction
- understand new words and use them wisely
- identify the theme of a text
- use your knowledge to reflect on a text (understand it better, or write it better)
- answer a question with a full sentence, both orally and in writing
- write a text of about fifteen lines (story, description, dialogue, poetic text, report) using his knowledge of vocabulary and in grammar
- spell a simple ten-line text correctly - when writing or dictating it - referring to known spelling rules and grammar and vocabulary knowledge
- know how to use a dictionary, precise grammar

REALISE shares the goals of building literacy and has a focus on building fundamental literacy among girls from Grade 4 to Grade 8 specifically. Girls are most likely to drop out in the transition from primary to secondary school and REALISE theorizes that if REALISE can build literacy skills and limit other restraining factors, then girls will transition successfully to secondary school and high levels of drop out from school can be curbed.

REALISE has also been working to complement the government's policy of free primary education, a right that is enumerated in Article 143 of the DRC's constitution, but one which has not been fulfilled. In 2019, the DRC remained as one of the few countries in which public primary education was not free.[63] In 2019, the new administration of Felix Tshisekedi took on free primary education as one of his primary goals and led major investment into education of over $1 billion per year.[64] Nevertheless, despite these investments, shortfalls remain for children and schools. To finance enrolment of girls into school, REALISE provides their families with bursaries and works to improve the household's ability to support their girls' education through programs such as VSLAs. Further, REALISE has observed in its reporting a lack of classroom supplies—up to five children share the same book, and teachers are without chalk in the classroom. To address

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[62] "Programme national d'écriture en langues congolaises à l'école primaire," DRC Ministry of Primary, Secondary, and Technical Education, February 2014, https://www.eduquepsp.education/sgc/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Programme_national_Ecriture-en-langues-congolaises.pdf.

[63] Scherezad Latif and Melissa Adelman, "Gratuité de l'enseignement primaire en RDC : où en sommes-nous sur la voie de la réforme," World Bank Blogs, August 3, 2021, https://blogs.worldbank.org/fr/education/*Gratuite*-de-lenseignement-primaire-en-rdc-ou-en-sommes-nous-sur-la-voie-de-la-reforme.

[64] Ibid.

these deficits and work in a complementary way with the government's policy of free primary education, REALISE procured class kits of notebooks, pens, pencils, and chalk for students and teachers. REALISE also procured and distributed textbooks, teachers' manuals and printed copies of the national curriculum for all schools.

With regard to sexual and reproductive health of children, the MOE introduced SRH education to primary and secondary schools (Education to Life) in 2013.[65] REALISE was first to expand SRH curriculum outside of Kinshasa at the provincial level in secondary schools. REALISE continues to build on its work on SRH and trains mentors for SRH in secondary school which help girls develop confidence, life skills, and social networks. A new Medium-Term Response Plan (MTRP) adaptation last year expanded SRH clubs to Grade 6 primary school girls, who will receive materials on mental health and psychosocial support and hygiene kits. The Medium-Term Response Plan (MTRP) adaptation also trained G6 teachers on the national Education to Life curriculum.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic which shut down schools during long stretches during the academic year, REALISE has worked with the MOE to meet the educational and protection needs of children. In March 2020, schools closed in response to the pandemic, reopened in October of that year only to close after two months, and reopened in February 2021.[66] The shutdowns are a major source of concern for education advocates in the DRC, because previous epidemics have been shown to result in a reduction in the re-enrolment of children and adolescents. In response to the crisis, REALISE continued providing teachers' professional development modules and resources and sharing them with the MOE and the members of the Education Cluster. REALISE has also maintained contact with girls throughout the pandemic with the help of their parents and caregivers. To provide girls with MHPSS, REALISE has printed and distributed guidance for parents and caregivers. All Grade 6 and L3 AEP students, as well as G4-G5 learning club students received home study workbooks. To prepare for the eventual re-opening of schools, REALISE continued quarterly TPD. The TPD included COVID-19 self-study modules which informed teachers about the virus, know how to speak to children of different ages about the virus to keep them safe, know the added vulnerabilities of girls and other marginalized children, and to support teachers' own well-being and mental health.

4.2.3 Internal Coherence
The primary way that the evaluation team observed internal coherence between different project interventions and across education pathways was in the way REALISE project promoted self-confidence of girls to pursue education and the REALISE project's advocacy efforts to promote girls' education among parents and community leaders—the cumulative effect of which was to have positive community-level impact, empowering girls and transforming perceptions of gender roles among community leaders, parents, and children. Due to participation in the learning and SRH clubs, girls reported feeling more secure and comfortable participating in the classroom. In turn, the community leaders and project stakeholders interviewed said that they have noted that parents are becoming more supportive of the education of girls. While the respondents in the qualitative data did not link the change of parents' attitudes directly to REALISE's advocacy for girls' education in school management (COGES/COPAS) meetings among community leaders or in parent/caregiver sessions, we find it likely that REALISE's efforts have helped to move the

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[65] "Formation des enseignants sur le nouveau programme d'éducation à la vie familiale," CONFEMEN, September 23, 2021, https://www.confemen.org/formation-des-enseignants-sur-le-nouveau-programme-deducation-a-la-vie-familiale/.

[66] "COVID-19 School closures in the DRC: Impact on the health, protection and education of children and youth," ReliefWeb, May 2021, https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/covid-19-school-closures-drc-impact-health-protection-and-education.

needle toward a culture of greater inclusivity for girls. The girls interviewed appear to have embraced this more inclusive culture and indicated having a desire to finish primary school and to continue onto university, and parents' opinions aligned with their children's wishes.

4.3   Efficiency

This section on efficiency addresses questions of whether the project was efficient in terms of its expenditure of resources, and also in terms of management practices and collaboration mechanisms within the project. The research questions the research aimed to answer to the extent possible are:

- To what extent did the project deliver the intended results in an economic[67] and timely way?
- Was the project managed efficiently? Were the coordination and collaboration mechanisms established by the project efficient? What could have been improved and what worked well?
- To what extent did the project adopt and apply 'adaptive management' practices that would support improved efficiency in the delivery of interventions?

While an elaborate evaluation of value-for-money (VfM) is beyond the scope of this evaluation,[68] we used available qualitative data from project staff to comment on perceived efficiencies or inefficiencies in the use of resources, and thereby provide some evidence that relates to VfM for REALISE as a whole. The summary at the end of this section seeks to answer the evaluation questions.

General efficiency and resource utilization

The project staff interviewed for this evaluation reported that the REALISE project as a whole was able to achieve its objectives within budget and that a key factor in this achievement was the close collaboration between the staff and other parties involved in the implementation of project activities. Hence, project staff said that the project was managed well and efficiently, with only minor issues. This success was attributed to an effective set of monitoring indicators that REALISE managers developed prior to implementation to constantly assess the quality of the activities, learn, and adapt when necessary. Project staff also suggested that, throughout the implementation process, the project maintained a sufficient level of control of implementation processes and monitored the activities accurately. Because the activities were well documented, staff were able to easily verify the lists of participants in order to ensure that all of the outputs were distributed as planned.

The only notable critique of implementation efficiency came from a small number of project staff who reported feeling that the project should have been expanded to other provinces to have even greater impact. The limited number of schools, locations, students in the clubs and teachers being trained was mentioned by many of the stakeholders across the regions. The project staff did temper their feedback by explaining that they also understood that resources were too limited to deliver on a broader geographic scope. In their view, had the project tried to expand its reach to other locations, the quality of the results in existing locations might have been compromised.

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[67] OECD DAC definitions: "Economic" is the conversion of inputs (funds, expertise, natural resources, time, etc.) into outputs, outcomes and impacts, in the most cost-effective way possible, as compared to feasible alternatives in the context. "Timely" delivery is within the intended timeframe, or a timeframe reasonably adjusted to the demands of the evolving context. This may include assessing operational efficiency (how well the intervention was managed).
[68] Save the Children is carrying out this evaluation in parallel.

Management and coordination

According to project staff who were interviewed as part of this evaluation, an aspect of the project which contributed to efficiency was the collaboration and coordination mechanism with stakeholders from different levels. REALISE staff at all levels maintained a good relationship with government entities (especially the MOE), having frequent meetings to inform the relevant bodies about the activities plan and divide the roles and responsibilities. Every quarter an inter-ministerial meeting was organized, in which all project partners, such as MOE, Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Gender, Family and Children, DIVAS and school coordinators were invited. In the meeting, REALISE updated the participants on all activities delivered in the quarter, quarterly performance metrics, challenges encountered, and improvements that needed to be made going forward. Participants in these inter-ministerial meetings were given space to provide feedback and to make suggestions for the improvement of the project. REALISE staff found this two-way flow of information to be particularly valuable and useful. This effective communication system fostered collaborative relationships between REALISE and project stakeholders, as the interviewed staff suggested that government entities were always willing to help and support whenever their help was needed. Before implementing activities at the community level, meetings took place inside the communities to inform them which, according to project staff, also improved the quality of the project.

When asked about concrete examples of activities that were well-managed and well-coordinated, most staff mentioned TPD activities. The delivery of TPD activities relied not only on Save the Children and World Vision staff, but also other government parties who were active in the follow-up process. Once the teachers finished the teacher training and started to teach, there was consistent follow-up at school level, through pedagogical units, teacher feedback, and ministry inspections to ensure that teachers were consistently applying the skills they had been trained on.

Despite the management efficiencies noted above, project staff raised an internal challenge related to the turnover of teachers, inspectors and staff. Several respondents mentioned that whenever new staff or other stakeholders join the project, there must be an investment of time and resources in building their capacity. One staff member explained: "*In Tanganyika, there were a lot of staff members who left, you know when a new staff member comes at the beginning of the project, and we haven't invested much in him… We had invested in the staff who left halfway through the project by resignation or perhaps because his contract has not been renewed. Therefore, you have to renew the team to recruit other new staffs that will have to learn about the project. We then take a small step backwards, because you have to orient them from the start. It takes time they come to understand how to evolve things well.*"[69] Similar turnover challenges were reported for teachers and inspectors. As one staff member said, "w*e had an inspector who was being trained, who is a master trainer, he is rotated, he is taken elsewhere, but he should continue with the 9 cycles, but we must quickly try to train people."*[70] There is nothing in the data to suggest that this problem was extreme in its severity, but the staff members did say that this added to the time pressure they experienced.

An external factor that affected the efficiency of project management was the long distances and the poor conditions of the roads in some project locations. The implementation and monitoring of the project required staff to do a considerable amount of commuting, as inspectors and project staff must travel often to do follow-ups and coordination. Several respondents reported that the available budget, cars, and schedule set were not sufficient to cover the frequent movement that

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[69] Project staff KII in Tanganyika, male, 42 years old.
[70] Project staff KII in Haut Katanga, male, 60 years old.

was required. In addition, some trips were extremely time-consuming, given the logistical challenges that surrounded movement from one project location to the next. In addition, adverse weather conditions often added an extra layer of complexity to the challenge of carrying out routine site visits.[71] Project staff said that on the Kasenga and Lubudi axis (Haut Katanga), travel was difficult during the rainy season, and this impeded the delivery of key inputs. Some respondents reported that access to Kasenga was cut off completely for a time, and the inputs did not reach the area at all during that period.

To summarize the findings and answer the evaluation questions, we are looking at delivery and engagement challenges, adaptive management, and working through local partners.

Delivery and engagement challenges:

According to the project staff, the project delivered its interventions in a timely manner, although some project staff complain of the amount of work to be completed in a short time. The time pressure from the project was not always felt by the partners in school or other participants – it was reported that they were not always punctual when necessary and many meetings were delayed. As one staff member mentioned, "*it is complicated coordinating 30 teachers for a training. You have to prepare the money. Then not all show up, then it has to be rescheduled. Some show up, and then don't get paid the allowance because they couldn't start because they had to reschedule because some were late.*"[72]

Project staff also suggested that the project would have done well to budget for providing incentives to local community members to attend sensitization meetings. Staff in Tanganyika said that eventually there was no budget to offer snacks during the sensitization sessions, and this was accompanied by a direct decrease in the attendance rate for those sessions. According to those staff, some session participants are typically more interested in the incentives provided than in the information and awareness messages presented.

Adaptive management: To maintain project relevance and overcome challenges encountered, project staff acknowledged that adaptive management was utilized. Examples include:

- When the government implemented the Gratuité public policy, REALISE had to change its strategy, as the scholarships for primary school girls provided by the project were no longer relevant. When Free education policy abolished the collection of school fees at primary level (G1-6), there were no fees to be paid. The funds were reallocated to support schools in other ways (classroom supplies, Learning Clubs). However, due to COVID pandemic, REALISE provided a small grant to each primary school. REALISE did continue to pay the school fees for girls in the lower secondary grades (G7 and G8).

- The overcrowded classrooms resulted from the policy also led the project to develop additional TPD modules, including Managing Large Size Classes and Positive Discipline for Large Class Sizes.

- The COVID-19 pandemic also demanded significant adaptations and affected the timely delivery of the intended results. To ensure the safe return of children to school, REALISE requested part of the project budget to be redirected towards COVID-19 prevention and safety measures. This re-purposing of resources was costly, but also ensured that the project was

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[71] In Kasai Oriental, a project staff member reported that there was only one vehicle available to do all of the required trips.
[72] Project staff KII in Lualaba.

able to provide hand-washing stations, alcohol gel (for hand sanitization) and soaps in all schools.

- Furthermore, as a result of COVID-19 restrictions, the project had to reduce the number of teachers who were trained per training session in order to allow social-distancing during trainings. This important safety measure ultimately slowed the rate of training and increased the number of trainer-hours invested, as each training session was not able to support the number of people that had been planned prior to the pandemic.

Working through local partners: One area for improvement noted by project staff was their impression that some project activities, such as SRH clubs, could have been outsourced to local NGOs. This outsourcing would have potentially saved resources for the REALISE project while also offering long term sustainability once the project concludes.

Summary

This summary seeks to answer the evaluation questions corresponding to efficiency.[73] The available qualitative evidence suggests that REALISE interventions were carried out in an economic and timely manner with effective coordination and management. Moreover, the collaboration and coordination mechanism with stakeholders from different levels was perceived as highly efficient. The inefficiencies in the project that respondents did identify were partly a product of external circumstances that might have been predicted and better mitigated, namely logistical challenges of visiting remote locations with poor road infrastructure. Adaptive management was utilized to repurpose some project resources and maintain the relevance of the intervention.

4.4   Effectiveness

In this section, this report aims to address the following evaluation question related to the effectiveness of the project:

- What impact did the project have on the learning and transition of marginalized girls, including girls with disabilities?
- To what extent were the objectives and intended results (outcomes and IOs) of the project achieved, including differential results across groups? what are linked organizational and contextual contributing variables to explaining this?
- What worked (and did not work) to increase the learning and transition of marginalized girls? (i.e., which interventions were most correlated with girls' learning and transition)
- What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives and intended results? To what extent did the project design / ToC address those factors successfully, including through its adaptations? What impact did COVID-19 have on the achievement of these results?

To address barriers to learning and transition for girls in the DRC, the REALISE theory of change focused on improving four intermediate outcomes: attendance, teaching quality, life skills, and economic empowerment which in turn contribute to the broader goals of improving learning outcomes, increasing transition rates, and effecting sustainable change. Each of the intermediate outcomes will be addressed in turn, followed by the two primary outcomes: learning and transition with emphasis on interventions that had the most direct contributions to those outcomes. We will finish the section by looking at the effects of respectively *Gratuité* public policy and COVID-19 on

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[73] See Annex 2 for the evaluation questions in the analysis plan.

the outcomes, and which barriers remain to be addressed. A summary table of the effectiveness of the project interventions in positively affecting the outcomes can be found at the end of this section. The summary will also answer the evaluation questions.

Attendance

School attendance is deemed an important requirement for girls' learning, and thereby their ability to learn and transition through grades. Improving attendance of girls at school is therefore a key intermediate outcome of the REALISE project.[74] Baseline analysis showed that higher attendance is a strong and statistically significant predictor, although not necessarily causal, of higher learning outcomes in both numeracy and literacy.[75] The indicators for attendance include attendance in primary schools, attendance in AEP centres and girls' views on the strength of barriers that may prevent girls' ability to attend school regularly.[76]

School attendance rate for cohort girls during the baseline was already above the 80% target set in the output results framework. A head count during a single day showed 86.8 percent of the total girls enrolled and a calculation of attendance based on the primary caregivers' assessment resulted in an estimated attendance rate of 85.3 percent.[77]

Monitoring data captured from October 2020 until May 2021 showed that student attendance in primary school was generally above 90%, see graph below[78]. October 2020 was the start of a new school year after school closures since March 2020. March 2021 represented the lowest attendance rate for both boys and girls which could be explained by the school closures from December 2020 to February 2021 during the second wave of COVID-19 in DRC. Although the baseline and monitoring data cannot be compared as they were collected through different methods, this does seem to indicate that school attendance has increased during the implementation of the REALISE interventions.

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[74] See REALISE logframe, *2017.12.14 REALISE Logframe_v11*.
[75] Forcier, REALISE Baseline evaluation, October 2018.
[76] See REALISE logframe, *2017.12.14 REALISE Logframe_v11*.
[77] Forcier, REALISE Baseline evaluation, October 2018.
[78] See Quarterly report 17: Monitoring annex 5

Figure 2 Attendance rates[79]
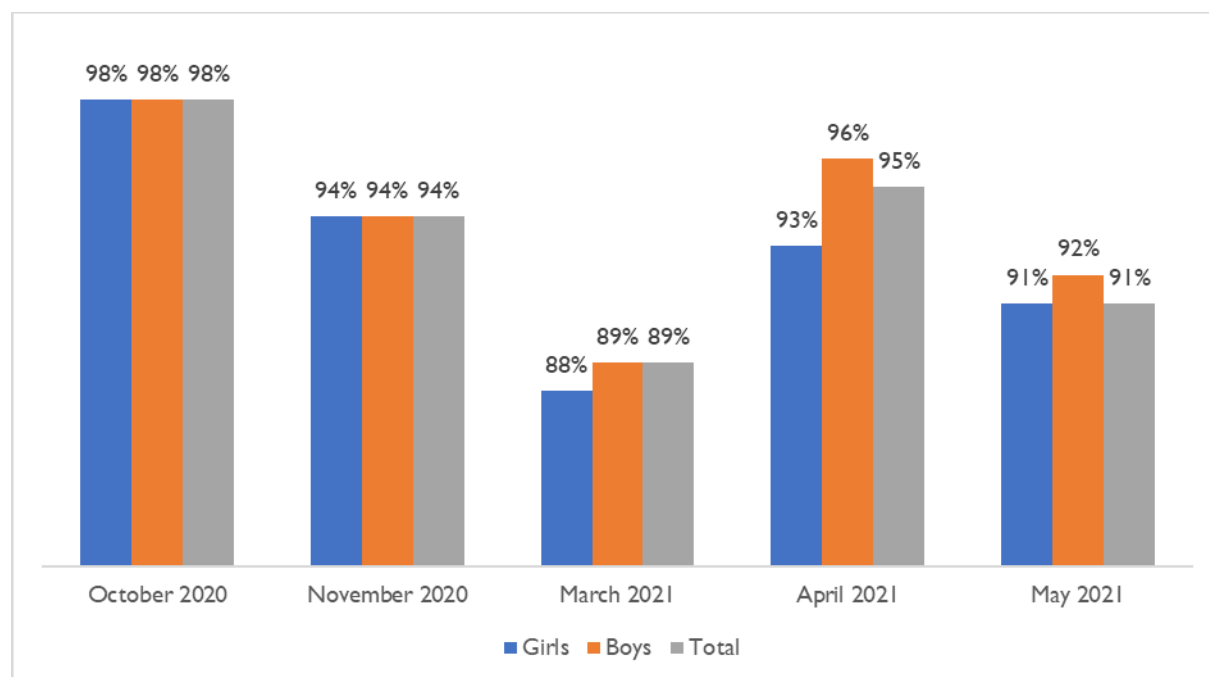
Furthermore, the monitoring report from Q17 concluded that large class size had a negative effect on students' attendance. More specifically, classes with more than 65 students registered larger number of absences for both boys and girls than smaller classes.[80] Although many have mentioned increased enrolment, either due to bursaries or to *Gratuité*, the respondents did not say much about attendance during the endline. The monitoring report mentioned that lower attendance can happen during April and May because of students helping their parents in the field which is confirmed by some teachers and head teachers during the endline.[81]

Many girls viewed school fees as the main barrier stopping girls in their community to attend school. Some also mentioned pregnancies, the need to help parents/mothers with housework and the desire of girls to get married as barriers. All girls interviewed reported that they now value school more than previously. As one girl said, "*we now view our studies as an important thing. In the past we did not take our studies serious but today we know the benefits of going to school. There are others who are going to the farms with their parents, the get pregnant and stop their studies.*"[82] This could indicate that girls have a higher motivation to attend school.

To summarize, attendance rates were already high in the intervention schools at baseline and seemed to have improved further. Current barriers to attendance are large classes and seasonal work. A main barrier for girls' enrolment remains the inability to pay school fees and other related school costs. Other barriers mentioned are pregnancies, housework and the desire of girls to get married.

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[79] See Quarterly report 17: Monitoring annex 5.
[80] See Quarterly report 17: Monitoring annex 5.
[81] See Quarterly report 17: Monitoring annex 5.
[82] Girls FGD 1 in Tanganyika, 11 to 14 years old group.

Quality of teaching

The ToC hypothesised that if the teaching environment and methodology improves, girls will achieve better learning outcomes which will lead to better scores in exams and improved ability to transition through grades. The indicators for quality of teaching include improvement of competencies, skills in teaching children with specific needs and girls' perception towards their teacher's teaching methods and ability.[83] During the baseline, it was found that only one third of teachers interviewed had received a training within the previous year (2017) and there were particularly large issues with organizational skills, mastery of the didactic actions that facilitate learning in the classroom and student-centred teaching approaches. When examining teachers' skills in teaching children with special needs, teachers' greatest limitations during the baseline were in terms of their abilities to use different languages when needed to accommodate children who did not speak the language of instruction, as well as teachers' abilities to make special accommodations for conflict-affected children, when necessary.[84]

Monitoring data of the Teaching Professional Development intervention showed that most teachers self-reported to have improved their skills due to TPD training, most notably in differentiated learning in reading and math (cycle 9). This included using only French in a teaching-learning situation in class, involving all students in class activities and differentiating learning to support all children.[85] The graph below shows the results of self-assessment tests conducted at the beginning and at the end of each cycle.[86] It should be noted that from cycle 6 to 8 TPD training of teachers continued even with the school's closure. However, they were not able to practice nor there was follow-up in place, which impacted the above mentioned cycles.

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[83] See REALISE logframe, *2017.12.14 REALISE Logframe_v11*.
[84] Forcier, REALISE Baseline evaluation, October 2018.
[85] Annex 9 provides an overview of the content of each cycle.
[86] See REALISE Monitoring data report, *TPD Teachers Competencies*, July 2021.

Figure 3 Teacher competences improved based on TPD cycles[87]

	Beginner	In progress	Mastery	Advanced
Cycle 1 BL	10.5%	46.0%	35.4%	8.0%
Cycle 1 EL	2.4%	14.0%	51.7%	31.9%
Cycle 2 BL	12.6%	51.9%	30.9%	4.6%
Cycle 2 EL	1.5%	20.1%	59.0%	19.3%
Cycle 3 BL	17.0%	36.2%	31.2%	15.7%
Cycle 3 EL	6.6%	21.1%	42.6%	29.7%
Cycle 4 BL	32.6%	40.7%	19.1%	7.5%
Cycle 4 EL	14.3%	30.6%	27.9%	27.2%
Cycle 5 BL	30.0%	44.2%	20.3%	5.6%
Cycle 5 EL	15.1%	36.7%	34.1%	14.1%
Cycle 6 BL	32.7%	42.8%	21.2%	3.3%
Cycle 6 EL	2.3%	24.3%	57.7%	15.7%
Cycle 7 BL	9.5%	44.3%	38.0%	8.2%
Cycle 7 EL	1.5%	19.3%	48.1%	31.1%
Cycle 8 BL	13.0%	40.4%	34.0%	12.6%
Cycle 8 EL	3.1%	21.5%	47.9%	27.4%
Cycle 9 BL	21.5%	41.6%	28.1%	8.7%
Cycle 9 EL	2.4%	24.5%	48.0%	25.1%

Many head teachers confirmed that the TPD training has motivated the teachers and created a more energetic school environment, with a better relationship between students and their teachers, and more organized classes, even with the overcrowding due to *Gratuité*. Most students noted positive changes in the way teachers explain subjects in the classroom, and girls felt they were learning more effectively. Both the boys and girls interviewed said they felt comfortable asking the teacher whenever they did not understand a topic because they found their teachers to be patient and that their teachers did not use corporal punishment. Whenever there is someone struggling to learn, the teachers dedicate extra attention to the issue, until it has become clear to all students. Some students said that, when necessary, tutors also stay after class to help the children in private.

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[87] See REALISE Monitoring data report, *TPD Teachers Competencies*, July 2021.

The teachers' concern with the children goes beyond the classroom environment, as it was reported that teachers also support children who face challenges outside class. When students miss class, teachers follow up on them to find out what has occurred. Several pupils also reported that a teacher raised money to aid a pupil. This indicates that the teachers are not only concerned with the students' learning outcomes, but also with their general wellbeing. The careful attention teachers give to students is important, as at times problems in the student's private life can affect their ability to learn. Box 2 presents examples of students' perceptions of their teachers' performance and how improved teaching has contributed to improved learning outcomes.

Baseline analysis of girls' impressions of their teachers and comfort levels when interacting with their teachers suggested that the punishment strategies that teachers use are very influential, and that corporal punishment and punishments given for incorrect answers in class can undermine student trust and lead girls to be fearful of their teachers in ways that may undermine participation in class and thereby impede learning.[88]

During the endline, students noted that most teachers do not use physical punishment as a form of discipline as much as it was used in the past. Most punishments reported by students now involved work in and around the classroom, such as wiping the floors, cleaning the classrooms, and fetching water. Children said that to perform the cleaning tasks, they are required to bring their own brooms and wipes to class. Other forms of discipline reported were having to bring chalk to

Box 2: Students' perceptions on teachers' performance and how it has contributed to their learning outcomes.

"*I saw the changes in learning, our teachers show us how to count things, and they show us how to read everything. They teach us in a way we understand and if you fail, they will repeat it several times until you understand*" (Girls FGD in Tanganyika, 11 to 14 years old group).

"*There is no more beating with sticks. Also, both men and women are sitting together, we are listening together, and no one is better than the other*" (Girls FGD in Tanganyika, 11 to 14 years old group)

"*What he does is that he teaches those that have not understood to understand then when he's done, he starts posing questions, to see if there are still those who have not understood so that we again repeat*" (Girls FGD in Haut Katanga, 14 to 17 years old group).

"*When a student is sick, the teacher will go around for people to contribute money and get him treated*" (Girls FGD in Kasai Oriental, 11 to 14 years old group).

the teacher, having to erase the board after class, clearing school bushes, or being expelled from class. Even though there were divergent views on which gender was punished more frequently, the frequency with which boys were mentioned was higher. Several students explained that the reason for that is because boys are usually more disruptive in the classroom environment.

The reported improvements in punishment are tenuous and uneven. In an AEP school in Kasai Oriental and a primary school in Haut Katanga, students reported teachers can also make them kneel down when they disturb the classes. A group of girls from a primary school in Lomami reported that their teacher still beats them. Even though there is a strong indication that the methods of disciplining changed towards less violent practices, teachers still appear to be strongly favouring negative forms of reinforcement over positive forms. Nevertheless, a project staff

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[88] Forcier, REALISE Baseline evaluation, October 2018.

member emphasised that any form of corporal or exploitative punishment are forbidden according to schools' code of conduct.

When asked about the conflict sensitive education TPD module, all teachers mentioned they had received the module, but they only referred to the way it helped them with conflict between children in class. One teacher gave the following example to show his improved skills in conflict sensitive education which were similar to the examples of all other teachers: "*there were two students who were quarrelling, but I saw that I calmed them down and then gave advice.*"[89] The teacher mentioned that the students followed his advice and that they resumed their relationship normally. Many teachers also reported less conflict between boys and girls as a result of the gained skills through this training module. Although relevant and important skills for teachers in general, they do not include improved abilities to address the special needs of children from conflict areas. While TPD modules provided guidance on how to teach children from conflict areas, some teachers appeared to have not been able to apply it based on our reports.

To summarize, based on students, teachers and head teachers reports, the quality of teaching in the intervention schools seems to have improved to some extent, both in terms of competencies of teachers in general as well as their specific skills in teaching children with special needs. However, the effectiveness of the conflict sensitive education module on the teachers' capacities to teach children from conflict areas are unclear. As teachers saw it, TPD training seemed to have motivated the teachers and created a more energetic school environment, with better a better relationship between students and their teachers, and more organized classes, even with the overcrowding due to *Gratuité*. Girls' perception towards their teacher's teaching methods and skills seems to have improved as well, although some reports of corporal punishments have been made which are concerning as punishment strategies are very influential and may undermine participation and attendance, and thereby learning.

Life skills

Life skills are deemed critical to young people's ability to positively adapt to and deal with the demands and challenges of life including making well-informed decisions about their bodies. The project ToC hypothesised that if girls improve their life-skills and self-esteem, they may perform better in school as a result of being more confident in their abilities and being able to participate more actively in the classroom. As a result, school dropout is anticipated to decrease and girls' educational success to improve. Life skills development is measured by participation in SRH clubs and girls' confidence in claiming their rights at school, in the community and at home.[90]

Many girls, parents, teachers, head teachers and religious leaders were convinced of the usefulness of the SRH clubs to inform girls about their sexual and reproductive health. Previously, due to a lack of knowledge, there was a lot of misinformation going around the communities, not only about menstruation but also about sex, body care and hygiene, puberty and how to protect oneself. This in turn caused unwanted pregnancies and health issues in the past. Many girls reported that they learned about menstruation and their fertile cycle during the club sessions.

They became aware that if they have sexual intercourse with boys, they might become pregnant. Because of that, many girls reported that they "*stopped playing [sexually]*" with boys. As a girl in Kasai Oriental noted, "*because, before it was not going well, because when a girl had sex with a boy, she got pregnant. Now there are no more pregnancies.*"[91] By educating the children about their bodies and reproductive health, also some teachers noted reduced cases of early pregnancy

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[89] Teacher KII in Haut Katanga.
[90] See REALISE logframe, *2017.12.14 REALISE Logframe_v11*.
[91] Girls FGD in Kasai Oriental, 15 to 17 years old group.

in the REALISE target communities. Moreover, some girls mentioned that it also helped them when the boys attended the club and learned about their sexual and reproductive health. As one girl said: "*It helped them as well and since then, they even stopped with the bad jokes with girls. They start to see us as we are all together.*"[92]

Some community stakeholders – mainly girls and boys – seemed uncomfortable or shy during the interviews when talking about sexual and reproductive themes, as they hardly ever utilized those terms. Despite the sensitization efforts surrounding the topic, this behaviour is mostly likely because reproductive health is still considered a taboo subject in intervention communities. About half of the respondents consistently used indirect terms to refer to the themes learned in the clubs, such as fool around or play compared to more direct terms such as sex or sexual intercourse The persistence of the taboo does not undermine the fact that much important knowledge was delivered, but it highlights some of the challenges that are still to be overcome.

All girls, many parents, and most teachers and head teachers noticed positive changes in body care and hygiene of the girls attending the clubs. Due to the clubs, the girls learned how to take care of their bodies, also when having their menstruation. As a head teacher mentioned: "*in the past, they used to come in a mess and sometimes without even washing. [Now,] they take care of themselves.*"[93]

During the baseline girls exhibited high levels of self-confidence, and the majority reported that they are confident in their organizational and communication skills. In decision-making, girls exhibited the lowest levels of agency in decisions related to marriage, attending school, and staying in school and the highest levels of agency in decisions related to spending time with their friends and working after finishing their studies.[94] As a result of the SRH club sessions, some girls reported feeling more empowered to take charge of their lives, also concerning harassment and violations from boys. One girl said, "*for me a man won't oppress me again, even if it is about those issues, you'll see me having courage even if I have to follow rules, you'll see me having the courage to tell my mother and my sister.*"[95] Additionally, a boy mentioned, "*my sister once told me that she will refuse to get pregnant so that she may study.*"[96] Although this has been noted by merely a few people, this indicates that girls feel more empowered over their choices.

Most teachers and head teachers mentioned that girls now feel equal to the boys. As a head teacher said, "*they have changed, we noticed first of all the girls don't feel inferior to the others anymore.*"[97] Both parents and girls mentioned that because of the clubs, they learned that girls are equal to men, that they have the same right to study and that they can do the same jobs as men do. As girls reported: "*There are no jobs just for men or jobs just for women, we are all the same.*"[98] Apart from raising feelings of confidence in the girls, it also changed how some parents see the value of the girls, which results in more equal division of housework. A girl said "*now they help me a lot because before, my family had me doing the work but now they also started considering the boys, [now] even him will carry a broom and start sweeping. Because there we learned, and I went and explained to them that they told us there is no job for girls that boys are not be able to do. That's when they said that also the boys will start sweeping, and cleaning, and*

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[92] Girls FGD in Tanganyika.
[93] Head teacher KII in Lomami.
[94] Forcier, REALISE Baseline evaluation, October 2018.
[95] Girls FGD in Tanganyika, 15 to 17 years old group.
[96] Boys FGD in Tanganyika.
[97] Head teacher KII in Tanganyika.
[98] Girls FGD in Haut Katanga.

fetching water."[99] A more equal division of housework increases the opportunities for girls to attend school and to focus on their school and homework.

Respondents (girls, teachers and parents) considered SRH clubs useful and effective in increasing girls' life skills. Premature pregnancies are said to be reduced as a consequence of the education of children about their bodies, and sexual and reproductive health. However, indirect wording used during the interviews indicates SRH is still considered a taboo subject to some extent. Stakeholders noticed positive changes in body care and hygiene of the girls attending the clubs. Additionally, girls said to be more empowered to take charge of their life and felt more equal to boys. As a last, some parents said to be dividing housework more equally between the boys and girls in the household, which was attributed as a result to the parental SRH sessions. This can potentially improve girls' attendance and punctuality to school, as many teachers reported that girls often miss class or show up late, due to house chores responsibilities.

Economic empowerment

Based on REALISE'S ToC, economic empowerment activities are expected to increase parents' ability to pay for school fees for their children and thereby improve enrolment, attendance and completion rates of girls. Economic empowerment is measured in terms of girls' views on how financial support received has contributed to girls' attendance and ability to continue in school and parents' views on how access to financial support impacted on family income level and use.[100]

As mentioned under attendance, the main barrier named by girls that stop girls from going to school are families' inability to pay school fees. Some girls mentioned that school fees were covered for some girls in their communities. Girls in Haut Katanga and Lualaba reported that the number of girls in the school grew since REALISE started giving out scholarships. One girl said that her sister was supported through a scholarship of REALISE and reported that this allowed her to go to school. She said that her sister now "*had the courage to go to school because her parents had the funds to pay for her studies*."[101]

Some girls in Haut Katanga said that they will finish high school if their school fees will be covered. One girl said, "*Me, I will finish, if you will be paying school fees as our elders, I will finish."*[102] Some other girls in that group mentioned that the scholarship helps to go to school regularly but that they would want to keep studying if it wasn't there: "*My parents will keep on forcing us*" and "*I will finish, my parents will start paying for me*."[103]

Due to the start of the fee-free primary school policy, it is unclear whether the financial support from REALISE impacted girls' ability to further their education. All girls in the primary and secondary schools reported that the *Gratuité* public policy increased the number of girls attending primary school significantly. Those who could not afford to go to school previously are attending now. However, some girls that were currently in secondary school mentioned that many girls dropped out after completing primary school because secondary school is not fee-free.

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[99] Girls FGD in Haut Katanga, 15 to 17 years old group.
[100] See REALISE logframe, *2017.12.14 REALISE Logframe_v11*.
[101] Girls FGD in Lualaba, 15 to 17 years old group.
[102] Girls FGD in Haut Katanga, 15 to 17 years old group.
[103] Girls FGD in Haut Katanga, 15 to 17 years old group.

Parents indicated that the access to financial support REALISE provided impacted their family income level and use to some extent. Parents in all regions apart from Tanganyika said that the bursaries have helped many families in keeping their daughters at school.[104] Due to these bursaries, it is reported that the left over money was used for the education of the other children, mostly boys. Box 3 presents examples of parents' views on how the bursaries impacted family income level and use.

Box 3: Parents' views on how access to bursaries impacted on family income level and use

"*The money helped the families in keeping their daughters at school.*" (Parents FGD in Kasai Oriental).

"*Because of the scholarships that the project had given, many of the girls are in classes*" (Parents FGD in Lualaba).

"*The money that was left helped us in buying our children uniforms and books*" (Parents FGD in Lualaba).

"*Yes, it made us send our children to school because when REALISE paid for young girls the parents paid for the young boys.*" (Parents FGD in Lualaba).

"*It helped us all in the matter of sending children to school*" and "*It helped in helping the children who did not get paid for by the project. It paid for their education so that they too can benefit from the opportunity of getting education.*" (Parents FGD in Haut Katanga).

Some teachers and head teachers raised a concerning issue related to the bursaries. They said that for the most vulnerable families it is not enough to cover only the fees, because they cannot afford to pay for extra costs, such as school supplies or uniforms. As a result, some girls are expelled from school, for example because they were not able to cover the uniform costs.

Other financial support to REALISE target communities concerned VSLA groups. During the baseline, it was found that girls experiencing the results of poverty are more likely to struggle with their ability to learn and that caregivers with savings and participation in savings groups were more likely to have their girls enrolled in school. The results suggested that families who know how to save for the future will also see the investment in paying the school fees for their daughters. Although some parents interviewed during the endline are members of VSLA groups, not many elaborated on the impact of this. Some parents in Haut Katanga mentioned that the financial support from VSLA helps paying for the education of the boys ("*because the girls are already paid for*"[105]) and for school materials such as books and uniforms. Additionally, a VSLA leader from Tanganyika shared that the VSLA allowed him to continue investing in his child's education.

As respondents saw it, REALISE interventions supported an increase on economic empowerment mainly through the VSLA groups. Due to the start of the fee-free primary school policy, girls' views on whether the financial support from REALISE impacted girls' ability to further their education are unclear. However, many girls are said to have dropped out after completing primary school because secondary school is not fee-free which indicates that school fees remain a barrier for

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[104] In Tanganyika, there was no report of bursaries or fees covered.
[105] Parents FGD in Haut Katanga.

girls to attend school. Some parents also indicated that if their daughters' fees were not covered, they would probably be prioritizing keeping their boys in school.

Learning Outcomes

The ToC theorizes that as girls' learning improves, they will be more likely to score better in exams. The indicators for improved learning outcomes were the number of marginalised girls supported by GEC with improved learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy.[106] Due to budget cuts, no learning assessment data has been gathered to inform the indicators. Therefore, we looked at what the qualitative evidence suggested regarding girls' learning.

According to all project staff and several MOE representatives, REALISE has been effective in improving girls' learning outcomes. The staff-members' reports of positive results were based on evidence, as they explained that when they compared the TENAFEP results of the REALISE targeted schools with other non-intervention schools, REALISE schools always performed better. This is confirmed by a MOE representative as well. Improved learning outcomes were strongly attributed to the reading, writing and mathematics pedagogical training that teachers received during TPD sessions and the learning clubs.

All teachers and head teachers were of the opinion that TPD training contributed positively to children's learning outcomes. The training better equipped the teachers to be more attentive to children's learning needs and to follow-up with students that show more difficulties in following instruction in class, as mentioned in the section about relevance. The use of charts was particularly highlighted as an effective methodology, as children tend to retain the knowledge better. Most students said they noted positive changes in the way teachers explain subjects in the classroom, and girls felt they were learning more effectively.

According to project staff in Lualaba, the training also improved how teachers view girls' education, as before teachers tended to not value girls in the learning environment and tended to not consider their needs. Reports from teachers, head teachers, girls, and boys suggest that TPD training successfully addressed some of the cultural attitudes among teachers that had contributed to teachers placing greater value on boys' education than girls' education. In addition, it was said that teachers learned how to engage with girls in ways that were sensitive to their needs, and learned how to create a gender equal classroom, in which boys and girls have the same treatment and the same opportunities to participate. Some girls, boys and parents confirmed that there is now equal participation whereas previously mostly boys answered in class. However, a few girls and some boys said that boys ask and answer more questions in class because "*they [boys] are smarter.*"[107]

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[106] See REALISE logframe, *2017.12.14 REALISE Logframe_v11*.
[107] Boys FGD in Lomami, Boys FGD in Haut Katanga, Boys FGD in Tanganyika, Girls FGD in Haut Katanga, 11 to 14 years old group.

Another project activity that contributed to the improvement of learning outcomes was learning clubs. As the clubs selected the lowest-performing students to receive extracurricular support on the learning progress, it created an environment in which students in the same grade would have the same level of knowledge. To guarantee the effectiveness of the intervention, the children selected would go through two evaluations: a baseline test to assess their level of knowledge before starting in the club and a final evaluation to measure how much they have improved.

The endline assessment of these tests showed that, despite the school closures, there had been a strong improvement in the scores of children who attended a learning club: their total scores in math, reading and writing have double, with a total score from 3.7/12 at Baseline to 7/12 at Endline. Boys had improved slightly more than girls. There were no significant differences found between rural and urban scores or conflict versus non-conflict area scores. The assessment did conclude that despite the improvement, the level of all students remains low. At the end of their participation in the learning clubs, they were able to meet 53% (7/12) of the possible marks.[108]

Some teachers interviewed noted considerable improvement among the students who initially perform poorly, but who received the benefits of learning clubs. Learning club participants were said to be participating much more actively in class. To assess if the children are following the study plan and doing the homework, teachers ask questions in class related to previous lessons. Asking questions in this way, allows teachers to identify the children who still need extra follow-up and mentorship. One teacher also stated to encourage parents to supervise and to ensure that the children are studying at home.[109]

Many girls, boys and parents were satisfied with the quality of education, as they noted results after attending the learning clubs.

> **Box 4: Parents' and children's' perceptions on learning outcomes.**
>
> "*Yes, they study well. Because I know someone who was not able to calculate, to read, and even write, but now I see he is reading and writing everything. I'm happy for this school*" (Parents FGD in Kasai Oriental).
>
> "*When she comes back from school, she takes off the uniform, she eats, at some moment you will hear her say 'the teacher told us we have to study in our notebooks'. She studies, again and again. Otherwise, she would play every day after school. That is why I am very happy*" (Parents FGD in Haut Katanga).
>
> "*For a period, when you send a child to the market and she comes back, she has lost 200, 300 you wonder why is she losing money? It became clear that it was because the child was not able to count. Then she started to study. When she goes to the market now, she comes back to tell you, daddy it remained 600, daddy it remained this much because she learned to calculate*" (Parents FGD in Tanganyika).
>
> "*My children used to fail to read when I asked them to read something. But now, they read frequently. Even when you give them words in french, they can just go ahead and read right there*" (Parents FGD in Lualaba).

Children who could not read, write or count learned to do so. The enhanced numeracy also helped the household to avoid money losses, as the children learned how to check the change when buying items at the market. The learning clubs also raised children's awareness on the importance of studying, as several parents reported that once the pupils are home, they want to keep

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[108] See REALISE Endline Learning club, *REALISE_Synthèse_Endline_Learningclub_update12072021*.

[109] A teacher in Haut Katanga reported lending the students workbooks, so they can practice at home.

practicing instead of playing. Box 4 shows parents' perceptions about the learning outcomes of their children.

The qualitative data presented suggests that REALISE has been effective in improving girls' learning outcomes. Respondents attributed the improved learning outcomes to the reading, writing and mathematics pedagogical training that teachers received during TPD and the learning clubs. Girls, boys, parents, teachers and head teachers reports suggest that there has also been a strong improvement of learning club participants for reading, writing and math. Despite this, their total levels remain low.

Transition Outcomes

On top of scoring better in exams, the ToC theorizes that as girls' learning improves, they will be more likely to transition through grades. In order to be able to transition grades, girls have to be enrolled in school, and not drop out, which is why this section also includes girls' enrolment and dropout. TENAFEP data showed a large increase of girls registered for the exams after the first year of implementation of the project activities (exams of school year 2018-2019), which was the year before the start of Gratuité: across the 6 regions the number increased from 6538 to 10225, an increase of 56%. While the numbers registered decreased over the next two years, likely due to COVID-19, they never came below 8,580, which was 1,705 (44%) higher than the first year.[110] This seems to indicate a positive effect on the transition outcomes by the project interventions.

Overall, several project stakeholders noted that there was an increase of girls in school and this result was partly attributed to REALISE's support in the communities. Dropout rates of the past school year[111] showed that none of the students in the intervention schools had dropped out, even though 5% were at risk at Save the Children's intervention schools and 3% were at risk at World Vision's interventions schools.[112] An external factor that contributed to an increase of girls in school was the public policy *Gratuité*, under which primary school became free for all. The main project activities that contributed to an increased presence of girls in school, which is likely linked to the ability of girls transitioning grades, were the VSLA groups, bursaries, TPD, and, to a certain extent, learning clubs and sexual reproductive health clubs.

At the baseline it was showed that transition rates were lower among girls facing household poverty.[113] Several VSLA leaders and a religious leader said that the VSLA groups greatly contributed to the increase on the enrolment and transition of girls in schools as it supported parents to pay school related costs. According to some parents, the dividends help them to pay for school related costs, such as school fees,[114] uniforms, books or other materials as, previously, they also did not have the culture of saving or access to credit. There is also an indication that the VSLA groups increased girls' transition in school, as a religious leader said the money originated from the activity helped many parents to send their daughters to secondary schools, and some even to university. A VSLA leader from Tanganyika shared that the VSLA allowed him to continue investing in his child's education, as he told the story: "*For example, my child is in*

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[110] See REALISE EL: TENAFEP analysis, October 20, 2021.

[111] This concerns the year October 2020 – June 2021, with data collected in May 2021.

[112] See REALISE drop out research reports from SCI and WV: *SC DRC - May project level drop out report, SC DRC - May 20 school level drop out report, WV DRC - May project level drop out report, WV DRC - May 21 school level drop out report*.

[113] Forcier, REALISE Baseline evaluation, October 2018.

[114] In case the child is attending private school, secondary school or university, since primary public school became free with the *Gratuité* public policy.

university, and it (VSLA) helped to pay for school fees and to cover the books. The money I got from the group and from what I saved there."[115]

Furthermore, several VSLA leaders and a religious leader said that the VSLA groups also changed their mindset in relation to girls' roles and education which they said increased enrolment and transition of girls as well. When REALISE started supporting the VSLA groups, the sensitization surrounding the purpose of the group was essential to make parents understand that the schooling of young girls should be prioritised when receiving the share-outs. Even though not all groups gave details about their schedules, a VSLA leader in Haut Katanga said that they share the dividends every year between August and September, just before the start of the school year. Regarding the message transmitted, the VSLA leader said, "*within that month [August or September] we raise parent's awareness saying, 'before doing any project, you have to keep in mind that before everything else, it's schooling of the kids.' Parents should say 'I am enrolling my children, which copy book I am buying?' Then, with the remaining money, they can think about what they want to do [referring to IGAs].*"[116]

Government representatives and community leaders said that IGAs are an important component of the VSLAs, as it develops caretakers' capacity to invest their savings on activities that will enhance their income and their financial resilience. Despite the benefits, several community stakeholders noted that REALISE could have provided a more robust training on IGAs, with specific modules in skills building, teaching them farming methods, for example. A VSLA leader also noted that the most vulnerable families are not able to engage with IGAs, because they do not have the means nor have access to loans. It was suggested that those families should get an IGA starter kit to facilitate the process.

Another indication on the effectiveness of the activity is that in some VSLA groups it is possible to find parents in which their children are not enrolled in the targeted school. A VSLA leader explained that as community parents saw the benefits of the groups, many also wanted to participate. However, the targeted schools had already reached its student capacity. As a solution, parents enrolled their children in other public schools, but registered in the REALISE VSLAs so they could have access to the benefits and pay for the education of their children as well.

Although most stakeholders were positive about the VSLA groups and its benefits, there were also remarks indicating that they did not always work well. Many VSLA leaders and some parents mentioned challenges of people defaulting in repaying the credits, of inability of the members to save enough money to be lend out due to lack of income or of stealing, sometimes leading to the termination of the group.

There is an indication that the bursaries for young girls to study provided by REALISE increased girls' enrolment and transition in school as well. Parents in all regions, apart from Tanganyika, said that the bursaries have helped many families in keeping their daughters at school, as it lifted the financial burden for many families.[117] Additionally, some teachers also mentioned that the scholarships have facilitated and increased the transition of girls from one grade to another. Project staff in Lomami reported that since the scholarships started, they have collected many testimonies from schools that used to have only boys attending, but now they have seen a significant increase in the enrolment of girls. On the contrary, some girls currently in secondary school mentioned that many girls dropped out after completing primary school because of the school fees for secondary schools. Some parents interviewed confirmed this and indicated that if

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[115] VSLA leader KII in Tanganyika, female, 58 years old.
[116] VSLA leader KII in Haut Katanga, female, 45 years old.
[117] In Tanganyika, there was no report of bursaries or fees covered.

their daughters' fees were not covered, they would probably be prioritizing keeping their boys in school.

TPD demonstrated results not only related to learning outcomes, but also to the reduction of dropout rate and improvement of transition. As discussed, respondents were the opinion that TPD contributed to an improvement on the quality of education by equipping teachers with effective teaching methodologies and raising awareness about gender and conflict sensitivity. Before the training, some teachers would shame older girls or girls who arrived late for class, which was extremely discouraging according to a head teacher and could even lead to dropouts. In raising awareness on gender equality principals, teachers were able to create a safer and more inclusive environment for girls, encouraging grade completion.

In utilizing a strategy of leaving no one behind to homogenize the level of knowledge among the students, some teachers acknowledged that the clubs reduced the dropout rates. Even though learning clubs are more directly connected to learning outcomes, they also likely played an important role to increase the transition rate, as the performance of the students is also linked to them staying in school and moving to the next grade. As explained, many students drop out when they feel they cannot follow or understand the content of the lectures. All stakeholders reported that there was significant improvement on the knowledge of the selected students and some teachers added that after the club cycle, the students who had participated in the clubs were able to follow lectures well. Several MOE representatives, teachers, head teachers, parents, boys and girls further reported that the clubs increased the attendee's motivation for and desire to go to school. This way, the activity was effective in addressing children's learning gaps to support the continuation of their education.

The baseline data showed that the probability of successful transition increases significantly with better developed life skills. Girls' confidence was already high during the baseline but due to the gender equality sessions of the SRH clubs, some girls reported feeling more confident and empowered to take charge of their life. For example, one boy in Tanganyika said, "*my sister once told me that she will refuse to get pregnant so that she may study*."[118] Many girls also expressed feeling equal to boys. As a last, some parents reported promoting a more equal division of housework between boys and girls as a result of the parental sessions of the SRH clubs. This is an interesting shift, as many teachers reported housework is a common reason for girls missing or being late to class.

There was an increase of girls enrolled in school and, based on perceptions from respondents, this result is partly attributed to REALISE's interventions in the communities. Furthermore, TENAFEP data showed an increase of 56% of girls registered for the exams after the first year of implementation of the project activities, which was the year before the start of Gratuité.[119] This seems to indicate a positive effect on the transition outcomes by the project interventions. However, some girls currently in secondary school mentioned that many girls dropped out after completing primary school because of the school fees for secondary schools which could indicate that the interventions might have positively affected more girls registering for TENAFEP, but not that this caused them to transition to secondary school.

The main project activities that appear to have contributed to an increased presence of girls in school were the VSLA groups, bursaries, TPD, and, to a certain extent, learning clubs and sexual reproductive health clubs. Parents believed VSLA groups and bursaries were able to partly target the financial constraints of girls moving to grades, which is one of the main barriers for girls to

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[118] Boys FGD in Tanganyika.
[119] See REALISE EL: TENAFEP analysis, October 20, 2021.

attend school. Girls and teachers attributed the learning clubs and the education quality increase (through TPD) to an increase on girls' motivation and performance which is linked to staying in school and moving to the next grade. Teachers, head teachers and students perceived the improved teaching (through TPD), as also leading to safer and more inclusive school environment, which can increase motivation and thereby grade completion. Moreover, girls' reports suggests that SRH clubs increased their confidence and empowerment to continue school.

Gratuité's Impact on the Outcomes

Large barriers to the effectiveness of the project interventions on the learning and transition outcomes were *Gratuité* and COVID-19 school closures. The *Gratuité* public policy was announced in August 2019, but was implemented only in September 2020, which was the beginning of the 2020/2021 school year. The policy offered free education to primary school students in public schools and reduced fees in secondary schools. However, secondary schools not only had their fees maintained, but also increased, because Covid-19 affected the DRC government capacity to implement the second half of the policy. Even though primary schools were free, parents still had to pay for other school-related expenses, such as notebooks, pens, and uniforms.

Gratuité had positive and negative impacts on the learning and transition outcomes. Overall, children had a very positive perception of the policy, as it allowed them to go to school for free. Parents, teachers, and government representatives, however, had a more nuanced perspective, highlighting the positive and negative consequences.

The main benefit the policy brought was the increase in the enrolment of children and mainly girls to the education system. According to a representative from the MOE, more than two million additional students enrolled once *Gratuité* was implemented. The policy not only supported the enrolment of children, but also grade transition, as TENAFEP[120] also became free. A PROVED representative said that since *Gratuité*, the participation in the annual exam has improved steeply, as almost all students enrolled have taken the exams. Before, not every student could take it, as not all could afford to pay the examination fees. Children were particularly happy with the opportunity of going to school, as before their parents were not able to cover the fees for every child in the household. Girls were especially satisfied with the policy, they said that before it was mostly the boys who would be sent to school. Box 5 shows examples of positive perceptions about *Gratuité* expressed by different stakeholders.

An MOE representative reported that the policy also had a negative impact in the transition process. As the number of the students increased, the classes became too crowded to be effectively managed by a teacher. As a result, some teachers felt pressured to pass students to the grade above to make space for more children. However, the approval of the children was not necessarily based on grades or

> **Box 5: Positive perceptions about *Gratuité***
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> "*We were happy about the development of my town because others did not have money to pay for schooling. They were just paying for boys but now we are studying*" (Girls FGD in Tanganyika, 11 to 14 years old group).
>
> "*Our sisters and our young siblings were asked to quit because of the fees but now we are all studying*" (Girls FGD in Tanganyika, 11 to 14 years old group).
>
> "*The gratuity helps many parents, many couldn't support the school fees, now that the education is free, many started sending their children to school*" (Parents FGD in Kasai Oriental).
>
> "*Before girls aged fifteen was getting married, now they are studying. This is a great decision, because many girls came back to school because it's free. It's a pleasure because girls are now studying effectively, before they were discouraged because of money*" (Boys FGD in Lomami).

performance. Similarly, one project staff member said the schools did not have the capacity to process so many new students. They lacked a proper evaluation structure in place to deal with a great number of newcomers and properly place them in a grade that would be equivalent to their level of knowledge. As a result, there were students misplaced through the different grades, which can be discouraging, as some might have difficulties to follow advanced lectures or might become bored with subjects they have already learned. These cases had only one report of each, and no similar stories came from teachers or children.

In an AEP in Kasai Oriental, a head teacher shared an interesting perspective about *Gratuité*, as it seems that there is a stigma against free education. He said that once the school becomes free, some community members can view it as a school for vulnerable children who would not have the means to access education otherwise, such as orphans, homeless or disabled. This group of people are not only vulnerable, but often marginalized and, according to the head teacher, some parents might not want to send their children to a school that welcomes them.

Even though the policy made education more accessible to all children, it had a negative impact on the quality of education, as the classes became too full due to the increase in the enrolment.

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[120] Annual evaluation exams.

Teachers and MOE representatives said that the school infrastructure could not facilitate the change in the demand. As a result, the classrooms became too crowded for the teachers to teach effectively and control the students. There were several reports from teachers saying that more than 100 children could be found in one room;[121] that the physical space was not enough, as teachers have difficulties moving around the classes; and students had to sit on the floor, because the benches and chairs are not sufficient. One parent in Lualaba even noted that some children even started to refuse to go to school, because they did not have anywhere to sit.

The crowded classrooms also posed a challenge for teachers to follow up effectively with the weakest students and to evaluate the pupils, as it can take too long, and teachers cannot give the necessary attention to all that need it. Some girls complained that since the classes became overcrowded, the noise is too loud, and they cannot hear the teacher's explanation. A girl added "*When we were few students we listened well to the teacher and could also follow on what was being taught.*"[122] Hence, children's learning outcomes are also subjected to being negatively affected by the changes that came with *Gratuité*.

Teachers' salaries were also affected by the policy, as previously the school fees were utilized to pay for their work. Many teachers and head teachers said that now their income is not enough to keep them motivated to teach.[123] An AEP official said that the teachers' turnover rate has increased, as many decided to leave the job because the payment was not satisfying to cover their basic needs. According to some teachers' perspective, teachers are the ones paying the price of free education. Inside the classrooms, children also felt the impact, as a girl described: "*The teacher told us since they were not paid well, they were also not going to teach well. So, we could study only two or three lessons a day, and then we went back home. It was not good at all.*"[124]

Some parents were of the opinion that the learning clubs were essential to compensate for the decrease in the quality of education, as the passage below explains: *"It [quality of education] has decreased because the teacher has too many children. In the past the teacher had 30 to 40 children. Now the teacher has 90, 100 or more children. I see that the quality has started to decrease. Yet when the child comes back from the school and he goes to the club, you see he starts explaining to you what he learned at the club, he will not say what he learned at school. So in fact, the club is more important than the school where he goes."*[125] Additionally, many teachers and head teachers indicated that the TPD modules on large classes helped to teach the overcrowded classes more effectively.

Gratuité positively impacted the financial constraints barrier that prevented many girls of accessing education but based on teachers, head teachers, MOE representatives and students' reports, it highly compromised the quality of education due to overcrowded classes, even less school materials per child and lacking infrastructure. Due to the adaptability of the project, some of the education quality issues were addressed.

Covid-19 Impact on the Outcomes

When the Covid-19 pandemic started, the schools in the DRC were closed down as a safety measure to protect the children, teachers, and the community as a whole. The halt on the in-

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[121] According to a MOE representative, 30 to 40 is the recommended number of students per class.
[122] Girls FGD in Tanganyika, 15 to 17 years old group.
[123] According to teachers' reports, their monthly salary is USD 100 or below.
[124] Girls FGD in Haut Katanga, 15 to 17 years old group.
[125] Parent FGD in Tanganyika.

person educational activities started on 19 March 2020. Because students were unable to go to school during that time, they missed approximately six months of their ongoing school year, as schools were reopened only on 12 October 2020. Schools were closed again on 18 December 2020 due to a second wave of the pandemic and they did not reopen on 5 January 2020 as planned. Instead, classes returned on 22 February 2021. This had a negative impact on the enrolment and learning outcomes of all children.

The mid-point assessment found that nearly one third of the girls did not engage in any learning retention activities since schools closed in March, and the vast majority of girls did not have access to informal teaching or tutoring while schools were closed.[126] An MOE representative said that the government tried to implement remote schooling through radio lessons and exercise books that the teachers would give to the children to practice at home. However, two teachers mentioned that the approach was not effective, as some children did not have the discipline to listen to the radio unsupervised and many other children did not even have access to radios. With a lack of a daily routine, many children said they felt bored or that they would play the whole day instead of studying. Here is a common example of how school-aged girls felt during the pandemic: "*Since Covid-19 started, we stayed many months without learning and our motivation waned. Many girls got impregnated since there wasn't any learning going on and they were free to do various things. As for me, I just stayed at home, and I stopped reading because I lost my motivation. When we were asked to do write-ups and follow up on videos at home, I used to not do it because I was playing games.*"[127]

The lowered contact with school activities was a setback on children's learning progress. Many children said that they felt demotivated to get back to school after the suspension of classes, because they felt they had forgotten a substantial amount. It was said that their mathematics, reading and writing proficiency had worsened during the period they stayed home. The negative impact on the learning outcomes was clear once the children were back to school. A teacher said that he had to revise the whole of the previous year, as children were not following well the lessons. The passage illustrates the issue: "*They (students) had to repeat the previous year's course as a reminder before moving on to the current year's course. They had forgotten everything, even reading. Even the alphabet had to be repeated so that the children could find their way around.*"[128] Furthermore, monitoring data of December 2020 (SB2S monitoring) showed that a mere 63% of schools had organised catch-up or tutoring activities for students after the school reopened,[129] which means that there was no space for children to catch up on the lost learnings. The consequences were even more evidenced when children were formally evaluated and the results were not satisfactory.[130] The few months at home had a devastating impact for some children, as at the end of that period they were in a worse learning situation than when the isolation started.

The mid-point assessment found that there had been a significant increase in the number of households that reported not being able to meet their basic needs due to COVID-19.[131] This is confirmed during the end-line as many parents mentioned struggling to make sufficient income to cover the household basic needs. Reported levels of chore burden during mid-point had increased substantially since the baseline, indicating that this barrier to retention worsened because, as found during the baseline, girls who belong to households where their education is not prioritized

[126] Forcier, REALISE Rapid mid-point assessment, November 2020.

[127] Girls FGD in Tanganyika, 15 to 17 years old group.

[128] Teacher KII in Lomami, female, 73 years old.

[129] See Safe Back to School Analysis, October – December 2020.

[130] The teacher did not give a concrete example with grades or percentage or approval.

[131] Forcier, REALISE Rapid mid-point assessment, November 2020.

have significantly lower retention scores than girls whose caretakers do not over-burden them with chores and where girls feel that they are supported in staying in school.

Next to affecting retention through lack of learning through school closures and significantly increasing economic hardships, the pandemic also affected drop out. Despite *Gratuité* policy which helped students return to school after school closures, many different project stakeholders agreed that the school closures caused both boys and girls to drop out of school. A head teacher reported that the number of students in his school decreased, as compared to the period pre-Covid-19. As an example, he said that he lost 53 students (27 boys and 24 girls).[132] An MOE representative was aware of the issue of dropouts and was of the opinion that the increase of cases of early pregnancy and of child labour were directly connected to it. Many stakeholders reported an increase in the rate of early pregnancies and marriages during school closures, confirming this as a barrier to return to school.

As previously discussed, some children had to join the economic activities of the household to ensure that the means of livelihood would suffice. Another factor that seems to be connected to the dropouts is the demotivation of children with their studies and their loss of knowledge. There were also reports that some parents were reluctant in allowing their children to go back to school, as they were afraid of the disease and for the safety of their children.

Girls surveyed at the midpoint were more likely to indicate they had school safety issues than they were during baseline, which may have posed an extra barrier for girls returning to school. Girls were more likely to say that they felt unsafe traveling to and from school than they were at the baseline. In addition, girls were more likely to say they were unsafe at school at the mid-point assessment. Most girls interviewed for the Wellbeing study said they were worried about COVID-19 and even more girls were worried about the risk of infection.[133]

Monitoring data of December 2020 found that schools and classrooms were not up to par with the measures that should have allowed for a safe reopening of schools. Most schools shared information about COVID-19 with children and youth, families, teachers and the community to combat stigma (96% of schools) and had trained teachers and school management in good hygiene practices and psychosocial support in relation to COVID-19 (87%). Most teachers were found to have been sharing good practices of hygiene promotion and COVID-19 prevention (91% of schools). Only two thirds of the schools had available water and/or hand washing facilities at school (70%), only half a system to monitor students' absenteeism and dropping out (54%), less than half of the schools disinfected the classrooms prior to reopening (45%) and less than a third rearranged classrooms to allow for physical distancing during activities (32%).[134] During the endline, some teachers and head teachers mentioned the receipt and usefulness of the handwashing stations and soaps. However, as one teacher said: "*The re-registration was not good. The way it [COVID-19] affected them, the children are afraid to go back to school.*"[135]

In addition to *Gratuité,* the mid-point assessment showed that economic hardships due to COVID-19 had likely increased teacher turnover or absenteeism. Nearly a fifth of teachers had not been paid for their work before and during the pandemic. The majority of teachers who were not paid for teaching before the pandemic did not believe they will eventually get paid.[136] Many parents and children confirmed during the end-line that teachers are often absent. As a head teacher in Lualaba said, this affects the quality of education: "*If they really want to have a good quality of*

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[132] Total number of students in the school was not provided.
[133] See Rapid Assessment on Girls' Wellbeing Synthesis of Findings, December 2020.
[134] See REALISE Safe Back to School Analysis, October – December 2020.
[135] Teacher KII in Haut Katanga.
[136] Forcier, REALISE Rapid mid-point assessment, November 2020.

teaching, of learning, they must really manage to improve the salaries of the teachers when the salaries of the teachers will be improved, so the teacher will not have other occupations besides the work of education, he will concentrate, He will not have any other distractions, because he knows that at the end of the month I have the money to survive with me and my family, so the quality of education will be really good."[137]

The pandemic had increased economic hardships, dropouts, feelings of safety, and teacher absenteeism. Additionally, it significantly reduced retention. This all had its effect of the learning and transition outcomes of girls and boys, as shown by the low TENAFEP pass rates of intervention school students. Although attendance rates were higher than last year, there is a slight decline in the TENAFEP pass rate with a reduction from over 83% of pass rate to 77%.[138] This decline is likely largely caused by the COVID-19 school closures and Gratuité as the policy also included fee-free participation at the annual exams. This has highly increased the number of children participating and, as a large percentage of them might not have had any schooling previously due to the financial constraints, likely affected the pass rate.

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[137] Head Teacher KII in Lualaba.
[138] See REALISE TENAFEP data.

Figure 4 TENAFEP pass rate 2017 – 2021[139]

Participation & Pass Rates: Girls & Boys (6 provinces)

Legend:
- Sum of Particpation rate - girls %
- Sum of Particpation rate - boys %
- Sum of Pass rate - girls % (Net)
- Sum of Pass rate - boys % (Net)
- Sum of Pass rate - girls % (Gross)
- Sum of Pass rate - boys % (Gross)

Values / Year
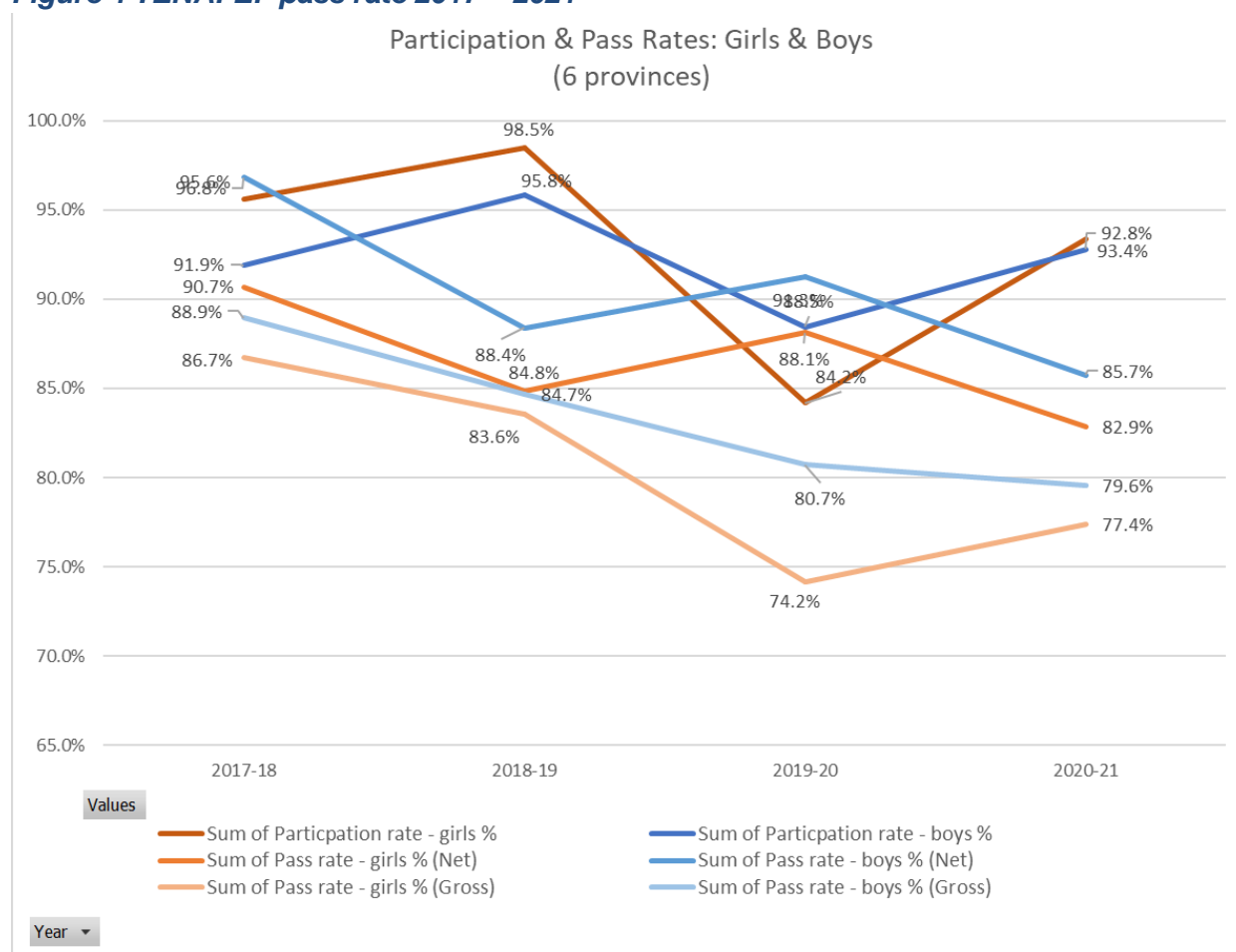
Summary

This summary seeks to answer the evaluation questions corresponding to effectiveness and will discuss the remaining barriers to girls' access to education below.[140] Overall, reports collected from respondents indicate that the project had a positive impact on the learning outcomes and to some extent on the transition of girls. The main factors to have a significant negative influence on the objectives and intended results were *Gratuité* and COVID-19 school closures. REALISE had been able to partly address the emerged barriers by adapting some of the interventions. The below table summarizes the effectiveness of the project interventions. The effectiveness is indicated as high if the qualitative data of many, and many different, respondents combined with triangulation of other data indicates that the intervention was effective. The effectiveness is medium if there is qualitative evidence by several different respondents or many respondents of one group, and some triangulation supporting the effectiveness. The effectiveness is indicated as

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[139] See REALISE TENAFEP data.
[140] See Annex 2 for the evaluation questions in the analysis plan.

low if the qualitative evidence and triangulation data is limited or negative about the effectiveness.[141]

Table 8 Effectiveness of the project interventions

Outcomes	Change / improvement	Interventions	Effectiveness (high, medium, low)	Strength of evidence
Learning	Evidence suggests that students improved their numeracy and literacy levels.	Learning Clubs	High	Strong
		TPD	High	Strong
Transition	The data suggests that the combination of the related interventions improved students' (especially girls) transition rate from one grade to the other. More girls were reported enrolling in school and being present in the classrooms.	VSLA	High	Strong
		Bursaries	High	Strong
		TPD	High	Medium
		Learning Clubs	High	Strong
		SRH Clubs	Medium	Medium
Quality of teaching	Quality of teaching seems to have improved, as students reported that teachers dedicate more time to explaining the subjects thoroughly to the class, which facilitates learning. Teachers also acknowledged that they learned new and more engaging teaching methodologies. According to students, corporal punishments have reduced, but some teachers still apply it.	TPD	Medium	Strong
Life skills	Evidence suggests that girls had their knowledge on sexual and reproductive health improved.	SRH clubs	High	High
Economic empowerment	The evidence demonstrates that the activities supported, to a certain extent, an increase on parents' ability to pay for school fees for their children or reduced the burden of school fees.	Village Saving and Loans Associations / Groups	Medium	Medium
		Bursaries for girls	Medium	Medium

Despite the overall effectiveness of the REALISE project interventions, many barriers to girls' access to quality education remain. For example, the VSLA groups were effective in addressing household income, yet not for everyone and most respondents still mentioned financial constraints to girls' enrolment in school. Therefore, poverty and the inability of families to pay school fees remains a large barrier to girls' access to education. The main barriers to attendance seem to be large classes and seasonal work. Beside poverty, other barriers to girls' enrolment are cultural beliefs: wanted or unwanted pregnancies, housework and the desire of girls to get married. The barrier to quality education remains corporal punishments, teacher absenteeism and low fundamental learning skills, as although many of the qualitative evidence suggested an increase in girls' skills, their total scores remain low. The below table summarizes the continuing relevance of each barrier in the intervention schools and communities.[142]

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[141] Please note that this concerns effectiveness as perceived by the respondents.
[142] Please note that this concerns barriers as perceived by respondents or triangulation data.

Table 9 Remaining barriers in the intervention schools and communities

Barriers	Continued barrier (high, low, medium)
Household income is too low to send girls to school**	High
School costs are too high to send girls to school**	Medium
Hidden costs of schooling	High
Families don't value girls' education**	High
Conflict disrupts schooling**	High[143]
Schools have insufficient learning materials*	High
Insufficient school infrastructure such as separate latrines for girls****	High
Low level of teacher experience / exposure to effective pedagogies**	Medium
Fundamental learning skill gaps exist in literacy at the level of letter-sound identification and in numeracy at the level of subtraction*	High
Overcrowded classes due to fee-free primary school decreases quality of teaching****	Medium
Teacher absenteeism*	Medium
Child protection and child wellbeing challenges threaten access to education and quality of learning**	Medium
School closures due to COVID-19 affect girl's learning retention***	Low
School closures due to COVID-19 affect girl's return and risk of dropout***	Low
COVID-19 demands adjustments of classroom management and materials***	High
School closures due to COVID-19 affect girl's chore burden such as income-generating activities, household upkeep, and childcare***	Low
School closures due to COVID-19 affect self-care, cognitive and mental health-related impairments***	Low

*Barrier from baseline evaluation[144]
**Barrier from ToC supported by baseline evaluation
***Barrier from mid-point assessment[145]
****New barrier from end-line evaluation

4.5   Impact

This section builds on the effectiveness results above to draw broader conclusions regarding higher-level effects of the project on the social, political, and economic environment of girls' education and gender equity in the DRC. The evaluation question relating to impact is as follows:

- To what extent did the project generate or contribute to the generation of significant higher-level effects (social, environmental and economic), whether positive or negative, intended or unintended?

The available qualitative evidence was reviewed for signs of changes in culture or perceptions surrounding girls' education and gender equity, as well as evidence of changes in attitudes of

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[143] Although none of the respondents mentioned conflict as a barrier, it is likely that this remains one due to its disruptiveness. During the endline, some teachers reported that students who came from conflict areas do not study well.

[144] Forcier, REALISE Baseline evaluation, October 2018.

[145] Forcier, REALISE Rapid mid-point assessment, November 2020.

policymakers that might come to be reflected in changes in future policymaking. The section looks at community-level perceptions and girls' motivation. The summary seeks to answer the evaluation question.

Community-level perceptions

Taken as a whole, the qualitative evidence gathered in this study suggests that the project has contributed to positive changes in **community-level perceptions** regarding girls' education. For example, one project staff-member reported that girls' participation in TENAFEP examinations (necessary to complete primary school and enter secondary education) participation increased to over 80 percent as compared to less than 50 percent prior to the start of the REALISE project. Although this could still be attributed to fee-free primary education and access to the national exams, it is mentioned that REALISE schools always score better on TENAFEP compared to non-intervention schools. This represents an important achievement in terms of learning and transition outcomes, and because TENAFEP completion requires a relatively supportive home environment, this also suggests a broader cultural shift in value placed on girls being able to complete their primary education.

The majority of parents interviewed stated that they now wish their daughters to finish the primary level and continue their education through secondary school or even university. Although this could be attributed to social-desirability bias,[146] some of the justifications indicate that at least some respondents changed their views on the value of girls' education. The main rationale that several parents provided for sending girls to school is for girls to find good employment, generate income, and ultimately take care of their parents when they grow old. Some parents also gave reasons for supporting girls' education that suggested they would like their daughters to have opportunities that were not available to them when they were young. Box 6 illustrates varied reasons that parents supplied to justify their interest and investment in the education of their daughters.

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[146] Social-desirability bias concerns the tendency of respondents to answer questions in that way that they think will be viewed as favourably by others.

In terms of enrolment, attendance and learning, many teachers noted that girls are now more numerous in class, and, at times, girls are more numerous than boys in the classroom. These reports suggest that a higher proportion of girls are enrolled and attending school than previously. In part, this is attributable to the *Gratuité* policy. However, some project staff and teachers suggested that project activities such as sensitization meetings and SRH clubs had changed parents' opinions about the education of girls in ways that contributed to increased enrolment and attendance. A project staff member told the research team that parents and caretakers now "*understood that education contributes to the development of everyone, starting with themselves. It makes the girl independent.*"[147] This perspective on the value of girls' education is thought to have contributed to parents and caretakers being more willing to support their girls in staying enrolled and attending school.

As a demonstration of their commitment to keeping their girls in school, several parents said that even if the project activities will be suspended, they would find a way to pay for the school-related expenses. Some of the girls mentioned that they were convinced of this as well. Furthermore, one parent suggested that he had created a concrete financial plan to pay for his daughter's education with VSLA's support, even if the project support ended. Many respondents confirmed that the VSLA groups are helping the girls to go to school through its financial benefits. Additionally, the sensitization and emphasis on the value of girls' education in the VSLA groups has likely helped increasing the value that families place on girls.

Several project stakeholders and community leaders confirmed that they believe parents are

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Box 6: Passages illustrating why parents would like their daughters to continue with their studies.

"*I hope that she can progress, because she can help the family, if she studies. Because I will not accept that when SAVE does not give me help, that this child stops because of money; I will do everything so that she can finish. So that she can finish all the classes. So that she can help the others too. She can help the family too*" (Parents FGD in Lomami).

"*We will send them there because the education that they will obtain will better their tomorrow lives*" (Parents FGD in Lualaba).

"*We will send them to school because we should. So as they may reach where I haven't been able to. So as she may take care of me in the future*" (Parents FGD in Lualaba).

"*I will send her to secondary school so that she may complete her studies. If I have the capacity, I will also send her to university and even to higher level of studies so as she may take care of me after I grow old*" (Parents FGD in Lualaba).

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becoming more supportive of the education of girls. A religious leader reported that parents in his community started to realize that educating girls can contribute to household wellbeing as much as boys because of the sensitisation activities. Similarly, some of the boys who participated in focus groups acknowledged that their parents are now supporting girls' education (when they did not before), encouraging their girls to attend school and following up on their progress. Several stakeholders said that, before REALISE, traditional gender roles were reinforced at many levels of society, whereas that is not the case now. According to some respondents, parents used to subscribe fairly uniformly to the conservative belief that girls were responsible for the housework,

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[147] Project staff KII in Kasai Oriental, female, 39 years old.

while boys should attend school. The evidence presented above suggests that these viewpoints have shifted, and it appears that gender roles are beginning to be revised at the household level in at least some households. One girl interviewed said that she noted changes in the housework dynamics in her own home, because her brothers started to share the housework load. Furthermore, there is an indication that this was, indeed, a project impact and a specific result of awareness-raising done during SRH club sessions. The girl explained: "*Now they [brothers] help me a lot because before, my family had me doing the [house] work but now they also started considering the boys. They [boys] will even carry a broom and start cleaning. Because there [at SRH clubs] we learned [about gender equality] and I went and explained to them [parents] that they [SRH clubs] told us there is no job for girls that boys are not able to do. That's when they [parents] said that also the boys will start sweeping, and cleaning, and fetching water*."[148] Furthermore, the role of the SRH clubs in contributing to a changed view on gender roles in the communities was highlighted by one MOE representative: "*As an impact at the family level, a student who learns in the club about gender, he is told that hears that a boy washing dishes is normal and he can even do it more than the girl. We tell him that helping your mom or your sister is important. You both come from school and you're both tired, you say no, no, I'm not going to wash the dishes because I'm a boy, the girl has to do it. Share the housework so you can eat quickly. Kids know about sharing housework and they know it's for the benefit of all of us*."[149]

Gender sensitive education through TPD trainings has also likely improved the view of teachers, head teachers, boys and girls on gender equality and roles. Many boys and girls indicated that, contrary to what they believed before, they now believe that boys and girls are equal and that they can do the same jobs. Furthermore, according to project staff in Lualaba, the training also improved how teachers view girls' education, as before teachers tended not to value girls in the learning environment and not to consider their needs. Some girls, boys and parents confirmed that there is now equal participation whereas previously mostly boys answered in class. The TPD training successfully addressed some of the cultural attitudes among teachers that had contributed to teachers placing greater value on boys' education than girls' education. In addition, teachers learned how to engage with girls in ways that were sensitive to their needs, and learned how to create a gender equal classroom, in which boys and girls have the same treatment and the same opportunities to participate. It was reported that (before REALISE) teachers used to assign girls in class the responsibility of cleaning up the classrooms, while boys were not given cleaning responsibilities. Several teachers said that now they have understood that this is not a girl's job any more than it is a boy's job and that they try to balance out the division of work. A teacher gave an example saying that she alternates weeks: "*This week, it's the girls who will clean. The other week, it's the boys*."[150] However, she noted that some boys refuse to do the work, as they do not think they should have to sacrifice their leisure time playing with the other boys. This dynamic suggests that at least some of the boys were still raised under social norms that entitled them to not do work that had been gendered by their caretakers or parents as 'women's work.'

Furthermore, some parents raised concerns that, though they want to support girls' studies, they were uncertain how to pay for their girls' education in the absence of project support. Even more, some parents indicated that if their daughters' fees were not covered, they would probably be prioritizing keeping their boys in school. This is confirmed by the reports of several secondary school girls that there are much less girls in their classes now compared to primary school. They said that this was due to school fees.

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[148] Girls FGD in Haut Katanga, 15 to 17 years old group.
[149] MOE Representative KII.
[150] Teacher KII in Lomami, female, 73 years old.

The reports of the different stakeholders cited above suggest that there has been a change in community-level perceptions regarding girls' education and qualitative evidence suggests that the project has positively contributed to this. Girls' participation and results on TENAFEP increased compared to other schools. Parents also said that they are now more motivated to keep their daughters in school. Based on the qualitative data, there is an indication that SRH clubs have likely contributed to changing parents' opinions about the education of girls in ways that possibly contributed to increased enrolment and attendance. VSLA groups have given some parents the opportunity to keep children in school and helped increase the value that families place on girls to some extent. As a last, the SRH clubs and TPD training on gender sensitive teaching have likely contributed to changed views on gender roles and equality. Despite these positive effects that could be attributed to the project interventions, some parents mentioned that they would prioritize keeping their sons in school if their daughters' fees would not be covered which means not everyone's ideas on the value of girls' education has changed.

Girls' motivation

Next to a change in community-level perceptions, the qualitative data suggests the REALISE interventions positively influenced girls' motivation. All of the girls interviewed indicated having the desire and motivation to finish primary and to continue their education to university level. While girls gave a number of reasons for wanting to stay in school, it is worth noting that one of the motivations often cited was so that they could get good jobs in order to support their parents. While some girls may have arrived at this motivation themselves, we can also speculate that parents may have passed this motivation on to their daughters as part of encouraging them to stay in school. To examine other motivations that girls cited, some girls suggested that by finishing their studies they wanted to become economically successful so they could contribute to the education of their younger siblings. If motives like this are made manifest, there is the potential for a positive feedback loop in creating longer term and more sustainable impacts at the household level. Another motivation that girls presented is that they wanted to finish their studies to serve as an inspiration for their family and community, and to thereby encourage other girls and boys in their community to study as well. This reported motivation offers similar promise for future virtuous-cycle dynamics in which educated girls become successful women who serve as role-models for the next generation of girls to emulate. Through raising their feelings of empowerment and confidence, it is likely that the SRH clubs positively contributed to the prospects girls envision for themselves. Some parents have mentioned that they learned through their daughters' learnings at the SRH clubs or the parental sessions about gender equality and girls' possibilities for the future which is likely to reinforce girls' motivation.

Moreover, when asked about their expectations about the future, most girls said they would now like to prioritize finishing higher education, finding a job and, only after that, would they think about getting married. As one girl gave her reasons: "*If I finish my studies I can work in a company but if I do not finish and I have a baby I will start to suffer [and I will have to] go to the field to cultivate.*"[151] As mentioned in the previous section, many parents reported now sharing the same vision for their girls' futures, as they want their daughters to focus first on completing higher education, and only then to then think about marriage. The average age at which parents thought girls should marry is around 25 years old, which is much higher than the median age for marriage for girls in the DRC. In addition, there were no reports of parents expecting girls to get married before 18, as they understood that girls being married at a young age often means that girls are not truly choosing the marriage for themselves. As one parent explained: "*A girl used to get*

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[151] Girls FGD in Haut Katanga, 15 to 17 years old group.

married even at 13 years old, so now we understood that we were making these children suffer. A girl is a grown up only after 18 years old."[152]

Furthermore, when girls were asked about professions they would like to pursue, girls did not feel limited to a certain set of "traditional" roles such as caretaking and householding that would typically be relegated to women. Among the most cited roles that girls aspired to were doctor, journalist, electrician, teacher, and government official. These are explicitly written into the Learning Club curriculum which suggests that the girls have learned about these options through their or their friend's participation at the learning clubs. Girls' aspirations signal that they are not governed by older and more conservative viewpoints about what girls *ought* to do when they grow up, and this is a small, but noteworthy shift in culture at the level of the project's most direct beneficiaries. That being said, some girls also mentioned that they would not want to work but marry straight out of school. As one girl mentioned her future plans: "*If I finish my studies I will stay home and wait for the wedding.*"[153] Some others said that girls are less ambitious: "*few girls want to be any kind of person,"[154]* and there is no equality between boys and girls "*because the boys are paid for the school fees and girls not.*"[155]

After the TPD gender-inclusion module training, participating teachers were said to be giving all students an equal chance to participate and were encouraging girls to express themselves more confidently. According to some teachers' reports, the teachers who participated on TPD training stopped insulting girls who would be late for class or who are older than their peers, as they have become aware of the risk of dropout and the challenges that vulnerable groups face.

The qualitative data suggests that Learning and SRH clubs contributed to increasing girls' levels of confidence, as it helped them to learn more effectively and raise their awareness on gender equality. Many teachers noted the result in class, as it was said that girls feel more confident to participate, raise their hands, and ask questions during lectures. Several girls reported not feeling inferior to boys (where this used to be a problem). Some girls said that they personally saw changes over the time, as they were not as willing to participate in the past. As one girl explained the changes she observed in her own classroom, "*Before, only the boys answered in class and now the girls answer too.*"[156]

Another change noted was that girls' attendance in school became more consistent as they were better equipped (with supplies and knowledge) to go to school during their menstrual period. A project staff-member said that, prior to the start of REALISE interventions, girls would feel ashamed of their menstruation and would miss several says of school while it lasted. Some teachers also shared some stories of girls panicking in class when they began menstruating and crying or running away when they started menstruating while in school. The sanitary pads provided at the SRH clubs made those girls that received it feel safer and more confident to continue with their daily activities, as they said that the material they used before was of inferior quality and not as effective. A project staff-member shared a success-story of a girl who used miss classes because of her period: "*She used to run away from school in the 4 or 5 days of her period. She used to stay at home. Afterwards, we explained to her that it was not an illness; that it is quite normal that she comes to school with that but protecting herself with sanitary pads.*"[157]

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[152] Parents FDG in Lomami.

[153] Girls FGD in Lomami, 15 to 17 years old group.

[154] Girls stated that girls are not ambitious. Girls FGD in Lomami, 11 to 14 years old group.

[155] Girls FGD in Lualaba, 15 to 17 years old group.

[156] Girls FGD in Lomami, 11 to 14 years old group.

[157] Project staff in Lomami, female, 39 years old.

There is an indication that SRH clubs supported changes in the community's perceptions on sexual health. As previously discussed, the subjects of menstruation and other aspects of sexual health were, before REALISE, seen as taboo, and this led to a lack of good information as well as a spread of misinformation on sexual health. Parents did not feel comfortable to talk with their children about puberty and sex, and at the same time children did not know who to consult in order to understand the changes they were going through in their bodies. As a result of REALISE interventions, the discussions during SRH clubs helped to normalize the dissemination of information, and to demonstrate to parents, girls, boys the importance of sexual education. In the weak of the REALISE intervention, parents said they felt more comfortable and capable to talk to their children about puberty, and personal and menstrual hygiene. Girls who had their level of knowledge and information on SRH improved said that they help other friends who need support but were not able to attend the club sessions. Some girls also reported that when they grow up, they intend to pass this knowledge on to their children. These findings imply long-term and potentially sustainable changes as a result of REALISE, as girls are likely to become advocates for SRH education and will themselves act as teachers within their communities to reduce taboos and provide valid information about SRH issues even after the REALISE interventions conclude.

Several teachers and community members also noted that they believe the number of early marriages and pregnancies has reduced as a result of the project because parents and children were educated on children's rights, gender equality and sexual health. A teacher illustrated the success of the intervention by sharing the story of a case that he observed in the past that he believes could have been avoided if children had been educated on sexual and reproductive health as they have been through REALISE. He explained: "*We know a girl who had her first period and, instead of telling her mom or her sister, she said 'I'm ashamed'. Then she went to tell her neighbour. The neighbour and the neighbour's mom said 'I can help you to end this (the bleeding), in a way you won't have this anymore. You see the boy there, he'll show you how he can end this. The girl agreed; the boy took the girl, and the girl had become pregnant.*"[158] This story, whether true or not, is a graphic illustration of what this teacher thinks can happen in the absence of the critical types of education that SRH clubs provide, taking the shame out of conversations about SRH, and also avoiding the spread of misinformation around SRH. This information and knowledge are said to have empowered girls to make decisions about their own lives and motivates the interviewed girls to stay in school.

The qualitative data suggests the REALISE interventions positively influenced girls' motivation as many girls are saying they want to finish school, find a job and marry only after this, which is said to be supported by many parents. However, not all parents and girls agreed – some mentioned wanting to finish school but marry straight after. Through raising their feelings of empowerment and confidence, it is likely that the SRH clubs positively contributed to the prospects girls envision for themselves. As the most cited roles the girls envision for themselves come from the LC curriculum, it is likely that the LCs contributed to girls' envisioning their futures as well. Some parents have mentioned that they learned through their daughters' learnings at the SRH clubs and the parental sessions about girls' possibilities and gender equality which is likely to reinforce girls' motivation. After the TDP gender-inclusion module training, participating teachers were said to be giving all students an equal chance to participate and were encouraging girls to express themselves more confidently. Learning and SRH clubs contributed to girls feeling more confident to participate, raising their hands, and asking questions during lectures, thereby reinforcing the results of the improved teaching. Another change noted was that girls' attendance in school became more consistent as they were better equipped (with supplies and knowledge) to go to school during their menstrual period. The information and knowledge about sexual health gained

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[158] Teacher KII in Lomami, female, 73 years old.

through the SRH clubs is said to have empowered girls to make decisions about their own lives and motivates the interviewed girls to stay in school.

Summary

This summary seeks to answer the evaluation questions corresponding to impact.[159] The qualitative evidence suggests that the project positively contributed to changes in community-level perceptions regarding the value of girls' education, and girls' motivation to go to and stay in school. However, evidence suggests that both social changes are not fully shared across the intervention communities as many respondents stated having opposing thoughts. As broader project impacts are difficult to attribute to a single intervention through qualitative interviews only, we did not include a summary table categorising the impact of each intervention.

4.6   Sustainability

This section aims to answer to the extent possible the evaluation questions concerning the sustainability of REALISE project. The questions are presented below:

- What project interventions / approaches have already demonstrated sustainability (or "traction")?
- What is the likelihood that key interventions will be sustained?
- To what extent will the net benefits (whether financial, economic, social and/or environmental) of the project continue?
- To what extent was the project successful in building sustainability within the enabling environment for change at the following levels:
    - community level
    - school level
    - government system level
- How successfully has the project leveraged its learning and work to impact policy level dialogue (from the views of stakeholders, communities, and project staff)? And which focus areas of policy advocacy have gained traction?
- What were the major factors which are likely to influenced take-up and/or sustainability of the key activities?

Sustainability for the REALISE project is assessed by determining the extent to which it is likely that the net benefits of the project will continue after REALISE support has ceased. In particular, we look for evidence that established structures, such as girls' clubs and VSLA groups will continue after the conclusion of the project. In addition, school-level and institutional interventions may also be sustainable if adequate systems and incentives are in place for project interventions such as TPD and child-safeguarding reporting systems continue to be sustained by the MOE, head teachers and safeguarding focal points after REALISE support ceases. The section looks first at TPD, then at VSLA groups, SRH and Learning Clubs, child protection and safeguarding, bursaries for girls and support for AEP Centres.

Teacher Professional Development (TPD)

The likelihood for TPD to provide sustained positive effects after REALISE ends appears to be high. Teachers have said they are willing to sustain the practices they gained through TPD. As

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[159] See Annex 2 for the evaluation questions in the analysis plan.

previously discussed, all teachers acknowledged that the training provided through TPD was useful to improve the quality of their teaching and classroom engagement. They were of the opinion it was useful to maintain the students' interest in the lectures and improved their academic performance. These findings suggest that the teachers are willing to continue using their gained skills even after REALISE ends.

In addition, the project has demonstrated sustainability, as according to a project staff member, teachers have formed TPD networks and some non-targeted schools already had teachers trained by the mentors.[160] The exchange forums organized by the government might play an important role in the maintenance of TPD, as teachers could still use it as a platform to exchange experiences and knowledge related to the training. Additionally, monitoring data reported that other elements of the TPD cycle are also institutionalized in the DRC Education system, such as "*the role of Inspectors in training and lesson observations*" and "*the role of School Director in coaching/lesson observation*,"[161] which shows the interest and ownership of the government in continuing at least part of the TPD.

In addition to the TPD networks and government uptake of some parts of the TPD cycle, monitoring data also gave several other examples that indicate sustainability of the intervention beyond REALISE: "*The IPP of Tanganyika requested for funding from UNICEF to scale up TPD in non-partner schools using the training modules of REALISE.*" and "*Some head teachers have instituted the TPD approach in non-targeted grades of their school, for example case of EP LUNFUNKWE in Tanganyika I and EP KITABATABA of Haut-Katanga.*"[162] The last example has been emphasized by a project staff member during the endline as well. Furthermore, monitoring data reported that certain TPD modules are currently already being used by SCI in projects active in other regions of the DRC and are being adapted for not only other projects in the DRC but also in other countries.[163]

The TPD intervention is likely to be sustainable as teachers have said they are willing to continue using their gained skills. As clear demonstrations of sustainability beyond individually gained skills, teachers have formed TPD networks, mentors in the network have started training teachers in non-intervention schools, funding is requested by the IPP of Tanganyika to scale up TPD in non-partner schools, and some head teachers instituted the TPD approach in non-targeted grades. Furthermore, the government institutionalized some elements of the TPD cycle such as the role of inspectors in training and lesson observations, the role of head teachers in coaching and lessons observations and exchange forums where teachers exchange experiences and knowledge. As a last, TPD modules are incorporated in other projects of SCI in and outside of the DRC.

VSLA Groups

According to reports from several stakeholders, the VSLA activities are likely to be sustainable. Many community members expressed they want VSLA groups to continue, even when REALISE's support is over, because of the financial benefits it brings to the households. In a learning brief from World Vision about VSLA groups in Haut Katanga, Tanganyika and Lualaba provinces, it is stated that in June 2021, "*129 out of 134 associations are functioning, among which 94 village savings and credit associations have reached maturity. This figure represents*

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[160] Project staff KII in Haut Katanga.
[161] See REALISE Sustainability Plan Submission 22 Feb 2021 rev 070521.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.

70% of the VSLAs formed."[164] That many of the VSLAs have reached maturity suggests that they will be able to continue without REALISE support. This is reinforced by monitoring data reporting that many groups have continued to have regular meetings, save and loan activities and have been respecting the VSLA standards when there was limited support during the pandemic.[165]

According to a VSLA leader, some groups have already taken a step forward in order to be an independent mechanism, as they have joined strengths to become a VSLA network. Together, they managed to finance their own statute and regulation to present it to the State and be a formal network. A learning brief from World Vision explains that this allows them "*to establish a sustainable partnership with the government, international partners and financial institutions in the implementation of projects and production activities, contributing to the integrated development of communities. They will also allow to orient future interventions financed by international donors by aligning themselves in the logic of supporting the existing local ASBL within the framework of the economic reinforcement of the households and the sensitization to the promotion of young girls' education.*"[166] Although there is no information about whether additional funding has been received by these association, this possibility allows for further sustainability of the VSLA groups in case they are in need of additional finances. Additionally, several reports of spontaneous VSLA groups in both monitoring data and the end-line interviews show clear signs of traction.

Several VSLA leaders stated believing the activity will be perpetuated because they were well equipped with the methodologies and procedures that are important for the functioning of the groups. Several project staff said that the IGA activities are an important component to guarantee the continuity of VSLA groups. As part of the VSLAs, parents were trained on business management, including notions of purchase and sale prices, profit, savings and interest. This way, they have the necessary knowledge on how to make extra income or to even start a business, which enables them to fully repay the loans taken from the groups and to keep investing on their children's education.

However, many VSLA leaders and some parents mentioned challenges of people defaulting in repaying the credits, of inability of the members to save enough money to be lend out due to lack of income or of stealing, sometimes leading to the termination of the group. However, this still seem to be a minority, if compared to the rest of the groups. The table below shows that 77% of the established groups are functioning well, while only 3% demonstrate a bad situation and 21% unstable. The high proportion of groups doing well reflect on the potential high level of sustainability of those groups.

Table 10 VSLA Functioning[167]

Province	Functions well	Functions very well	Bad situation	Unstable situation	Total
Kasai Oriental	56	10	3	27	96
Lomami	32	9	1	3	45

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[164] See REALISE Case Study / Learning Brief - Village Savings and Credit Associations, June 2021.
[165] See REALISE Sustainability Plan Submission 22 Feb 2021 rev 070521.
[166] See REALISE Case Study / Learning Brief - Village Savings and Credit Associations, June 2021.
[167] SCI Etat de sante VSLA fevrier 2021_3_Mars

Ituri	14			3	17
Total	102	19	4	33	158
Percentage	64.5%	12%	2.5%	21%	100%

Additionally, some VSLA leaders did raise concerns related to the provision of physical materials necessary to maintain the groups operational, such as pens, notebooks and other supplies. They were worried that with the withdrawal of support from REALISE, they would not be able to acquire the supplies anymore, as they used to be donated by the organization. A staff member noted, however, that before REALISE's withdrawal, they made sure to provide the required supplies for the function of the groups for the first school year. The creation of a common fund could be a possible solution to address this concern, as there was a report of a group that created a wellbeing fund to support members in urgent need. This way, the purpose of the common fund would just have to be expanded to also address the needs of the school.

The VSLA activities are very likely to be sustainable, at least in many of the locations. Many community members expressed they want VSLA groups to continue, even when REALISE's support is over, because of the financial benefits it brings to the households. Reports state that many of the groups have already reached maturity, meaning they will be able to continue without any help. Furthermore, some VSLAs have joined together and registered as a formal network which allows them to request funding when needed. Additionally, many spontaneous groups have formed, and some have joined the networks as well, showing clear signs of traction. Finally, the income generating activities that are part of the VSLAs will allow the groups to be able to keep on paying back, saving, and loaning money. However, there remain challenges of some people defaulting on loans, of inability of the members to save enough money to be able to lend out or due to lack of income or stealing, both of which can hinder the sustainability of the VSLA groups. Additionally, similar to the clubs, some concerns have been raised related to the provision of physical materials needed to keep the groups operational. The creation of a common fund would be a possible solution to this.

Learning Clubs and SRH Clubs

As community members were satisfied with the results of both learning and SRH clubs, their wish is for it to continue even after Save the Children's support has ended. A project staff member said that it is possible to sustain the activities, because the teachers were equipped with the knowledge and methodologies to keep training other teachers and replicating the project in other locations.

Aligned with this perception, the clubs have already demonstrated a certain level of sustainability . A project staff member noted he visited, unannounced, one of the schools in which the support had already been withdrawn and witnessed the Learning and the SRH clubs still functioning. He noted that the content and methodology of the sessions are still consistent with what used to be taught when REALISE was in place.[168] Another example of demonstrated sustainability was reported in the monitoring data where it said that some head teachers had "*created additional clubs in their schools as they think having a learning club with 30 children is too small considering the need.*"[169] Furthermore, a head teacher interviewed at the end-line stated that he was planning

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[168] Project staff KII in Lomami.
[169] See REALISE Sustainability Plan Submission 22 Feb 2021 rev 070521.

to go to another school to set up clubs there as well.[170] Additionally, parents in Tanganyika and Haut Katanga are reported to have written to the head teachers to include their children in the learning clubs as well,[171] indicating there is also interest in scale-up and continuation on the side of the parents.

Some teachers, however, expressed some concerns about the sustainability of the clubs, as they were uncertain who would pay the teachers to keep working on them. It is not sustainable for the teachers to work extra hours, particularly after the salary cut that occurred with the implementation of *Gratuité*. Before the policy, school fees were utilized to pay teachers' salaries, but since then the government has not been able to cover the gap. Teachers who worked as mentors in both clubs volunteered their times, as the project paid no salaries or stipends for the extra work. Only airtime and some transportation were paid for by REALISE. However, because most teachers are poorly paid by the government, this can become an issue to the sustainability of the activity. This is emphasized by several head teachers as well.

Another concern expressed was the provision of the necessary materials for the maintenance of the clubs. With the suspension of the support, some teachers and head teachers were uncertain how they would acquire the supplies for the clubs, as they were not of the opinion that they could buy it out of their own pockets. A few head teachers said they might be able to continue a bit before they would run out and needed additional support to acquire the necessities. Some respondents suggested that to ensure the sustainability, government or local NGOs should be involved to take the responsibility of both providing those supplies as well as covering the teachers' salaries for the extra work.

Despite monitoring data suggested that not all schools have received all books, the materials schools have received for their book banks will have some sustainable use. Furthermore, usage of the book banks has gone up over time and are currently at 91% for students and for the teachers interviewed for monitoring.[172] A project staff member interviewed at the end-line mentioned that the clubs can and should continue using these. As the monitoring data stated the books are well managed and most books are not yet damaged or lost, it is likely that the teachers and students will be able to do so.[173]

However, there are some indications of the sustainability of information discussed in SRH clubs, as several parents, teachers and head teachers noticed some girls spreading the information they learned in the SRH Clubs. As one parent said about her daughter, "*since she started attending the club, she has become very clean, she takes the time to study. Another thing I see is that she helps her friends who have not joined the club and come to visit her, she advises them on their hygiene.*"[174] Moreover, the monitoring data reported that a girl was seen leading a SRH session for a small group of girls during the lockdown.[175] The willingness to spread the knowledge they gained during SRH clubs further is confirmed by several girls during endline interviews as well.

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[170] Head teacher KII in Haut Katanga.
[171] See REALISE Sustainability Plan Submission 22 Feb 2021 rev 070521.
[172] See REALISE Utilisation_de_book_banks, May and June 2021.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Parents FGD in Tanganyika.
[175] See REALISE Sustainability Plan Submission 22 Feb 2021 rev 070521.

Beneficiaries said they were satisfied with the results of the clubs and want them to continue. Some schools have been able to do so. Additionally, some girls have taken charge in spreading the knowledge gained through the SRH clubs themselves. These are signs of interest and ownership of the beneficiaries over the learnings and the clubs but there is no indication of continuation of the clubs by other local, national or external partners. Challenges to sustainability of the clubs are the lack of pay of teachers and the need for support in the provision of the necessary materials. Suggestions have been made to involve the government or local NGOs to address these challenges and continue the clubs.

Lastly, according to an MOE representative, SRH clubs supported the expansion and national popularization of the Education to Life Curriculum. According to a project staff member, REALISE was the first to expand the Education to Life Curriculum to the six targeted provinces. The project staff member said that before the closure of the project, REALISE advocated with the government for the use of SRH clubs at all levels.

Child Protection and Safeguarding

The potential sustainability of the child protection and safeguarding lies in the merging of the regional hotlines into the NGOs' national hotlines and the individual continuation of RECOPEs. The monitoring data referred to a plan to transition the project hotline to the SCI National Hotline and the WV National Hotline.[176] Although no information has been received on the status of this transition, the report that there is a plan which is supported by the SCI Country Safeguarding and MEAL teams to ensure that a new hotline and case management system is in place, including trained hotline monitors suggests that the hotline will be sustained, albeit by INGOs and not the DRC government or national NGOs which would have suggested a longer-term sustainability. The qualitative data showed that prior to the start of REALISE sexual harassment cases were usually not reported at all. Although the responses of the interviewees regarding the hotline were contradictory, the examples of cases reported indicates the use of hotlines. This is confirmed by the monitoring data.[177] If present day behaviour is an indicator for future behaviour, this would suggest that the communities would keep on reporting cases if the hotline remains operational.

Furthermore, monitoring data noted meaningful traction as "*in the midst of a deadly pandemic, RECOPEs played a vital role in sensitizing communities against the pandemic, and how to prevent it; and RECOPEs in Mwadingusha mobilised funds to buy handwashing stations for needy community beneficiaries which can continue to be utilised.*"[178] Furthermore, it is reported that RECOPEs made a number of hotline calls even when the schools were closed, which indicates their investment in child protection and safeguarding.[179] The shows that there has been traction and movement beyond the projects input, however, it is unclear whether this will be sustained. None of the qualitative data supports this. The sustainability of the child protection and safeguarding lies in the merging of the regional hotlines into the NGOs' national hotlines and the individual continuation of RECOPE's.

Bursaries for girls and Support for AEP centres

Despite the bursaries for girls and the support for AEP centres were one-off interventions, there were a few indications that these have some longer term, albeit still short, effects. One head teacher mentioned that with the support of the bursaries the school was able to purchase

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[176] See REALISE 133 HOTLINE Analysis Q15, Q16 and Q17.
[177] Ibid.
[178] See REALISE Sustainability Plan Submission 22 Feb 2021 rev 070521.
[179] Ibid.

benches.[180] A head teacher of an AEP centre mentioned that the AEP centre has received handwashing stations. Additionally, through the bursaries and AEP centre support, the schools have purchased or have been provided books. The books, handwashing stations and benches will not sustain forever, but might have some sustainable use. Albeit there might be some lasting elements as a consequence of the bursaries for girls and support for AEP centres, mainly in the form of books and benches, the sustainability of the bursaries and support for AEP centres are likely low.

Summary

This summary seeks to answer the evaluation questions corresponding to sustainability.[181] In general, the qualitative data suggests that it is likely the project will be sustainable to some extent. Most likely to sustain are the VSLA groups and the TPD. The learning club, SRH club and CPSG interventions might sustain to some extent. Although respondents all mentioned they would like the interventions to continue, the main challenge to continuation is a lack of financial means.

In communities with active and mature VSLA groups the financial benefits will likely continue. As discussed under Impact, social changes in perceptions on girls' education and girls' motivation might have a lasting impact, at least for some. These perception and motivation changes are on the community level. Although regular refresher trainings might be needed to keep their knowledge updated, the end-line evaluation indicates that teaching skills have improved significantly which will have sustaining effects on the education quality on the school level. The national uptake of some of the TPD modules indicate its sustainability on the governmental level. The training of inspectors as master trainers will also help sustain the learnings. The table below summarizes the likely sustainability of the interventions.[182] High sustainability means that triangulation of the qualitative data with the project reports indicate a high likelihood of sustainability of the activity beyond the project. Medium sustainability means that triangulation of the qualitative data with the project reports indicate a medium likelihood of sustainability of the activity beyond the project – some parts might be sustainable, others are likely not. Low sustainability means that there is little evidence found for a sustainability of the activities.

Table 11 Likely sustainability of the interventions

Intervention	Sustainability (high, medium, low)
Teacher Professional Development	High
VSLA groups	High
SRH and Learning Clubs	Medium
Child Protection and Safeguarding	Medium
Bursaries for girls	Low
Support for AEP centres	Low

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[180] Head teacher KII in Lomami.

[181] See Annex 2 for the evaluation questions in the analysis plan.

[182] Please note that this concerns sustainability as perceived by the qualitative respondents.

5. Conclusion & Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This section aims to summarize the report's findings while answering, to the extent possible, the evaluation questions established in this study. The evaluation questions were initially designed for a quantitative study, which limits the extent to which the qualitative data collected can fully address all questions. Due to the qualitative nature of the data, the findings and conclusions are based on trends present in respondents' perceptions about the project and its interventions. At the end of this section, there is a table that summarizes main conclusions from the study, organized by evaluation criteria and by the relevant project intervention. Each criteria-intervention combination is given an overall rating of high, medium, or low (underlined at the top of each cell), provided that sufficient evidence was available to arrive at a rating. Because aspects of efficiency and the broader project impacts are difficult to attribute to a single intervention, efficiency and impact are discussed separately below.

Relevance

- **Was the project soundly designed and relevant to the targeted beneficiaries? To what extent were the objectives and design of the project, including the underlying theory of change, valid and did they respond to the needs, priorities and policies of intended beneficiaries, partner organizations (e.g., schools) and the country?**

In terms of relevance, the qualitative evidence drawn from research participants indicates that project interventions were well designed, as they targeted several barriers to girls' education and beneficiaries' needs. The barriers mapped in the research showed that the projects' ToC is still valid and targeting the needs of school-aged girls, despite some contextual changes with the introduction of Gratuité or the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. The interventions that demonstrated higher levels of relevance were: TPD, VSLAs, Learning Clubs, and SRH Clubs.

Teachers acknowledged that TPD training fulfilled the needs they had on teaching methodologies and pedagogy. When triangulating this finding with student interviews, children felt like they were learning better as a result of more effective teaching. In addition, it was said that teachers became more attentive to the students' needs and that they would pay special attention to girls' needs, encouraging them to participate in class. There is also an indication that the modules on conflict sensitive education and gender inclusion were important in improving teachers' capabilities to deal with children coming from conflict affected areas; it also enabled them to handle rivalries in class more effectively. Overall, these modules enhanced their understanding of the value of girls' education and reduced abusive and humiliating behaviours towards girls in class.

VSLAs were deemed as relevant by parents as they targeted well their financial needs. Based on the qualitative data, VSLAs supported an improvement in targeted households' economic situation through financial education and savings mechanisms. Caretakers said that the money resulting from the share outs enhanced their capacities to pay for girls' school fees and other related costs, which positively affects girls' enrolment and transition in school.

There is an indication that learning clubs were effective in targeting the needs of the weakest school-aged children. All children who reported participating in learning clubs said that because of the clubs, they learned how to write, read and calculate. Students suggested the clubs also motivated them to keep learning and going to school. Parents noted the improvement as well, mentioning that they would see their children studying or reading at home, which was not the case before these clubs were introduced. Teachers acknowledged that the intervention was well designed and relevant to students' needs, as it assessed the child's level of knowledge before the start of the learning cycle and after to measure their improvement. Teachers rated learning clubs as important to homogenize the classroom level and avoid dropouts due to demotivation to study.

The qualitative data suggests that SRH clubs were impactful in addressing child protection and wellbeing barriers that hinder girls' access to education. Both girls and caretakers acknowledged that SRH clubs addressed their knowledge gaps regarding sexual health and puberty. Community stakeholders attributed their perception about the reduction of early marriages and pregnancies to the sensitization done by these clubs. All girls who received menstruation kits said that they were highly suited for their needs, as they would not have been able to acquire the supplies otherwise, given their limited financial capacities.

Even though the project seems to have decreased the barriers identified in its ToC, the evaluation identified barriers related to school infrastructure that were left unaddressed, as they were not present in the ToC in the first place. Teachers and head teachers said that school infrastructure is poor, dated and dusty, which can compromise student learning outcomes. Another relevant gap identified was that many schools have a complete lack of latrines or gender separated latrines. This untargeted need can have a negative effect on the effectiveness of the menstruation kits, as girls need appropriate facilities in which they feel safe enough to utilize the supplies provided.

- **To what extent has the project been relevant to the priorities, needs and barriers of the specific subgroups of marginalized girls (list and definitions to be provided). Do girls who were involved in and/or supported by different intervention feel the project met their educational needs and priorities?**

The sampling methodology chosen does not permit us to speak to subgroups beyond age groups (girls 11-14 and girls 15-17). Both groups showed similar responses in terms of needs and barriers faced to access school. Even though when they were asked about the barriers they face, none of the groups mentioned the abuses, harassment or humiliation faced in class by teachers and other boys, interviewed teachers and head teachers noted this was an issue particularly to girls in age group 15 to 17. Teachers said that because they are older, they also feel ashamed to join the school, as other children can bully them. TPD and to some extent SRH clubs targeted that barrier in providing teachers and boys with awareness on gender equality. Teachers, head teachers and students acknowledged that verbal abuses were reduced, which created a more comfortable environment for girls to want to join school. Boys who joined on SRH activities said they stopped provoking the girls and started to respect them more. Some girls (from both groups) confirmed that the abuses in school have reduced from both sides: boys and teachers.

- **To what extent did they remain responsive to the needs, priorities and policies of these groups when circumstances changed? Did the project apply adaptive management to ensure that interventions maintained their relevance?**

When circumstances changed, the project applied adaptive management to try to maintain its relevance to the beneficiaries. Once Gratuité policy started, and primary grade schooling became free, REALISE transformed the bursaries targeted on primary grade girls to a one time financial support to the intervention schools. Teachers rated this adaptation as relevant, because it allowed schools to buy supplies they were in need of. As a response to the massive growth of the amount to students in class, the project also introduced a module on large-sized classroom management, which targeted the needs teachers had to maintain order in class and keep the students engaged. More details on adaptive changes will be further detailed in the conclusions on Efficiency.

Coherence

- To what extent were the project and its interventions consistent with and complementary to other interventions and policies?
- Where relevant, to what extent did the project adapt to changes in the policy environment?
- Did the project achieve coherence, interlinkages, and synergies between the different interventions and across the education pathways supported?

Save the Children serves as Co-Lead of the National Education Cluster, and, as such, Save the Children's REALISE project design exhibit a high level of consistency with national policy and other education interventions. There is a close alignment in goals between the goals outlined in the national education strategy described in ""Stratégie nationale d'éducation et formation, 2016-2025." The national strategy supports the right to a free primary education, as enumerated in Article 143 of the country's constitution.

REALISE project activities complement the national strategy. The project's TPD programs improve education programs for children and promote enhanced pedagogical techniques which are gender-sensitive and conflict-sensitive. In its support for AEP programs, REALISE reintegrates children who are out of school. By provisioning schools with classroom kits containing pens, pencils, notebooks, chalk, and textbooks, REALISE improves the educational environment. The additional teaching and learning materials were crucial as the *Gratuité* policy stretched school resources thin.

REALISE project activities are also consistent with other education interventions without duplicating efforts and covering different geographic areas. The Projet d'Amélioration de la Qualité d'Éducation (PAQUE) program funded by the World Bank aims to improve teaching and learning with a focus on primary schools, grades 1 through 4. PAQUE seeks to drive change for teachers and students through performance-based financing. Accelere! Is a program funded by USAID and FCDO to improve equitable access to education and learning outcomes for girls as well as boys. The program was initially expansive and covered grades 1 to 3 (eventually expanding to grade 4 as well) in eight provinces in DRC, Haut-Katanga, Lualaba, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental, Equateur, Sud Ubangi, Nord Kivu, and Sud Kivu, before closing field operations in March 2019 and moving the project's work to Kinshasa to work with private schools.

REALISE SRH-related programs were also coherent with other two other SRH-related programs which were implemented concurrently. Bien Grandir Plus!, a program funded by Global Affairs

Canada and Save the Children Canada, seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of girls and boys aged 10 to 19 in Kinshasa. The Kitumaini initiative, implemented by UNFPA and financed by Canada, Sweden, the Korea International Cooperation Agency, and FCDO, seeks to integrate comprehensive sex education/family life education in the curriculum of primary, secondary, and vocational education.

Efficiency

- **To what extent did the project deliver the intended results in an economic[183] and timely way?**

The qualitative evidence gathered from project staff suggests that the project delivered the outputs in an economic and timely manner through effective coordination and management, despite unforeseen factors, such as COVID-19 and *Gratuité*. The collaboration and coordination mechanism were rated by project staff as a key component to an efficient project management, as it allowed the project to respond to challenges encountered and adapt to unforeseen changes.

- **Was the project managed efficiently? Were the coordination and collaboration mechanisms established by the project efficient? What could have been improved and what worked well?**

REALISE staff said that the inter-ministerial quarterly meetings were successful in developing a good relationship with government stakeholders and maintaining good coordination and feedback loops. Through the meetings, REALISE team members shared with the present stakeholders updates on project indicator progress, and challenges encountered. In the sessions it was said that participants were also able to share their inputs and give suggestions on how the project could improve. An external factor was rated by REALISE personnel as the biggest challenge to project management: the poor conditions of the roads and the long distances between the locations. REALISE staff said that due to the long distances to be covered, the substantial number hours of hour driving required, and the poor roads, the project should have allocated more resources and time to complete the school visits more efficiently and with less pressure.

- **To what extent did the project adopt and apply 'adaptive management' practices that would support improved efficiency in the delivery of interventions?**

As mentioned previously, the project utilized adaptive management to improve delivery of the interventions, whenever the circumstances changed, especially during COVID-19 and after the implementation of *Gratuité*. As a response to *Gratuité*, REALISE abolished the payment of bursaries to primary grade girls and the funds were reallocated to support the school in other ways, such as with school supplies or the learning clubs. In addition, due to COVID-19, the project paid a small grant to intervention schools. As another response to *Gratuité*, REALISE implemented a module on large class sizes in the TPD training, to support teachers in how to deal with the rising number of students in class due to the policy.

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[183] OECD DAC definitions: "Economic" is the conversion of inputs (funds, expertise, natural resources, time, etc.) into outputs, outcomes and impacts, in the most cost-effective way possible, as compared to feasible alternatives in the context. "Timely" delivery is within the intended timeframe, or a timeframe reasonably adjusted to the demands of the evolving context. This may include assessing operational efficiency (how well the intervention was managed).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, REALISE requested a repurposing of part of its budget to ensure a safe return of children to school. Even though this reallocation of resources was costly, it provided school-aged children a safe school environment with hand-washing stations, alcohol gel, and soaps in all intervention schools.

Effectiveness

- **What impact did the project have on the learning and transition of marginalized girls, including girls with disabilities?**

In terms of effectiveness, due to the qualitative nature of the research, it is difficult to measure for certain the extent to which the project supported the improvement of students' learning and transition outcomes. However, respondents suggested that REALISE had a positive effect on the learning and, to some extent, transition outcomes of boys and especially of girls. The interventions that contributed more to this achievement will be detailed in an answer to an evaluation question below.

- **To what extent were the objectives and intended results (outcomes and Intermediate Outcomes) of the project achieved, including differential results across groups? what are linked organizational and contextual contributing variables to explaining this?**

Although qualitative data is limited in its ability to quantify the extent to which intended outcome and intermediate outcome were achieved, it is possible to gain, through triangulation of interviews with beneficiaries and other project stakeholders, more insight into the answers of the EQs. Based on the qualitative data, Intermediate Outcome 1 (Girls report lower barriers to attending school and their attendance improves) was partially achieved. As it was detailed in the Impact section, overall, there was a shift in the community's perception of girls' education. Many parents reported that they started to value girls' education just as much as that of boys. Due to VSLAs, parents also reported feeling more financially capable of covering school fees and other related school costs. Classes became a safer environment for girls to learn, as head teachers reported that harassment cases and public humiliations decreased, which was likely a result of TPD gender equality module. It was also said that the hotlines and focal points facilitated the reporting, identification and persecution of cases of abuse in the schools. Overall, teachers acknowledged that they saw an increase in the enrolment of girls in primary and secondary school, which can be utilized as a proxy indicator of lowered barriers to access to education. However, this also must be tempered with the fact that the implementation of Gratuité led to a massive increase in enrolment rates in primary grade levels.

Based on student, teacher and head teacher interviews, the quality of teaching in the intervention schools (Intermediate Outcome 2) seems to have improved to some extent, both in terms of competencies of teachers in general, as well as their specific skills in teaching children with special needs. Teachers reported that TPD training improved their teaching skills, equipping them with updated and engaging methodologies to be used with students. It was also reported that TPD motivated teachers and fostered a school environment in which teachers wanted other teachers and children to succeed. Teachers also reported that based on the Positive Discipline module in TPD, they changed their discipline practices and no longer applied corporal punishment. However, concerning reports from several students, including girls, mentioned that

teachers often make students kneel as a form of punishment. This indicates a problem of effectiveness with the training and with the teachers understanding of what physical punishment is. In addition, children reported that teachers make students do menial tasks, such as sweeping the floors, picking up garbage around the school, trimming bushes or buying chalk to bring to class.

Respondents (girls, teachers and parents) deemed SRH clubs as useful and effective in increasing girls' life skills (Intermediate Outcome 3). Girls reported having their knowledge on self-care, hygiene and puberty improved. Parents also noted that – at home – girls attending the clubs improved their hygiene practices. Community stakeholders had the impression that early pregnancies and marriages were reduced as a result of the awareness raised in SRH clubs. Many girls expressed feeling equal to boys and more empowered to finish their studies and work.

Regarding Intermediate Outcome 4 (Financial barriers to girls' education are reduced, resulting in improved attendance), respondents suggested that REALISE's interventions supported economic empowerment, mainly through VSLA groups. Parents said that because of the activity, they felt more economically capable to cover school fees and related costs. Caretakers also noted that the economic support provided by the bursaries were important in lifting the financial burden related to school fees, enabling beneficiary girls to go and to continue school. However, head teachers and teachers raised concerns regarding the limited nature of the bursaries, which were designed to cover only the school fees, but not other related costs. Most vulnerable families do not have the means to pay for certain required supplies, such as uniforms, which then results in the girl being sent away, despite the school fee payment being available. This implies a limitation in the effectiveness of the intervention.

In terms of learning outcomes, the qualitative evidence suggests that there has been an improvement in the overall learning level of the children benefiting from the project. Beneficiaries attributed this result mainly to the learning clubs and TPD. Many girls, boys, and parents were satisfied with the quality of education. All interviewed children who were participating in learning clubs reported that because of the activity they learned to write, read and count. The learning clubs also raised children's awareness on the importance of studying, as several parents reported that once the pupils are home, they want to keep practicing instead of playing. In addition, teachers said that TPD training provided teachers with the necessary knowledge to improve their quality of teaching.

The main project activities that appear to have contributed to an increased presence of girls in school were the VSLA groups, bursaries, TPD, and, to a certain extent, learning clubs and sexual reproductive health clubs. Parents were of the opinion that VSLA groups and bursaries were able to partly target the financial constraints of girls moving to new grades, which is one of the main barriers for girls to attend school. Girls and teachers attributed the learning clubs and the education quality increase (through TPD) to an expansion in girls' motivation and performance which is linked to staying in school and moving to the next grade. Teachers, head teachers and students perceived the improved teaching (through TPD), as also leading to a safer and more inclusive school environment, which can increase motivation and thereby grade completion. Moreover, girls reported that SRH clubs increased their confidence and empowerment to continue school.

- **What worked (and did not work) to increase the learning and transition of marginalized girls? (i.e., which interventions were most correlated with girls' learning and transition)**

Learning clubs appear to have been the main contributor to an increase in learning and transition outcomes. Children who participated attributed their considerable improvement in reading, writing and calculus skills to the learning clubs. Parents also noted an improvement in their children's (who were participating on LCs) study habits at home. Teachers also reported that by improving the level of the weakest students, they became less likely to become demotivated to study and drop out of school. There is an indication that TPD training also provided a relevant contribution to the improvement of learning outcomes. By targeting teachers' knowledge and experience gaps, quality of education was said to be improved. The training also addressed abusive behaviours of teachers against girls. Based on teachers, head teachers, and girls' perceptions, this type of behaviour was reduced drastically. Teachers and head teachers attributed the reduction to TPD. Higher level stakeholders (such as head teachers) explained that this contributes to a safer school environment, in which girls feel more comfortable in attending and less likely to drop out. However, despite the described decrease of harassment and a TPD module on positive discipline, several children noted that teachers still make them kneel in class as punishment, which suggests this punishment may not have been covered in the positive discipline module. Those reports are also concerning, as physical punishments can potentially undermine children's attendance in school. VSLAs were also likely to have supported an increase in the enrolment and transition of girls. Parents noted that because of the groups they became more financially capable to afford girls' school fees and related supplies. Some group participants, however, noted that some members cannot afford to pay back the loans, which undermines the functionality of the affected groups

- **What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives and intended results? To what extent did the project design / ToC address those factors successfully, including through its adaptations? What impact did COVID-19 have on the achievement of these results?**

The main factors that hindered the achievement of these results were the *Gratuité* policy and COVID-19 pandemic. While *Gratuité* greatly increased the enrolment of children, especially girls, in school, it had adverse effects on the quality of teaching. Several teachers and head teachers reported that classrooms became too crowded, as school classroom infrastructure was unable to meet the rapid increase in the demand. Teachers and head teachers said that this partly compromised the quality of teaching, as classrooms generally became unruly and too noisy. While the challenges with classroom infrastructure were unaddressed due to project scope, REALISE was able to mitigate some of the effects of overloaded classes by providing teachers with a TPD module on how to manage large classes.

COVID-19 had devastating effects on DRC's educational system as a whole, including project intervention schools and its students. The project's mid-point assessment found that nearly one third of the girls had not engaged in any learning retention activities since schools closed in March, and the vast majority of girls did not have access to informal teaching or tutoring while schools

were closed.[184] Despite government efforts to maintain remote schooling, children's contact with school steeply decreased, which according to the qualitative data collected was a massive setback in children's learning progress countrywide. Many children reported feeling demotivated to get back to school after the suspension of classes because they felt they had forgotten a substantial amount. Several teachers noted that students' mathematics, reading and writing proficiency had worsened once schools reopened. However, the negative impact COVID-19 had on the children's level of knowledge did not seem to have offset the project's overall outcomes, as the TENAFEP rates dropped from 83% pre Covid-19 to 77% in 2021. In addition, the pass rates in 2021 showed signs of improvement, if compared to 2020.

Impact

- **To what extent did the project generate or contribute to the generation of significant higher-level effects (social, environmental, and economic), whether positive or negative, intended or unintended?**

The qualitative evidence suggests that the project positively contributed to changes in community-level perceptions regarding the value of girls' education, and girls' motivation to go to and stay in school. Several project stakeholders and community leaders said that they believe parents are becoming more supportive of the education of girls. Several caretakers reported in the endline interview that they now value the education of girls as much as that of boys. In addition, all parents interviewed at the endline indicated that (with regard to their daughters) marriage was no longer a priority, and instead parents wanted their daughters to finish their studies before getting married.

All of the girls interviewed indicated having the desire to finish primary and to continue their education to the university level. Some girls also reported that when they are older, they intend to pass SRH knowledge on to their children, which implies long-term and potentially sustainable changes as a result of REALISE. This type of potential generational advocacy for SRH education and knowledge has the potential to contribute to broader social change.

Sustainability

- **What project interventions / approaches have already demonstrated sustainability (or 'traction')?**

Based on the qualitative data, VSLA groups and TPD have already demonstrated a certain level of sustainability. It was reported that some teachers from intervention schools have formed multiplication networks in order to spread the TPD methodologies beyond the targeted schools. In addition, some teachers in non-targeted schools have already received training from inspectors, which is an indicator that the benefits of the TPD will disseminate beyond project areas after the project's finalization.

VSLA groups have demonstrated sustainability as some groups have reached maturity and graduated from the programme, which indicates that they will be able to function without external support. In addition, VSLA leaders reported that some groups have taken formal steps towards

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[184] Forcier, REALISE Rapid mid-point assessment, November 2020.

becoming a legal institution with a statute and recognized by the government. Some groups have also joined forces and created VSLA networks.

- **What is the likelihood that key interventions will be sustained?**

As previously mentioned, there is an indication that VSLAs and TPD have a high level of sustainability. The qualitative data suggests that SRH, learning clubs, and child protection and safeguarding activities present a medium level of sustainability. The REALISE project staff are of the opinion that because teachers were trained and equipped with the appropriate knowledge and methodologies, they will be capable of passing on the necessary knowledge to teachers in non-targeted schools to replicate both types of clubs. Some teachers however expressed concerns regarding whether they would be able to obtain the necessary supplies to maintain and expand the clubs once REALISE is over. The sustainability of the child protection and safeguarding lies in the merging of the regional hotlines with the NGOs' national hotlines and the individual continuation of RECOPEs. The qualitative and monitoring data indicated an increase in cases reported, which suggests that the communities would keep on reporting cases if the hotline remains operational.

The likelihood for the bursaries and AEPs to be sustained is low. The bursaries are highly dependent on project resources and, without any partners who are willing to continue the activity, the coverage of school fees will cease once the project is over. In terms of the AEPs, the received resources (such as books and hand washing stations) can last for a limited period of time after the end of the project, but not for an extended period of time.

- **To what extent will the net benefits (whether financial, economic, social and/or environmental) of the project continue?**

Based on the qualitative evidence, there is an indication that some financial and social benefits supported by the project are likely to continue. The continuity of the VSLAs is likely to contribute to the sustainability of the financial benefits resulted from the activity. The IGAs training provided is central to sustainability of this activity, as parents said they learned how to invest their money to generate extra income. However, the same stakeholders suggested that the training in IGAs should have been more robust and built more skills capacity.

In addition, the awareness raising on gender equality and hygiene done in the SRH clubs seem to have had a positive effect on girls. In general, girls mentioned feeling more empowered, wanting to finish school and work (instead of marrying early). Community leaders and project stakeholders were also of the opinion that parents were feeling more supportive of girls' education. Both findings suggest broader changes on gender norms. Furthermore, some girls who participated in the SRH clubs said they would pass on the knowledge acquired on hygiene and puberty to other friends and to their future generations, which suggests that those girls are likely to become project advocates and continue, to a certain extent, with the benefits of the project.

- **To what extent was the project successful in building sustainability within the enabling environment for change at the following levels:**

At the community level, the qualitative data indicates that there have been some shifts in the communities' perceptions of girls' education. In addition to girls reporting feeling more empowered

to continue their studies, most parents said they valued girls' education just as much as boys'. However, whether these feelings will last over time and be passed on to the next generation is uncertain.

In addition, TPD is likely to have developed an environment that will foster a positive change. Teachers suggested that the training not only improved quality of teaching, but also created a safer environment in class for children, especially girls. If the benefits from the training are continued and TPD multiplied to other schools, more children are likely to gain from the updated teaching methodologies and the safer classroom environment. As explained by several teachers, the reduction of abuses and harassment is important to improve attendance and lower dropout rates.

- **How successfully has the project leveraged its learning and work to impact policy level dialogue (from the views of stakeholders, communities, and project staff)? And which focus areas of policy advocacy have gained traction?**

The main project activity that has gained traction in interventions areas and which Save the Children has used to leverage to impact the policy level dialogue is SRH clubs and the life skills curriculum of SRH clubs. According to an MOE representative, REALISE has supported the expansion and popularization of the life skills curriculum. According to a project staff, REALISE was the first to expand the Education to Life Curriculum to the six targeted provinces.

- **What were the major factors which are likely to influenced take-up and/or sustainability of the key activities?**

Based on the qualitative data, the perception of the importance and relevance of the activities to the needs of the targeted stakeholders play an important role in the continuity of the activities. This was the case with VSLAs, TPD, and Learning and SRH clubs, in which the community perceived great value in the benefits from these activities and wished for them to continue despite the removal of REALISE support. In addition, community ownership seemed to be another factor in the level of sustainability of the activities. VSLAs were a good example, as there were several groups that reached maturity and even became a legal institution recognized by the government. The data suggested that when beneficiaries were equipped with the necessary knowledge and methodologies, the likelihood of continuity of the activity was higher. This indicates that it was important that the project engaged directly with project stakeholders and transferred knowledge and power to them. However, another crucial factor determining sustainability is whether it is mostly dependant on physical and external resources or on knowledge transfer. Bursaries and material support to AEP centres, for example, were highly dependent on REALISE resources, which limited a community's ability to maintain the activity independently. While TPD, VSLAs and both clubs utilized some physical resources provided by REALISE to support the intervention, they were not highly dependent on external resources, but on capacity building, which can be multiplied independently by the beneficiaries.

Table 12 Summary rating interventions on relevance, coherence, effectiveness and sustainability

Intervention	Relevance	Coherence	Effectiveness	Sustainability
Teacher Professional Development (TPD)	High: Interviews with teachers and head teachers suggest that TPD adequately addressed the needs of teachers for capacity building on teaching methodologies and sensitization on conflict and violence prevention. TPD also addressed challenges related to over-crowding in classrooms, though there is space for improvement here.	High: Through its TPD programs, REALISE is improving education programs for children and promoting enhanced pedagogical techniques which are gender-sensitive and conflict-sensitive.	Medium: TPD training motivated teachers and created a more energetic school environment, with a better relationship between students and their teachers, and more organized classes, even with the overcrowding due to Gratuité. All teachers and head teachers were of the opinion that TPD training contributed positively to children's learning outcomes. The TPD training successfully addressed some of the cultural attitudes among teachers that had contributed to teachers placing greater value on boys' education than girls' education. Girls' perceptions towards their teacher's teaching methods and skills seems to have improved as well, although some reports of corporal punishments have been made which are concerning as punishment strategies are very influential and may undermine participation and attendance, and thereby learning.	High: Regarding TPD, some teachers have formed TPD multiplication networks in order to spread TPD methodologies beyond intervention schools. Some teachers in non-targeted schools have already received training from inspectors, suggesting that the benefits of TPD will continue to diffuse beyond project sites after the conclusion of the project.
Village Saving and Loans	High:		Medium:	High:

Intervention	Relevance	Coherence	Effectiveness	Sustainability
Associations / Groups (VSLAs)	Parents found VSLA groups to be relevant to the goal of keeping girls enrolled and attending school, as VSLAs helped to address the financial barrier presented by school-related expenses that households might have otherwise not been able to afford.		Although some parents interviewed during the endline are members of VSLA groups, not many elaborated on the impact of this. Several VSLA leaders and a religious leader said that the savings VSLA groups greatly contributed to the increase on the enrolment and transition of girls in schools as it not only supported parents to pay school related costs, but also changed their mindset in relation to girls' roles and education. Government representatives and community leaders said that IGAs develop caretakers' capacities to invest their savings in activities that will enhance their income and their financial resilience. Despite the benefits, several community stakeholders noted that REALISE could have provided a more robust training on IGAs, with specific modules in skills building. A VSLA leader also noted that that the most vulnerable families are not able to engage with IGAs, because they do not have the means nor have access to loans.	VSLA groups have already demonstrated some level of sustainability, as the members of those groups have taken steps to make their organizations into a legal institution with a statute, and to have their groups formally recognized by the government.
SRH and Learning Clubs	High: Learning clubs were useful to improve the education level of the weakest students and keep them motivated. Many	High: REALISE SRH-related programs were also coherent with the two	High: A considerable number of children said they learned to read, write, and calculate because of the learning clubs	Medium: Because community members were satisfied with what they saw as the

Intervention	Relevance	Coherence	Effectiveness	Sustainability
	children said that because of the clubs they learned how to read, write and calculate. Parents and teachers noted that students had developed a habit of studying and were performing better at school.

Both girls and their caretakers/parents reported that SRH clubs were relevant in addressing knowledge gaps of both girls and their parents in relation to the subjects of puberty and sexual health. The SRH clubs also provided parents of girls with much needed sensitization about early marriage, early pregnancy, and sexual abuse. | other SRH-related programs which were being implemented concurrently with REALISE. Bien Grandir Plus!, a program funded by Global Affairs Canada and Save the Children Canada, seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of girls and boys aged 10 to 19 in Kinshasa. The Kitumaini initiative, implemented by UNFPA and financed by Canada, Sweden, the Korea International Cooperation Agency, and FCDO, seeks to integrate comprehensive sex education/family life education in the curriculum of primary, secondary, and vocational education. | and the enhancement of teaching methodologies. Parents also acknowledged that their children became more interested in learning and were performing better at school.

All girls, many parents, and most teachers and head teachers noticed positive changes in body care and hygiene of the girls attending SRH clubs. Premature pregnancies are said to be reduced as a consequence of the education of children about their bodies and reproductive health.

SRH clubs supported changes in sexual health perception, as the discussions during the sessions helped to normalize the dissemination of information, and to demonstrate to parents, girls, boys the importance of sexual education. | effectiveness of learning and SRH clubs, community members reported that they wish to sustain those activities even when Save the Children's support ends.

Because teachers were trained and equipped with teaching methodologies and established systems for follow-ups with students, REALISE project staff believe that teachers will be capable of spreading these methodologies and replicating learning and SRH clubs in other schools. However, some teachers expressed concern about whether they would be able to obtain the necessary supplies to maintain clubs once the REALISE intervention ends. |
| Child Protection and Safeguarding | Medium:

The lack of channels to report abuse cases in the community (prior to the REALISE intervention) was addressed by the child protection hotline. Teachers | | Medium:

Protection hotlines enhanced the reporting of cases of sexual abuse, harassment, and violence, as before the communities reported there were no such mechanisms available. This was | Medium:

The sustainability of the child protection and safeguarding lies in the merging of the regional hotlines into the NGOs' national hotlines and |

Intervention	Relevance	Coherence	Effectiveness	Sustainability
	found the mechanism useful to discover cases of teachers harassing students.		an important step to reducing cases of abuse, as before families would not report it and the perpetrators would not face charges. The reporting system allowed the pressing of charges and firing of teachers who committed confirmed offenses. However, a number of children were not aware of the existence of the hotline and the focal points were not mentioned.	the individual continuation of RECOPEs. The qualitative and monitoring data indicated an increase in cases reported. This suggests that the communities would keep on reporting cases if the hotline remains operational.
Bursaries for girls	Medium: Parents found bursaries to be relevant to the goal of keeping girls enrolled and attending school. The main barrier named by girls that stop girls from going to school are families' inability to pay school fees.		Medium: Some parents interviewed suggested that they would not have been able to keep their girls enrolled in school if not for the bursaries provided.	Low: Bursaries and impact of such support will not continue after the project closes.
Support for AEP Centres	Moderate, (low evidence): The teacher and head teacher reported finding AEP manuals and hand washing stations to be useful, and girls reported finding school kits to be useful.	High: In its support for AEP programs, REALISE is reintegrating children who are out-of-school and preparing them for a transition back into school or a vocation.	Moderate, (low evidence): For girls, school kits relieved some of the costs that would have been associated with schooling and obtaining necessary school materials. Evidence on AEP transitions is unclear, and not enough AEPs were covered to triangulate.	Low: AEPs received resources (such as books and handwashing stations) that will outlast the close of the project, but there is no clear evidence that AEPs will continue after the close of project support.

Remaining barriers

Despite the overall relevance, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the REALISE project, many barriers to girls' access to quality education remain. Most respondents still mention financial constraints to girls' enrolment in school. Therefore, poverty and the inability of families to pay school fees remains a large barrier. Other stated barriers to girls' enrolment are cultural beliefs: wanted or unwanted pregnancies, housework, and the desire of girls to get married. The main barriers to attendance seem to be large classes and seasonal work. Besides poverty, the barriers to quality education remain corporal punishments, teacher absenteeism and low fundamental learning skills; although much of the qualitative evidence suggests an increase in girls' skills, their total scores remain low. The below table summarizes the continuing relevance of each barrier in the intervention schools and communities.[185]

Table 13 Remaining barriers in the intervention schools and communities

Barriers	Continued barrier (high, low, medium)
Household income is too low to send girls to school**	High
School costs are too high to send girls to school**	Medium
Hidden costs of schooling	High
Families don't value girls' education**	High
Conflict disrupts schooling**	High[186]
Schools have insufficient learning materials*	High
Insufficient school infrastructure such as separate latrines for girls****	High
Low level of teacher experience / exposure to effective pedagogies**	Medium
Fundamental learning skill gaps exist in literacy at the level of letter-sound identification and in numeracy at the level of subtraction*	High
Overcrowded classes due to fee-free primary school decreases quality of teaching****	Medium
Teacher absenteeism*	Medium
Child protection and child wellbeing challenges threaten access to education and quality of learning**	Medium
School closures due to COVID-19 affect girl's learning retention***	Low
School closures due to COVID-19 affect girl's return and risk of dropout***	Low
COVID-19 demands adjustments of classroom management and materials***	High
School closures due to COVID-19 affect girl's chore burden such as income-generating activities, household upkeep, and childcare***	Low

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[185] Please note that this concerns barriers as perceived by respondents or triangulation data.

[186] Although none of the respondents mentioned conflict as a barrier, it is likely that this remains one due to its disruptiveness. During the endline, some teachers reported that students who came from conflict areas do not study well.

Barriers	Continued barrier (high, low, medium)
School closures due to COVID-19 affect self-care, cognitive and mental health-related impairments***	Low

*Barrier from baseline evaluation[187]
**Barrier from ToC supported by baseline evaluation
***Barrier from mid-point assessment[188]
****New barrier from end-line evaluation

5.2   Recommendations

This section presents recommendations or components in the project that worked well derived from the findings above. These recommendations focus on how future interventions and aspects of project evaluation and learning could be strengthened in light of the findings above, key questions left unanswered, and some of the important limitations of this study.

Project Design

Activity	Recommendation	Key finding
TPD	Consider introducing a TPD module about approaches for adapting teaching strategies to better accommodate children living with disabilities.	The data suggested that most teachers do not have experience teaching children living with disabilities. As it is now, the level of education of children with disabilities learning is dependent on the extra effort that their teacher chooses to dedicate to their specialized needs.
TPD	The module on Positive Discipline under TPD should be revisited and reinforced to include demeaning tasks such as kneeling in class as corporal punishment and to provide appropriate alternatives to teachers to having students clean the classroom and school as punishment.	Although children did not classify these incidents as corporal punishment, there were several reports of children saying teachers were making them kneel or forcing students to sweep the classroom, pick up trash, sweep outside the classroom, and bringing chalk to school.
VSLA	Strengthen and develop a more income-generating trainings to support VSLAs and develop skills in farming, raising livestock.	Several community members requested for more capacity building on the topic, including specific skills development (such as farming, livestock keeping) that would support on the setting up of the business.
VSLA	Expand outreach of VSLAs to the most vulnerable families and consider providing income-generating activities starting kits to them.	VSLA leaders noted that the most vulnerable families do not have access to credits nor the independent means to set up IGAs.
SRH and Learning Clubs	Continue and include more children, especially to catch up on learning deficits incurred by COVID-19 (for Learning Clubs) and to reinforce the impact made on community-level perceptions regarding the	Many teachers noted that the learning clubs could have included more children for greater results.

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[187] Forcier, REALISE Baseline evaluation, October 2018.

[188] Forcier, REALISE Rapid mid-point assessment, November 2020.

Activity	Recommendation	Key finding
	value of girls (girls', boys', and parents' sessions with SRH Clubs).	
Child Protection and Safeguarding	There should be awareness raising with students on the types of disciplining allowed according to the school's code of conduct, so they know when and how to report the teachers if there is a violation in class.	There were several reports from children saying that their teachers still make them kneel or do menial tasks as a form of punishment, despite the TPD module on TPD training.
Child Protection and Safeguarding	Spread awareness of the hotlines with children and parents through caregiver session. Consider including a module on child protection for teachers to present at the beginning of the year and hanging posters about it in the schools.	Many girls reported not being aware of the toll free number.
SRH Hotline	SC should conduct an assessment to understand why in Ituri and Tanganyika the number of calls to the hotlines remained so low when compared to the other provinces. This could indicate problems with the effectiveness of the activity in the locations.	Ituri and Tanganyika registered extremely low numbers of hotline calls when compared to the other counties that demonstrated a clear increase in the number of calls over the quarters.
Bursaries	Consider fully or partially covering extra school costs, such as school supplies or uniforms, for the most vulnerable children targeted by the scholarships.	Teachers reported that because some girls could not afford other school-related expenses such as uniforms, some girls were expelled.
Bursaries	Consider increasing the number of bursaries for girls from the most vulnerable families to be able to attend secondary school.	Teachers suggested the number of bursaries should be increased to target more vulnerable families not covered by *Gratuité*.
Beyond the Interventions	Coordinate or partner with food aid NGOs to provide school meals for children enrolled in the targeted schools.	Some teachers said that there are many children who are food insecure and miss class as their household adapts.
Beyond the Interventions	The project and the donor might consider increasing funding for the provision of classroom kits.	Teachers and parents noted that classroom kits were well utilized by children who received them, but teachers also suggested that the supply of such classroom kits was inadequate to meet demand.
Beyond the Interventions	In the future, it may be beneficial to plan and budget for larger numbers of field staff, or to budget for more/better transportation for staff traveling to and from the field.	The long distances and poor conditions of the roads posed logistical challenges for the staff who had to commute often to different and distant locations. Staff noted that the resources available (cars, staff, and time) sometimes were not sufficient to cover the visiting schedules.
Beyond the Interventions	The project and donor might consider funding and/or partnering with government and other organizations to repair or build separate school latrine facilities.	Girls said that they do not feel comfortable or secure sharing latrines with boys, in particular, during menstruation. In addition, the evaluation found that many schools lack latrines, which prevent girls from utilizing their menstruation kits at school.

Activity	Recommendation	Key finding
Beyond the Interventions	Coordinate with government and private organizations to construct, rehabilitate, and equip classrooms to accommodate the large influx of children as a result of *Gratuité*.	Teachers and head teachers reported that classroom infrastructure was crumbling, and after *Gratuité*, the attendance of many more students meant that the school's resources were not sufficient to meet demand. There were several reports of children having to sit on the floor.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning of the Project

- The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted many of the weaknesses of conventional face-to-face data collection strategies used for both project monitoring and for external evaluation. Future evaluation strategies would benefit from being designed in such a way as to allow for remote, telephonic or digital data collection, including by equipping trained community monitors to collect and upload data from their own community. Such data collection mechanisms, if standardized into project MEL design would allow for more continuous engagement with beneficiaries and collection of data, even during major crises that preclude monitoring or evaluation teams from traveling to the field.
- GEC projects and interventions are sufficiently complex that they deserve a mixed-methods approach to evaluation, including a well-powered quantitative sample, ideally with a quasi-experimental design, that will allow for the evaluation of effectiveness and impact through the use of difference-in-differences. The donor will want to make certain that the evaluation component of future projects is adequately funded to enable the execution of an appropriately designed study.
  - In order to have another point of comparison for the project intervention schools, the project should consider also obtaining the TENAFEP results of non-intervention schools that share similar characteristics such as location, total number of students, proportion of girls in the student body, and number of teachers.

Annexes

Annex 1: Project Design and Interventions

Activity	What Intermediate Outcome will the intervention contribute to and how?	How will the intervention contribute to achieving the learning, transition, and sustainability outcomes?	Start to end date of activity	Number of schools / centres / communities targeted	Teachers / facilitators targeted	Target beneficiaries (and numbers)
List main types of project interventions in this column by type in this column e.g., access, capacity-building, governance, material support, safe-spaces, teaching inputs, female voice, community initiatives, learning support						
Output 1						
Literacy and Numeracy Boost	Quality of teaching and learning	Teachers are trained on assessment and skill building and to adapt curriculum to improve learning outcomes	2018-2021	ALL		
Learning clubs established	Quality of teaching and learning	Weaker students develop Improved reading and numeracy skills to improve learning outcomes	Oct 2019-2021	260 learning clubs Expanded to all primary schools in 2020	260 facilitators	4786 students (including 2745 girls in 19/20)
Book banks	Quality of teaching and learning	REALISE will distribute book banks to all primary and secondary schools to support learning clubs and encourage reading which will improve learning outcomes	2019	260 learning clubs	260 facilitators	4786 students (including 2745 girls in 19/20)

Activity	What Intermediate Outcome will the intervention contribute to and how?	How will the intervention contribute to achieving the learning, transition, and sustainability outcomes?	Start to end date of activity	Number of schools / centres / communities targeted	Teachers / facilitators targeted	Target beneficiaries (and numbers)
School kits provided	Quality of teaching and learning	REALISE will distribute school kits – textbooks, teachers manuals and supplies to classrooms to ensure that all children in a class are equipped to learn and teachers have some resources to teach improving attendance and learning outcomes	2018-2021	484 schools and AEPs		21567 books (target 60000 girls)
Output 2						
Teacher Professional Development	Quality of teaching and learning + Attendance	TPD aims to strengthen teachers' skills and competencies through quarterly cycles of trainings focusing on domains and competencies most useful for teachers improving learning environment for girls	2018-2021	468 Schools, 16 AEP Centres	2749 teachers trained so far including 418 females (4 teachers per primary, 3 teachers per secondary, and 2 teachers per AEP)	60,000
Accelerated education - Educators from 16 supported AEP Centres were trained to implement accelerated education	Quality of teaching and learning + Attendance	Training impacts learning and transition outcomes directly	2018-2021	16 AEP Centres	1 educator from each of 16 AEP Centres	2,700 (TBC)
Output 3						
Conflict-Sensitive Education	Quality of teaching and learning + Life skills Attendance	By adapting teaching to all children, including those affected by conflict, children will have improved learning and will stay in school during conflict or reintegrate schools more quickly after conflict, minimizing the disruptive impact of conflict on education	2019-Y3 only	468 schools	2749 teachers trained (all TPD teachers trained on CSE)	60,000 girls

Activity	What Intermediate Outcome will the intervention contribute to and how?	How will the intervention contribute to achieving the learning, transition, and sustainability outcomes?	Start to end date of activity	Number of schools / centres / communities targeted	Teachers / facilitators targeted	Target beneficiaries (and numbers)
Training all school communities on protection of schools in conflict	Attendance	Protecting schools, teachers provide a safe and sustainable environment for students and improves Learning Outcomes	2019- Y3 only		ALL school communities	
Output 4						
Training of secondary school SRH Teachers on national 'Education to Life curriculum and provision of materials	Life skills	Provide training to teachers and schools on education to family life curriculum on SRH and puberty improves learning and transition outcomes.	2019-2021 Expanded to primary schools Oct 2021	147 schools (primary)	395 teachers	38728 girls (from G4 to G6): 20/21 schools data
SRH Clubs formed in secondary schools	Life skills, Attendance	This intervention will help improve girls' self-esteem and girls' attendance in school, which the project believes will in turn increase learning for girls, improving transition and enabling sustainable change	2019-2021 Expanded to primary schools Oct 2021	468 clubs		60,000 girls
Parents sessions organized	Life skills/Attendance	Parents sessions will help create a lasting change in the community on attitudes and behaviours towards girls, leading to achieving the sustainability outcome through behaviour change. If the key community members support girls to continue their learning in schools and acknowledge education as a priority for girls, these girls will feel more supported to attend school and learn and transition over the years.	2019-2021	484 schools and AEP	TBC	TBC girls

Activity	What Intermediate Outcome will the intervention contribute to and how?	How will the intervention contribute to achieving the learning, transition, and sustainability outcomes?	Start to end date of activity	Number of schools / centres / communities targeted	Teachers / facilitators targeted	Target beneficiaries (and numbers)
SRH Hotline established	Life skills	This intervention will help improve girls' self-esteem, and improving learning and transition	April 2019-Jul 2021	484 schools and AEP	1 hotline	60,000 girls
Training of RECOPES on safeguarding /referrals	Attendance	By contributing to better overall protection of children through strengthened referral pathways for abuses of child rights both in schools and in communities, the response to abuse will be improved. Keeping children safe in schools will positively impacts learning and transition outcomes	2019-2021	468 schools	97 RECOPE	60,000 girls
Output 5						
Material and financial support provided to AEP Centres	Attendance	AEPs aim to create an informal alternative to primary education that is adapted to student needs. Since costs are not borne by family, children who have been left behind by the formal system can register and attend, and improve learning and transition outcomes	2017-2021	16 AEP Centres		2,700 (TBC)
Bursaries for girls	Attendance	This intervention is aimed to keep girls in schools through the final year of primary and getting them to register, and start secondary, with direct impact on transition outcome. Bursaries also improve attendance, which impacts learning outcomes.	TENAFEP 2018-2019 Bursaries 2018-2021	208 secondary schools	N/A	22,000 girls in target primary and secondary grades
VSLAs	Economic empowerment + Attendance	Improving parents' revenues will have a long term impact on their capacity to pay schools fees, and support their	2018-2021	270 groups (TBC)	2,672 persons including 1,722 women	TBC

Activity	What Intermediate Outcome will the intervention contribute to and how?	How will the intervention contribute to achieving the learning, transition, and sustainability outcomes?	Start to end date of activity	Number of schools / centres / communities targeted	Teachers / facilitators targeted	Target beneficiaries (and numbers)
		families, creating an overall sustainable change				
Citizen Voice and Action Groups	Economic empowerment	This activity is aimed at ensuring sustainability as it engages communities to becomes agents of change in education.	2018-2019 Cut in Y4 but reinstated in MTR workplan Oct 2020 to support COPAS and COGES on SB2S	262 communities	TBC community members	TBC

Annex 2: Endline evaluation approach and methodology

Evaluation methodology

The endline evaluation design is exclusively a qualitative study, focusing on using a sample of 87 purposively selected qualitative interviews to construct the most comprehensive picture possible of REALISE project outcomes in the absence of a representative quantitative sample. This qualitative evaluation is organized thematically around the OECD-DAC criteria and subsets of evaluation questions corresponding to each of the criteria. Thus, the main findings sections are: 1) relevance, 2) coherence, 3) efficiency, 4) effectiveness, 5) impact, and 6) sustainability. While the report will comment on each of these criteria, the qualitative data is well suited to the evaluation of some of these criteria, e.g., sustainability, and is much less suited to the evaluation of effectiveness or impact, where quantitative, longitudinal measures are often preferable in terms of being able to make valid causal inferences about the impact of a given intervention or activity.

The endline evaluation design is sufficiently different from the baseline sample design in terms of both scope and methodology that our analysis does not attempt to draw direct comparisons between baseline and endline data because, in most cases, these comparisons would not be valid or might even be misleading. The baseline findings are only referenced when appropriate to broadly contextualize the endline findings.

The initial intention of the endline was to replicate the baseline in such a way as to allow for longitudinal comparison and a mixed-methods approach to evaluating effectiveness and impact. However, due to severe budget reductions the endline design was reduced to a purely qualitative study with emphasis on the ability to collect qualitative data that would allow for triangulation of sources and perspectives to provide the best summative evaluation possible in light of budget restrictions.

As a result of major budget-related changes to the methodology, Lomami district was dropped entirely from the sample, as was the province of Ituri. As the estimated budget contracted further, the EE and the Project re-designed the endline methodology in order to remove all quantitative data collection, streamlining a qualitative sample of two schools per province (excepting in Tanganyika where only one school was sampled). The details of final school selection are presented in the Sampling Framework in Annex 13.

The planned qualitative sample was as follows, by province:

Province	HAUT KATANGA	KASAI ORIENTAL	LOMAMI	LUALABA	TANGANYIKA	Total
FGD Girls	4	4	4	4	2	**18**
FGD Boys	2	2	2	2	1	**9**
FGD Parents	2	2	2	2	1	**9**
KII Teacher	2	2	2	2	1	**9**
KII Headmaster	2	2	2	2	1	**9**
KII Leader VSLA	1	1	1	1	1	**5**
KII Religious Leader or Community Leader	2	2	2	2	1	**9**
MINAS Provincial Officer	1	1	1	1	1	**5**

Project staff at provincial level	1	1	1	1	1	**5**
MOE staff at provincial level	1	1	1	1	1	**5**
And a total of 4 interviews in Kinshasa:						
1.	**Focal point in the SG's office**					
2.	**Head of Education for Life (SRH), Dept of MOE**					
3.	**DG of Non-Formal Education, Dept. of MINAS**					
4.	**Member of Inspectorate in charge of training**					

Endline data collection process

The endline data collection process, which was exclusively qualitative, was completely different from that of the baseline (which was a broad, mixed-methods study) and the mid-term assessment, which was conducted exclusively by STC staff using a combination of monitoring visits and telephonic interviews with teachers in order to gather a small quantitative sample under a restricted budget and with minimal risk of spreading the coronavirus by sending external data collectors to numerous provinces and schools.

Most of the qualitative interview modes from the baseline (focus groups and key informant interviews) were retained for the endline. Girls' and caretakers' questionnaires at endline re-used some of the questions from baseline but were also heavily adapted in order to compensate for the lack of quantitative data collection and in order to speak to aspects of sustainability and impact that are most relevant at endline.

Pre data collection

The sampling framework for endline comprised all baseline intervention schools (see Annex 13).

All qualitative tools were revised for the endline evaluation in light of the fact that the quantitative portion of the study was removed. New tools were created for MINAS and project staff.

The training of the researchers was followed by pre-testing and supervised practice of qualitative tools. Four days of qualitative researcher training emphasized the importance of collecting high-quality data. The researchers practiced conducting interviews and moderating FGDs among themselves and the Research Officer provided feedback to each researcher, especially on how they handled the consent process and probing during the mock interviews/FGDs.

During data collection

Qualitative interviews in all locations were conducted from July 31st to August 20th of 2021.

With respect to child protection, a refresher training on ESOMAR guidelines regarding research with children was conducted with all researchers coming in direct contact with children prior to the start of fieldwork. At all times Forcier researchers were obligated to adhere to the FCDO Ethics Principles for Research and Evaluation, as well as to its accompanying guidance note. The ten core principles contained therein, which guided our researchers in their approach to surveying children, include:

- Identifying and securing ethical permissions for the study we are undertaking;

- 'Doing no harm' to those participating in the study;

- To ensure that all participants in the study have provided voluntary and informed consent;

- Ensuring the confidentiality of information and anonymity of participants;

- Adhering to international human rights conventions and covenants; and

- Respecting cultural sensitivities and participation of excluded groups.

Also, all field staff will be sensitized to, and must commit to adhering to Save the Children's Child Safeguarding Policy and ethical principles, which adds the following:

- Ensuring transparency in research so communities should know what their collective data is;

- Safeguarding children through awareness, prevention, reporting and responding;

- Working with local researchers to avoid using translators which can build suspicion and complicate
power dynamics.

In addition, research staff will be guided by the ICC Code of Conduct/ESOMAR Guidelines, which state that:

- Consent must be obtained by a parent or legal guardian;

- Survey questions must be tailored to the child's age and level of maturity; and

- Strictly voluntary participation must be ensured, as well as the child's right to respond free from
pressure.

Forcier Consulting believes that the best way to minimize the risks associated with working with children is through the active and mindful prevention of abuse. Forcier Consulting staff, interns, and enumerators are trained to treat children in a manner that is fully respectful of their rights, integrity, and dignity. The welfare of each child is the overriding concern when conducting all site visits and interviews where there are children present. Furthermore, our teams are trained to consistently:

- Treat children with respect regardless of race, colour, gender, disability, language, religion or other ethnic or social origins. The Researchers behave and use an appropriate language in the presence of children, and they will interact with children only throughout the duration of the interviewing process.

- Seek permission before conducting an interview from the adult overseeing that location (such as a teacher), and from the parents or guardians of the participants. Comprehensive explanation about the survey questions was given to the relevant authority figure so that they are fully aware of the nature of the survey and its content.

- Ensure that children are always in a safe and protective environment during interviewing by ensuring that all children are interviewed in the presence of an adult (e.g., a parent/guardian or a teacher).

- Only exchanging business contact information that is necessary to conduct research follow-ups and ensures children and their families have a means to contact Forcier should they require further assistance relating to the research, such as rescinding their consent to participate. Forcier staff never exchange personal contact information with children and their families, unless exceptional circumstances require this within the boundaries of the research exercise (e.g., when concerns of abuse arise and action needs to be taken).

- Complying with all relevant and local legislation regarding labour laws in relation to child labour.

Lastly, all Forcier staff working on this project were briefed on SCI's Child Safeguarding protocol. This includes salaried staff, interns, and all hired enumerators involved in the research. As part of the training for enumerators, a specific module on child safeguarding and related risks management was included. Also, Forcier has and distributes a written, comprehensive Child Protection Policy that includes a Code of Conduct to which all staff, including researchers, must review, sign, and adhere.[189]

Gender-inclusivity is taken into account at all levels of the research process. As a result, Forcier's teams of Researchers and Enumerators comprise both male and female full-time research staff.

To ensure that these principles were upheld in the design of data collection instruments, all tools were reviewed by Forcier and STC staff and modified in keeping with ethical principles, including do-no-harm, gender sensitiveness, benefit versus cost of obtaining data (i.e. "nice to know" versus "need to know", considering the time burden for participants), respect for the local culture and nuances related to specific sub-groups (i.e. ensuring that questions take into consideration sensitivities and risks for disabled girls, orphans, pastoralists and girls at high risk of dropout).

Researchers received specific training on research ethics, including informed consent, confidentiality, working with children, gender-sensitivity, disability-sensitivity, and do-no-harm principles. Informed consent will be obtained from adults and children. Specific guidelines were provided to ensure that illiterate participants in remote areas are able to understand the purpose of this activity and the uses of data, as well as the concept of confidentiality. Respondents, independent of their age, gender, or status, were treated as partners in the project; questions were asked in a manner that demonstrates respect for their dignity, and participants were clearly informed of their right to refuse responses and to withdraw from the process at any time. Researchers were required to sign Forcier's child protection framework and policy before beginning piloting or fieldwork.

Regarding quality assurance during data collection: the Forcier research team listened to the interview/FGD audio files and review interview/FGD notes on a daily basis (or as often as interview uploads are possible from the field) and provide feedback to each researcher on areas to improve and mistakes to avoid for future interviews/FGDs. The review process was most intensive during the first 2-3 days of qualitative data collection, where all audio files and notes were reviewed each day. Once the quality of interviewing was deemed acceptable, a sample of 20% of audio files and notes was reviewed daily as part of our quality assurance process. Feedback was provided to the researchers before the start of fieldwork the following day.

Post data collection

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[189] See Annex 4 for this document.

The achieved qualitative sample was ultimately identical to the planned sample, thus having the following distribution by province:

Province	HAUT KATANGA	KASAI ORIENTAL	LOMAMI	LUALABA	TANGANYIKA	Total
FGD Girls	4	4	4	4	2	18
FGD Boys	2	2	2	2	1	9
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KII Teacher	2	2	2	2	1	9
KII Headmaster	2	2	2	2	1	9
KII Leader VSLA	1	1	1	1	1	5
KII Religious Leader or Community Leader	2	2	2	2	1	9
MINAS Provincial Officer	1	1	1	1	1	5
Project staff at provincial level	1	1	1	1	1	5
MOE staff at provincial level	1	1	1	1	1	5
And a total of 4 interviews in Kinshasa:						
1.	Focal point in the SG's office					
2.	Head of Education for Life (SRH), Dept of MOE					
3.	DG of Non-Formal Education, Dept. of MINAS					
4.	Member of Inspectorate in charge of training					

For the transcription team, the first quality assurance step involved training. The transcribers underwent a special one-day training where a significant amount of time was spent on practicing translation and transcription of audio files from the pilot. Once transcription of the fieldwork data started, the Forcier research team reviewed the transcripts for typos, grammatical errors, accuracy, and completeness as they became available. Where responses did not flow well or where the meaning of responses was not clear, translations were compared against original audio recordings and referred to the researcher for clarification. Subsequently, edits were made to reflect the actual intended responses. The research team conducted random checks of the audio files (at least one audio file per day) against transcripts to verify the completeness and validity of the completed transcripts.

The cleaned transcripts of the qualitative interviews and FGDs were then formatted in Excel for coding. Forcier used a simple coding scheme in Excel to code responses by evaluation criteria, questions, and interventions/activities.

Analysis Plan

In order to provide a clear basis for linking evaluation criteria, questions, interventions, and operational measures in the tools, Forcier and STC formulated an analysis plan, which provides a tabular summary of all evaluation criteria and corresponding linkages to interventions, etc. the full analysis plan appears on the following page.

Table 14 Analysis Plan

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Questions	Interventions	Tools (+examples)
Relevance	a) Was the project soundly designed and relevant to the targeted beneficiaries? To what extent were the objectives and design of the project, including the underlying theory of change, valid and did they respond to the needs, priorities and policies of intended beneficiaries, partner organizations (e.g., schools) and the country? b) To what extent has the project been relevant to the priorities, needs and barriers of the specific subgroups of marginalized girls (list and definitions to be provided). Do girls who were involved in and/or supported by different intervention feel the project met their educational needs and priorities? c) To what extent did they remain responsive to the needs, priorities, and policies of these groups when circumstances changed? Did the project apply adaptive management to ensure that interventions maintained their relevance?	TPD VSLA SRH club Learning Clubs Ed Kits CP&SG Bursaries	**All qual tools** begin by asking what interventions the respondent knows of or may have been involved in, along with questions of relevance for each. **DIVAS KII** asks about the key priorities, barriers, and challenges of girls at AEPs and then asks how relevant the project's interventions have been to address these priorities, needs and challenges. It also asks how the interventions have fed into the various frameworks and strategies on education. **PROVED KII** asks about the key priorities, barriers and challenges of school aged girls and then asks how relevant the project's interventions have been to address these priorities, needs and challenges. It also asks how the interventions have fed into the various frameworks and strategies on education. **Project Staff KII** asks what specific interventions that staff member has been involved in and how relevant they found those interventions to be to the needs of school-aged girls. It also asks how consistent the interventions were with various education frameworks and strategies **Religious leader and Community leader KIIs** ask about relevance of interventions at the community level. **Teacher KII** asks about the relevance of the interventions at the school level. **Head Teacher KII** asks about the relevance of the interventions at the school level. **VSLA Leader KII** asks about usefulness of the VSLA group, whether it meets general needs, and in terms of girls' priorities, needs and barriers. **All 4 national level KIIs (2 MOE, MINAS, Inspectorate)** asks about the key priorities in the education sector and barriers to education and asks to what extent REALISE interventions were relevant to addressing these priorities and barriers. It also asks about how REALISE interventions fed into key national level educational strategies and frameworks.

| Coherence | a) External coherence: To what extent were the project and its interventions consistent with and complementary to other interventions and policies? Where relevant, to what extent did the project adapt to changes in the policy environment?

b) Internal coherence: Did the project achieve coherence, interlinkages, and synergies between the different interventions and across the education pathways supported? | TPD

VSLA

SRH club

Learning Clubs

Ed Kits

CP&SG

Bursaries | **DIVAS KII** and **PROVED KII** ask how REALISE has coordinated and collaborated with other education programming in the province.

DIVAS KII and **MINAS KII** ask about change in child protection referrals.

Project KII asks about how REALISE coordinated and/or collaborated with other efforts focusing on education. It also asks how TPD feed into the National Strategy for Teacher training and how REALISE collaborated with other interventions in the area. Follow up questions ask specifically about interlinkage and synergy among interventions.

PROVED KII and **National MOE KII** ask about how REALISE collaborated with other interventions in the area. Follow up questions ask specifically about interlinkage and synergy among REALISE interventions and other interventions in the area.

Religious leader and community leader KIIs ask about other education projects in the community and how they interact/coordinate with REALISE.

Head Teacher KII asks about other education projects in the school and how they interact/coordinate with REALISE.

VSLA Leader KII asks about internal and external coherence regarding the VSLA group. |
| Efficiency | To what extent did the project deliver the intended results in an economic and timely way?

To what extent did the project adopt and apply 'adaptive management' practices that would support improved efficiency in the delivery of interventions?

Was the project managed efficiently? Were the coordination and collaboration mechanisms established by the project efficient? What could have been improved and what worked well? | | **Project Staff KII** asks about how efficiently the project was managed, what worked well and what could have been improved and factors that affected the efficient management of the project (both external/contextual factors that were outside of their control and the internal ones). Question 7 addressed efficiency directly.

Teacher KII asks about the projects ability to adapt its training modules to the shifting priorities and needs of the teachers.

Head Teacher KII asks about the projects ability to adapt its activities to the shifting priorities and needs of the teachers and students.

VSLA Leader KII asks about the projects ability to adapt its activities to the shifting priorities and needs of the members of the group. It also asks about the extent in which the intended results were delivered in a cost-effective and timely way and what could have done better. |

Effectiveness	What impact did the project have on the learning and transition of marginalized girls, including girls with disabilities? What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives and intended results? To what extent did the project design / ToC address those factors successfully, including through its adaptations? What impact did COVID-19 have on the achievement of these results? To what extent were the objectives and intended results (outcomes and IOs) of the project achieved, including differential results across groups? what are linked organizational and contextual contributing variables to explaining this? What worked (and did not work) to increase the learning and transition of marginalized girls? (i.e., which interventions were most correlated with girls' learning and transition)	TPD VSLA SRH club Learning Clubs Ed Kits CP&SG Bursaries	**Parent FGD** asks about impact of bursaries, school kit, VSLA of enrolling girls in schools and the impact of SHR and LC (parent sessions) on their girls and their relationship to their girls. Also asks about TPD (perception of improved quality of teaching on girls learning), factors influencing non-achievement (impact of COVID-19 and *Gratuité*). Also includes a question about CP&SG- what is done in instances of violence and if they are aware of a referral system or reporting mechanism. Asks about transition/changes in likelihood of sending girls to school as well. **Boy FGD** asks about impact of school kit on retention, impact of TPD on teaching quality/discipline in class, SRH and LC on knowledge of SRH topics and improved learning. Also asks about factors (COVID-19 and *Gratuité*) influencing non-achievement. Also asks about general transition/progression of girls. **Girl FGD** asks about effectiveness of TPD in improving learning (girls are learning better and are being supported adequately). Asks about factors influencing achievement (COVID-19, *Gratuité*) and project effects on general transition/progression. Asks specifically about effectiveness of SHR and LCs and 134 hotlines. Also asks about CP&SG and support received during school closures. **Religious Leader KII and Community leader KII** asks about effectiveness of VSLAs in girls' continued access to education, asks also about impact of SRH and LC on children and their families. They also ask about changed perceptions towards girls' education in the community. **Project staff KII** asks about the effectiveness of the interventions in improving learning outcomes, as well as what factors contributed to non-achievement of results (both COVID-19 and *Gratuité*). Also asks about the role of the 133 hotline and teacher safeguarding training on CP&SG. **DIVAS KII** asks about effectiveness of project in terms of improving learning outcomes for AEP's. It also asks about factors that may have contributed to non-achievement of results, including COVID-19 and *Gratuité*. Also asks about the role of the 133 hotline and teacher safeguarding training on CP&SG. **PROVED KII** asks about effectiveness of project in terms of improving learning outcomes. It also asks about factors that may have contributed to non-achievement of results, including COVID-19 and *Gratuité*. Also asks about the role of the 133 hotline and teacher safeguarding training on CP&SG. **Teacher KII** asks about how effective the TPD was in teaching them new teaching technics, in improving their understanding of gender and inclusion, classroom management, conflict sensitive teaching, using positive discipline etc. It also asks about SHR, LC, school kit, changes in exam results, student abilities in general and in transition. Also asks about the

role of the 133 hotline and teacher safeguarding training on CP&SG.

Head Teacher KII asks about changes in girls transition in the last three years and the effectiveness of the project activities for their school. It also asks about factors that affected achievement or non-achievement of results (both internal and external factors such as COVID-19 and *Gratuité* policy). Also asks about the role of the 133 hotline and teacher safeguarding training on CP&SG.

VSLA Leader KII asks about the effectiveness of the VSLA group, also in terms of enrolment, transition, retention and learning outcomes, and the effects of the VSLA group during COVID-19.

All 4 national level KIIs asks about how effective the project has been in improving learning outcomes, transition, and dropout rates. It also asks about factors that affected achievement or non-achievement of results (both internal and external factors such as COVID-19 and *Gratuité* policy).

National MOE KII also asks specifically about TPD and how effective that training has been in improving teachers' abilities to teach effectively, asks about particularly effective modules and about those that were not as beneficial. Also asks about the SRH and how effective those have been to students and families. Also asks about the role of the 133 hotline and teacher safeguarding training on CP&SG.

National MINAS KII also asks about the role of the 133 hotline and teacher safeguarding training on CP&SG.

Impact	To what extent did the project generate or contribute to the generation of significant higher-level effects (social, environmental, and economic), whether positive or negative, intended or unintended?		**Parent FGD** asks about social norms (best age for marriage, post-school life for girls, if they will send their girls on to secondary school, why parents might not enrol their daughters in school) also economic factors.
			Boys FGD asks about impact on social norms (if they've seen a change in people's opinions vis a vis girl's education).
			Girls FGD asks if they plan to go on to secondary school/finish school. Impact on perceptions about gender and gender roles/expectations
		TPD	**MINAS KII** asks about bursaries, kit, TPD and VSLAs and how they may have impacted enrolment and retention of girls in school. Also asks about the impact of TPD on National strategy in teacher training. Also asks about how perceptions may have changed as well as any unintended effects.
		VSLA	
		SRH club	**Project Staff KII** asks how interventions impacted girls' leadership/confidence, perception of girls' education in community, changes in gender norms and use of violence in classrooms. It also asks if there had been any unintended effects
		Learning Clubs	
		Ed Kits	**Community Leader KII and Religious Leader KII** asks about changes in community perceptions in and parents support for girls' education, about changes in the number of girls attending and finishing school.
		CP&SG	
		Bursaries	**Teacher KII** asks about the impact of the interventions on student learning.
			Head Teacher KII asks about the impact of the school bursaries and VSLA on retention as well as the impact of SRH clubs and LCs on gender norms and on learning and wellbeing of girls.
			VSLA Leader KII asks about impact of VSLA on its members and the community, about the unintended consequences. Also asks about the effects of the VSLA on girls' enrolment, transition, retention and learning outcomes.
			All national level KIIs ask about unintended consequences as well as about changes in perceptions of girls' education.

| Sustainability | a) What project interventions / approaches have already demonstrated sustainability?

b) What is the likelihood that key interventions will be sustained?

c) To what extent will the net benefits (whether financial, economic, social, or environmental) of the project continue?

d) To what extent was the project successful in building sustainability within the enabling environment for change at the community, school, and government/system levels?

e) How successfully has the project leveraged its learning and work to impact policy level dialogue? And which focus areas of policy advocacy have gained traction?

f) What were the major factors which are likely to influenced take-up and/or sustainability of the key activities? | TPD

VSLA

SRH club

Learning Clubs

CP&SG | **Parent FGD** asks about sustainability of the VSLA structure to those who have been involved

DIVAS KII asks about the sustainability of TPD as well as VSLA, if sustainability has been demonstrated and factors that may affect the sustainability. It also asks about sustainability of interventions in terms of their behaviour and that of their colleagues.

Project staff KII asks about which interventions have shown some sustainability and then specifically about the TPD and VSLA's sustainability.

Proved KII asks about sustainability of interventions in terms of their behaviour and that of their colleagues.

Community leader and religious leader KII asks about LCs, SRH clubs, 133 hotlines and VSLA and how sustainable these interventions are. For community leaders, question 10 asks about VSLA, 11-12 about SRH and 12 about LCs, and question 14 about the hotline. For Religious leaders, question 11 asks about VSLA, 12-13 about SRH, 14 about LCs and 15 about the hotline.

Teacher KII asks about the sustainability of the project interventions for their school, even if the project would not continue its activities. Question 23-25 ask about SRH, 26-27 about LCs.

Head Teacher KII asks about the sustainability of the project interventions for their school, even if the project would not continue its activities.

VSLA Leader KII asks about sustainability of the VSLA group, also in terms of being able to meet their own needs and in terms of benefits for its members.

National level KIIs ask about what interventions have already demonstrated traction in terms of sustainability and asks about what other interventions may be sustainable in the future and what factors affect sustainability. |

Challenges in endline data collection and limitations of the evaluation design

Please describe any identified limitations and challenges. This section should:

- Outline any methodological challenges to the approach (including any biases, attrition etc.) and how these were mitigated.

- Provide a summary of any limitations and challenges that were faced during the endline evaluation (for both quantitative and qualitative aspects) either pre-fieldwork, during fieldwork, or post-fieldwork.

- Explain how these challenges affect/may affect the robustness, reliability and comparability of any findings, and the degree to which findings should therefore be caveated.

Note: **The approach adopted by the GEC is that a child identified as having a disability is one who is recorded as having a lot of difficulty or cannot do at all in one or more domain.** This applies to both the Washington Group Short Set of Questions and the Child Functioning Set of questions.

Annex 3: Logframe

The latest version of the project logframe has been included.

Annex 4: Beneficiaries tables

Table 7.1: Direct beneficiaries

Beneficiary type	Total project number (life of project)	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.	73,438	Girls with disabilities not deemed to be relevant subgroup. Overall number of 60k comes from total beneficiary count across all subgroups. This figure of 50,405 comes from verified enrolment data from 400 out of the total 468 schools targeted.
Primary school girls (target grades only)	39,124	School Enrolment, primary school, G4-6, Girls
Secondary school girls (target grades only)	31,195	School Enrolment, secondary school, G7-8, Girls
AEP girls	3,119	AEP Enrolment data
Bursary recipient girls	48,388	Bursary girls tracking data (see also MTRP Y4 output framework (FINAL) and Y4 APR)
Learning club girls	5,902	Learning clubs registration data (see also MTRP Y4 output framework (FINAL))
SRH club girls	17,725	SRH club registration data (see also Y4 Annual report)
Home Learning kit recipients (distributed to boys and girls)	32,248	Learning kit distribution data (see also Y4 Annual Report)
Menstrual Hygiene Management kits	32,504	MHM kit distribution data (see also Close out presentation, and quarterly workplan trackers)

Table 7.2: Other beneficiaries (Total over lifetime of the project)

Beneficiary type	Total project number (life of project)	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.	69,772	2020-21 School Enrolment: Primary, Secondary, and AEP. Learning clubs, SRH clubs participants and other beneficiaries have not been double-counted.
Primary school boys (target grades only)	39,196	2020-21 School Enrolment: Primary School, G4-6, Boys.
Secondary school boys (target grades only)	27,703	2020-21 School Enrolment: Secondary school, G7-8, Boys
AEP boys	2,873	AEP Enrolment data (see also: Y3-4 beneficiaries table)
Learning club boys	5,510	Learning clubs registration data (see also MTRP Y4 output framework (FINAL))
SRH Club boys	6,757	SRH club registration data (see also Y4 Annual report)
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.	69,553	
Primary school boys (non-target grades)	48,227	School Enrolment, primary school, G1-3, Boys
Secondary school boys (non-target grades)	21,326	School Enrolment, secondary school, G9-10, Boys
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.	64,596	
Primary school girls (non-target grades)	49,871	School Enrolment, primary school, G1-3, Girls
Secondary school girls (non-target grades)	14,725	School Enrolment, secondary school, G9-10, Girls
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	2,804	

Beneficiary type	Total project number (life of project)	Comments
comments box used to describe the type of training provided.		
Teachers - female	423	TPD participation data
Teachers - male	2,381	TPD participation data
Inspectors / coaches	149 (23 women)	TPD participation data
Broader community beneficiaries (adults) – adults who benefit from broader interventions, such as community messaging /dialogues, community advocacy, economic empowerment interventions, etc.	26,790	
Caregivers/Parents	21,555 (11,793 women)	See Y3-Y4 actuals
VSLA members	5,235	VLSA group member registration data

Table 7.3: Target groups - by school

| Provinces | PRIMARY | | | | | | | | SECONDARY | | | | | | Total | | |
| | Grade 4 | | Grade 5 | | Grade 6 | | TOTAL PRIMARY | | Grade 7 | | Grade 8 | | Total SEC'ARY | | | | |
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	All
H-Katanga	1,538	1,695	1,303	1,422	1,007	1,242	**3,848**	**4,359**	1,016	840	462	451	**1,478**	**1,291**	5,326	5,650	10,976
Ituri	2,212	1,958	1,887	1,748	1,674	1,441	**5,773**	**5,147**	1,274	1,266	872	771	**2,146**	**2,037**	7,919	7,184	15,103
K. Oriental	2,978	2,951	2,815	2,778	2,993	2,459	**8,786**	**8,188**	1,513	1,203	902	929	**2,415**	**2,132**	11,201	10,320	21,521
Lomami	754	890	645	719	794	710	**2,193**	**2,319**	428	180	270	240	**698**	**420**	2,891	2,739	5,630
Lualaba	1,542	1,662	10,330	1,496	1,272	2,114	**13,144**	**5,272**	945	751	550	555	**1,495**	**1,306**	14,639	6,578	21,217
Tanganyika	1,700	1,796	1,548	1,642	1,736	1,637	**4,984**	**5,075**	1,963	1,885	1,482	1,676	**3,445**	**3,561**	8,429	8,636	17,065
Total	**10,724**	**10,952**	**18,528**	**9,805**	**9,476**	**9,603**	**38,728**	**30,360**	**7,139**	**6,125**	**4,538**	**4,622**	**11,677**	**10,747**	**50,405**	**41,107**	**91,512**

Table 7.4: Target groups - by subgroup

Subgroups	Definition / Characteristics of the subgroups	No. Beneficiary Girls (may Overlap)
Girls from poor households	Girls enrolled in AEP Centres	**1,575**
	Bursaries for girls in schools	**26,374** (Y4)
	Poor quality roofing baseline proxy IPC Food Crisis Areas	**40,380** (67%) **42,993** (69%)
Girls in conflict affected areas	All schoolgirls enrolled in Ituri and Tanganyika provinces	**21,452** **(36%)**
Girls in remote / rural locations	School girls in nearly all locations (excluding some schools in Mbuji Mayi, Mwene Ditu, Kalemie and Kolwezi towns)	**50,400** (84%)
Girls who suffer from anxiety and depression	Girls who suffer from anxiety and depression; slow learners.	**16,620** (27.7% Baseline)
	Girls in SRH Clubs – these also focus on gender norms, empowerment, and resilience (life skills & confidence) for girls & will include additional psychosocial support sessions/content. Has expanded to include P6 students. The club will also provide as the peer support/network.	**7,977**
	Girls in Learning Clubs (LBCA) which include stories of positive gender norms and opportunities for girls & will have psychosocial support content further integrated. The club will also provide as the peer support/network.	**1,787**
Total		**60,000 (TBC)**

Insufficient information has been furnished to allow the EE to evaluate the accuracy of the numbers above.

Annex 5: External Evaluator's Inception Report

The inception report is annexed to this report separately.

Annex 6: Data collection tools used for Endline

Data collection tools are annexed to this report separately.

Annex 7: Datasets, codebooks and programs, and upload to the UK Data Archive

This is an exclusively qualitative endline evaluation, and all qualitative transcripts will be conveyed to the FM as part of the endline report submission.

Annex 8: External Evaluator declaration

Name of Project: REALISE

Name of External Evaluator: Forcier Consulting

Contact Information for External Evaluator: 301 W Platt Street, Suite 388, Tampa, Florida, 33606, USA; +1 239 297 0771

Names of all members of the evaluation team: Schadi Semnani, Sara Kaserer, Erika Rizzo, Jonathan Forney, and Sam Ha

Schadi Semnani, Sara Kaserer, Erika Rizzo, Jonathan Forney, and Sam Ha 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. (Initials: <u>SS, SK, ER, JF, SH</u>)

- Data quality assurance and verification mechanisms agreed in the terms of reference with the project have been soundly followed (Initials: <u>SS, SK, ER, JF, SH</u>)

- The recipient has not fundamentally altered or misrepresented the nature of the analysis originally provided by Forcier (Initials: <u>SS, SK, ER, JF, SH</u>)

- All child protection protocols and guidance have been followed (initials: <u>SS, SK, ER, JF, SH</u>)

- Data has been anonymised, treated confidentially, and stored safely, in line with the GEC data protection and ethics protocols (Initials: <u>SS, SK, ER, JF, SH</u>)

<u>Schadi Semnani, Sara Kaserer, Erika Rizzo, Jonathan Forney, and Sam Ha</u>

(Names)

<u>Forcier Consulting</u>

(Company)

_____

(Date)

Annex 9: TPD Modules & competencies

Cycle	Thematic	Competencies
Cycle 1 (October - December 2018)	Child Protection (Module 5&6) and supporting the well-being and learning of all children (Gender and Inclusion)	Teacher uses positive strategies to address negative student behaviour / Teacher does not use physical and humiliating punishment to correct students
		The teacher takes steps to prevent any form of abuse, bullying or violence in their classroom
		Teacher takes action to address child protection issues in the classroom and school setting
		The teacher recognizes behaviours that may indicate child protection issues in their classroom
		The teacher listens to the children and encourages them

		The teacher demonstrates knowledge of each child, his/her abilities and learning needs
		The teacher demonstrates gender sensitivity in instruction and/or in various classroom activities.
Cycle 2 (Janvier - Mars 2019)	Literacy L 1-3 (Phonemics, Fluency and Vocabulary)	Teacher identifies key components of reading and writing
		The teacher clearly explains the components of reading to give examples of how students develop these skills.
		The teacher understands the value of writing in their classrooms and developing focused writing for an environment
		Teacher explains the importance of fluency in reading for comprehension and for proficient readers
		Teachers use different strategies in their classrooms and at school to improve reading fluency
		The teacher explains how vocabulary development is important for proficient readers.
		Teachers use different strategies in their classrooms and at school to develop students' reading vocabulary.
Cycle 3 (Avril - June 2019)	Maths: Introduction to Maths	Makes connections between mathematical concepts in the classroom and his/her daily life
		Progresses gradually from the concrete to the abstract
		Uses materials or diagrams effectively to represent concepts
		Represents understanding in different lessons
		Makes assumptions (or estimates), checks the reasonableness of these assumptions, and explains his/her reasoning
		Analyses, compares, or draws conclusions
		Explains the method or approach used and comments on friends' answers
		Suggests more than one lesson or approach to solving a problem
		Establishes and explains relationships between different mathematical concepts
		Uses earned procedures with speed and accuracy
		Uses all the tools in their environment to solve problems or support their learning
Cycle 4 (Sept - Dec 2019)	Use of classroom resources (teaching materials) and conflict sensitive education	The teacher identifies the resources available in the learning environment
		The teacher selects useful resources to support the learning of all children
		The teacher uses and adapts resources appropriately to support children's learning
		The teacher is able to explain how students in his/her community may be affected by the conflict and the impact it has on them
		The teacher is able to recall and apply the three-step model of initial crisis counselling for students who have had a conflict experience.
		The teacher is able to identify and develop conflict-sensitive education knowledge, skills and behaviours and explain their importance in their schools and communities
Cycle 5 (Janvier - Mars 2020)	Reading Assessment and Large Class Size Management	The teacher understands the importance of assessing each student's progress in a variety of ways
		The teacher uses effective strategies to assess all students in the various reading skills
		The teacher plans and implements activities and strategies that encourage participation and learning by all students in large classes

		Teacher tests and assesses learning progress of all students in large classes
Cycle 6 (April - June 2020)	Positive Discipline in a crowded classroom and Math: Problem solving in the form of statements + cross-curricular skills cycle 1.	The teacher uses only French in a teaching-learning situation in class
		The teacher links the lesson activities to the topic and instructional objectives
		Teacher engages all students in class activities
		The teacher gives positive, constructive feedback on the students' responses
		The teacher demonstrates gender sensitivity in teaching learning in classroom activities
		Makes connections between mathematical concepts in the classroom and his/her daily life
		Progresses gradually from the concrete to the abstract
		Uses materials or diagrams effectively to represent concepts
		Explains the method or approach used and comments on the answers
		Uses all the tools in his/her environment to solve problems or support learning
		Understands how their own stresses can affect their own well-being and behaviour and the culture of the classroom
		Uses strategies to manage own stress and well-being
		Implements activities and strategies that promote positive discipline and learning for all children in large classes
Cycle 7 (Sept- Dec 2020)	COVID -19 III (SB2S) + transversal skills	The teacher uses only French in the teaching-learning situation in class
		The teacher links the lesson activities to the topic and instructional objectives
		The teacher involves all students in class activities (listens to the children, encourages them
		The teacher supports the well-being, learning and success of all children (knows each child, his/her abilities and learning needs)
		The teacher demonstrates gender sensitivity in teaching learning in classroom activities
		The teacher shares personal thoughts and feelings about returning to school safely and uses strategies to help students feel safe and secure
		The teacher identifies gaps in learning for students returning to school and mitigates them by developing and providing appropriate support for individual children at their own level.
		The teacher understands the importance of safe return to school and uses strategies to support the well-being of all students during the transition, and follow up on a case-by-case (individual) basis on students' return to school and retention
Cycle 8 (Jan- Mar 2021)	Refresh Literacy Module Literacy 1-3 (Digital) et L 5-6 -Compréhension & Ecriture en Lecture	The teacher uses only French in a teaching-learning situation in class
		The teacher links the lesson activities to the topic and instructional objectives
		The teacher involves all students in class activities (listens to the children, encourages them
		The teacher supports the well-being, learning and success of all children (knows each child, his/her abilities and learning needs)
		The teacher demonstrates gender sensitivity in teaching learning in classroom activities
		The teacher shares personal thoughts and feelings about returning to school safely and uses strategies to help students feel safe and secure

		The teacher identifies gaps in learning for students returning to school and mitigates them by developing and providing appropriate support for individual children at their own level.
		The teacher understands the importance of safe return to school and uses strategies to support the well-being of all students during the transition, and follow up on a case-by-case (individual) basis on students' return to school and retention
		The teacher understands the importance of reading comprehension and how it contributes to producing competent readers
		The teacher uses a variety of strategies in the classroom to ensure that all students develop their reading comprehension skills
		The teacher articulates the key components of quality writing and uses various strategies to develop them in students.
Cycle 9 (Avril - June 2020)	Differentiated learning in reading and math	The teacher uses only French in a teaching-learning situation in class
		The teacher links the lesson activities to the topic and instructional objectives
		The teacher involves all students in class activities (listens to the children, encourages them
		The teacher supports the well-being, learning and success of all children (knows each child, his/her abilities and learning needs)
		The teacher demonstrates gender sensitivity in teaching learning in classroom activities
		The teacher can explain the advantage of having groups of learners at different levels in the classroom to help each learner progress in reading
		The teacher regularly and effectively implements learning sessions with learners organized according to their reading skill levels in order to support their progress toward the correct level.
		The teacher provides both individual and small group support to learners in Differentiated Instruction sessions, taking into account their reading level, individual strengths, gaps, and differences in learning styles.

Annex 10: Barriers for girls to access education

Poverty and cultural beliefs

All respondent types across the regions agreed that poverty is a main obstacle hindering girl's access to education. Most families do not have sufficient income to send all of their children to school, as school fees and required school materials can be prohibitively costly for many families. With the *Gratuité* policy, the struggle to pay school fees has decreased, as primary education became fee-free. However, MOE representatives, head teachers and girls reported it remains a barrier for girls to enter secondary school or non-formal education pathways, as these paths still require payment. Hence, older girls still face challenges to access education and to be reintegrated in the formal system. Older girls who are attempting to re-join school after some time of being out of school face a shame-barrier around the teasing that they may receive or personal shame they may feel for being much older than the rest of the girls at their grade-level.

Additionally, food insecurity due to poverty affects girls' chore burden at the household including income-generating activities, household upkeep and childcare which in turn affects girls' attendance. Prior to the start of the REALISE project, it was common for families to

demand girls to join in income-generating activities, e.g., helping the family with fishing or farming. A DIVAS official explained that "*sometimes during the harvest period in April, the parents would only take their daughters to accompany them to the field to harvest, and this created difficulties to finish the school program.*"[190] Other examples included girls selling products on the streets, but also needing to sweep the house, wash the clothes and doing the dishes which obstructs their ability to attend school. This was confirmed by parents, teachers, and head teachers.

As a result of poverty, parents often have to choose which children will be sent to school. Due to gender-biased attitudes that have been passed from generation to generation, some parents favour boys' education over girls' education, as boys are seen as being more likely to grow up to be household providers. Girls' education was often sacrificed, as their families did not see how they would benefit directly from their girls being educated. Where these types of attitudes are held, young girls faced (and continue to face) challenges related to early marriage or pregnancy. A traditional, conservative view of the role of girls in the Congolese society says that a girl should grow up to be a mother and a wife, staying home and taking care of the children. Some parents, MOE representatives, teachers, head teachers, boys and girls confirmed that these cultural beliefs were a barrier keeping girls from accessing education. PROVED officials said that in rural areas those challenges are amplified, as traditional gender roles are reinforced in those locations, resulting in higher occurrence of early marriage and early pregnancy. Girls' dowries are often seen as a form of financial insurance, since families resort to finding their daughters a husband when they need to pay debts or when they require dowry-money in order to enable their sons to marry. Parents, teachers, head teachers, boys and girls also said that girls often get pregnant, wanted or unwanted, due to misinformation about gender roles, sexual activities, and rape.

Conflict

Conflict and political instability in the DRC continue to put strain on and disrupt education. In conflict-affected areas, an already strained education system is directly impacted by fighting. Armed groups target schools, in some cases permanently interrupting access to schooling. In 2016 and 2017, six hundred schools in the Kasai region alone were attacked or destroyed.[191] Gender inequalities have been heightened by the ongoing conflict. Rape and sexual violence are used as weapons of war by both government forces and militia groups – an estimated 57% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence at some point of their lives.[192] In addition, girls who live in conflict areas are at risk of recruitment by armed groups – a 2017 Child Soldiers International report estimated that approximately 40% of child soldiers in the DRC are girls.[193] Rape, forced marriage, and sexual slavery occur in the context of recruitment and use or abduction of children.

During the baseline, a vast majority of qualitative interviewees described the impact of conflict on schooling in terms of economic consequences -- the loss of parents who can raise money for school fees, and the inability of households to earn a viable living. Furthermore, both baseline and ToC suggested that a lack of teachers' ability to make special accommodations for conflict-affected children is a barrier to girls' access to education. During the endline, some teachers reported that students who came from conflict areas do not study well.

School facilities

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[190] DIVAS KII in Haut Katanga, male, 35 years old.
[191] Council on Foreign Relations (2018).
[192] Ministère du Plan et Suivi de la Mise en œuvre de la Révolution de la Modernité (MPSMRM), Ministère de la Santé Publique (MSP) and ICF International (2014).
[193] Child Soldiers International (2017). *Raped then rejected*. Accessed at: https://www.child-soldiers.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=e57e9cb2-cd70-4dc2-8681-e29bc6f3622b

Insufficient infrastructure is another challenge schools face when attempting to provide quality education and safe spaces for children. As stated by MOE representatives, teachers, head teachers and parents alike, school infrastructure was not able to accommodate the massive increase in student (re)enrolment that resulted from *Gratuité* policy. As a result, students could not be adequately accommodated in the classrooms that became overly crowded.[194] For example, according to parents, boys, girls, teachers and head teachers, there are not enough benches and tables to accommodate everyone which leads to children often sitting and writing on the floor.

Furthermore, several government stakeholders and head teachers said that classroom infrastructure is, in some cases, crumbling and this can negatively influence the pupils' learning experience. It was said that in some schools, classrooms are dusty, there are no windows and doors are missing. In addition, there are holes in some classroom roofs, causing leakages when it rains. According to a MOE representative, the construction, rehabilitation, and equipment of classrooms should be a priority to improve the quality of education.

School latrine facilities can be another factor influencing girls' attendance or school dropouts. According to a representative from the MOE, girls do not feel comfortable or secure sharing latrines with boys. This is particularly relevant during their menstruation, when girls often go home to get changed due to the lack of gender-separate facilities at school (and lack of proper materials). A complete lack of school latrine facilities, a need for separating the latrines or a need for reparations were mentioned by many MOE representatives, several parents, a community leader, and a girl, in different locations.

The infrastructure present in the school centres is also not adapted to accommodate children who have movement-related limitations, and this limits the abilities of those students to access school facilities. Several head teachers, teachers and MOE representatives said that the way that the buildings were designed are not inclusive in terms of accessibility, as most schools have stairs or platforms, for example, but do not provide ramps or alternative means of entry for children with mobility-related impairments. In addition, most classroom infrastructure is not adaptable for children with disabilities.

Another important barrier to girls' access to education concerns a lack of school supplies and materials. As stated by many MOE representatives, teachers, head teachers, parents, boys, and girls alike, the influx of students in primary schools increased the need for more school materials, which were already lacking. The materials mentioned were books and manuals on different subjects and in different languages.

According to almost all MOE representatives involved in AEP centres, the infrastructure issues and lack of sufficient school supplies concern the AEP centres as well. Most centres are in bad conditions, which can lead to risky situations, especially in rainy season. Furthermore, it was reported there is also a lack of school supplies and materials in these centres, making it hard for the teachers to teach.

Teacher quality

Low levels of teacher experience and teacher training are among the main challenges for quality education. At the baseline, fundamental learning skill gaps existed in literacy at the level of letter-sound identification and in numeracy at the level of subtraction. According to parents, boys, girls, teachers and head teachers, many boys and girls had trouble reading, writing, and calculating. The MINAS and DIVAS representatives confirmed that this is similar at the AEP centres.

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[194] *Gratuité*'s impact on learning and enrolment outcomes will be further explored in an upcoming section.

At the baseline, both parents and teachers indicated seeing the value of teacher training, however, only a third of the teachers had received any training in the year prior to the start of REALISE. The lowest teaching competencies concerned the mastery of didactic actions that facilitate learning in the classroom, student-centred teaching approaches, and teaching children with special needs and language barriers. Corporal punishment was mentioned as another barrier undermining student trust and participation in class.

Furthermore, rapidly growing class-sizes followed by the *Gratuité* policy also affected teachers' capacities to maintain orderly classrooms and to teach effectively. Although many parents, boys and girls said they are happy with the opportunities that *Gratuité* policy offer them, many spoke of uncontrolled classes, children talking through class, children sitting on the floor, children quarrelling and fighting, and a lack of personal attention of the teacher for each child which affects learning. As one parent summed it up: "*previously it was if you finish to write, the teacher controlled the notebooks, grading them to see if they write well or not, nowadays they are not doing so [..] There are now one hundred fifty or two hundred [pupils] per class, so it's difficult for the teacher to control everyone, to know if everyone is studying well or not. He is teaching just like that.*"[195]

Classroom learning can be challenging to blind, deaf or mute children as the school curriculum (and the classroom environment) is not adapted to them. As a result, such students need large amounts of extra attention that teachers in crowded classrooms are unlikely to be able to provide. Many teachers said they usually place children with disabilities in the front seats of the classroom, so they can pay close attention to them and promptly respond to their needs. However, given the circumstances, it was clear that the success of the education of these children is highly dependent on the level of effort teachers choose to dedicate to it.

At the baseline, teacher absenteeism was also identified as a barrier to access to education. Parents and head teachers mentioned lack of or delayed salaries, especially as a result of the *Gratuité* policy which cause teachers to be demotivated or search for income-generating activities next to teaching, which makes teachers more absent. As one head teacher described, "*children study for free but a big issue is that we have unpaid teachers. So these teachers are forced to absorb the dust of the chalk and sometimes they fall ill but they are not able to take care of themselves because they receive absolutely nothing because they are not paid by the state. Here at school, they have no support, nobody takes care of their survival. It's really a danger for the school because sometimes they are absent because they don't have enough to eat, they leave the pupils to go and get food.*"[196]

Most representatives of DIVAS and MINAS mentioned that this is similar for the AEP centres: as many children studying at AEP centres are not able to pay the fees, the teachers are often unpaid and therefore unmotivated. Additionally, one MOE representative said that due to *Gratuité*, many girls and boys have switched from the AEP centres to the formal primary schools.

Sexual health issues

Period poverty (meaning a lack of necessary resources and accurate information around menstruation) is a common problem that negatively affects girls' attendance in school.[197] The school days missed as a result of this can lead girls to fall behind in school, become demotivated to continue attending classes, and even to drop out. According to several project staff, girls usually miss class when they are menstruating because they do not have accurate information on how to care for themselves during that period, and they often do not have

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[195] Parent FGD in Kasai Oriental.
[196] Head teacher KII in Lomami, female, 31 years old.
[197] Rossouw, L. & Ross, H. (2021). *Understanding Period Poverty: Socio-Economic Inequalities in Menstrual Hygiene Management in Eight Low- and Middle-Income Countries.* Accessed at:
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33806590/

adequate supplies to manage the bleeding. Because the subject is still considered taboo in the Congolese society, some parents do not educate their daughters on the subject of menstruation, and (because of historic lack of such education from one generation to the next) some parents simply do not have the requisite knowledge to educate their girls. Many girls and parents confirmed that they had a lack of knowledge. Across head teachers, teachers, parents, and girls in the different locations, including several religious leaders, it is agreed that this lack of knowledge created a lot of misinformation about menstruation, body hygiene and sex which in turn caused unwanted pregnancies and health issues.

Safety

Gender based violence (GBV) in the school environment is another threat that discourages girls from attending classes. There are many varieties of GBV that girls are subject to, including more subtle forms such as teasing and bullying as well as sexual harassment and rape. According to several representatives from the MOE and project staff, some teachers and classmates can openly ridicule girls who are older, married or have children, and public humiliation can lead girls to drop out. One MOE representative explained: "*When a girl is late for the class, untrained teachers can says 'you are already a big mother, what are you doing here? This is not your place.'*"[198] Teachers and head teachers also mentioned that older girls in class often feel ashamed for being in the same grade as (much) younger girls.

More severe forms of GBV, including sexual harassment or rape perpetrated by teachers or boys at school, is also a problem that makes girls feel unsafe at school and that can also lead to underaged pregnancy through sexual assault. Furthermore, girls surveyed at mid-point were more likely to say they were unsafe at school than they were in the baseline.[199] Several reports of teachers harassing or raping students were made by head teachers and representatives of MOE at the end-line. An interviewee from the MOE said that most teachers lack training and awareness about violence prevention (with violence meaning sexual, physical, and verbal forms of abuse), and that teachers must be sensitized and become familiar with the code of conduct to protect the students and prevent abuses in the school environment. However, it was said that even when cases of abuse were reported, the system failed to punish the perpetrators.

Almost all girls interviewed at the baseline mentioned that they do not feel safe travelling to/from school, which was again reiterated at mid-point. Moreover, the REALISE Wellbeing study found that "*many girls think during school closures there have been increases in the incidence of various damaging practices that form barriers to girls' education and return to school.*"[200] The majority of girls in the different age groups interviewed across the regions at the end-line mentioned having witnessed violence against girls on the way to and from school, and in general in the community. Some parents, teachers, head teachers and religious leaders confirmed this, which means that girls' safety at school, to/from school and in the communities were (and continue to be) a barrier for girls' access to education.

COVID-19

School closures due to COVID-19 created additional barriers to girls' access to education, most notably regarding learning retention, return and dropout, classroom management and materials, chore burden and mental health.[201] Furthermore, the lockdown and school closures due to COVID-19 is likely to have exacerbated educational inequalities, notably for girls.[202]

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[198] National MOE KII in Kinshasa, male, 37 years old.

[199] Forcier, REALISE Rapid mid-point assessment, November 2020.

[200] Rapid Assessment on Girls' Wellbeing Synthesis of Findings, December 2020.

[201] Forcier, REALISE Rapid mid-point assessment, November 2020.

[202] IDS and ISP, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Education in South Kivu, DRC*, Oct 2020.

The mid-point assessment showed nearly one third of the girls did not engage in any learning retention activities during school closures and only one third of intervention communities had teaching or tutoring opportunities available to girls during this time. Parents, girls, boys, teachers, and head teachers all mentioned that retention was very low for most students after the school closures. Boys and girls across the regions were saying "*our brains became dormant*"[203] and "*there are some of us maybe who strived to learn but the confinement made it harder and harder, there are others who forgot how to read, there are others who forgot how to write.*"[204]

During the mid-point assessment, a majority of girls and their caretakers had no concerns about girls' abilities to return to and regularly attend school. Many representatives from MOE, teachers and head teachers mentioned during the end-line that the *Gratuité* policy helped students return to school after school closures. However, many MOE representatives, religious leaders, project staff, parents, teachers, and girls also agreed that the school closures caused both boys and girls to drop out of school. Furthermore, many MOE representatives, parents, teachers, and girls said that due to having nothing to do during school closures, many girls became pregnant. Some project staff added that many children were taken to the fields by their parents, and they did not return when schools opened again.

The COVID-19 pandemic required adjustments of classroom management and materials to prepare for a safe return to school for the students as well as for the teachers. Most girls interviewed for the REALISE Rapid Assessment on Girls Wellbeing study of 2020 said they were worried about COVID-19 and even more girls were worried about the risk of infection.[205] Although about half of the teachers interviewed during the mid-point assessment reported feeling *very safe* returning to teach in schools after the school closures (47.7%), about a third of the teachers said to feel *somewhat safe* (32.8%), a seventh *somewhat unsafe* (13.3%) and a minority *very unsafe* to return to school (4.7%). The most commonly cited reasons for feeling unsafe were a lack of social distancing and a lack of masks at school. Almost all teachers who reported feeling unsafe, reported having a fear of getting COVID-19 and two thirds of the teachers cited a lack of handwashing as an issue.[206] Furthermore, amongst the priorities for safe returning to school as identified by head teachers, teachers and parents during the IDS study on COVID-19 Impact on Education, included awareness raising on measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, disinfecting classrooms and providing schools with hand washing stations, face masks and running water.[207]

Although chore burden for girls caused by poverty and cultural beliefs already existed, an increase during school closures exacerbated educational inequalities, especially between girls with families that are supportive of them going to school and girls with unsupportive families, with the latter having significantly higher chore burdens than the former.[208] Reported levels of chore burden during mid-point have increased substantially since the baseline, indicating that this barrier to retention and potentially also to attendance is becoming even more prevalent and severe.

At the baseline, more than a quarter of the girls suffered from anxiety and depression which caused the girls to be slow learners. At mid-point, a significant increase was observed in caretakers reporting that girls have self-care, cognitive, and mental health-related impairments. Primary caregivers said that these girls experienced anxiety or depression daily, weekly, or monthly.[209] The REALISE Rapid Assessment on Girls Wellbeing study of 2020 found that "*a small but significant proportion of girls are experiencing poor mood, lack of calm*

[203] Boys FGD in Tanganyika.
[204] Girls 2 FGD in Haut Katanga, 15 to 17 years old group.
[205] See Rapid Assessment on Girls' Wellbeing Synthesis of Findings, December 2020.
[206] Forcier, REALISE Rapid mid-point assessment, November 2020.
[207] IDS and ISP, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Education in South Kivu, DRC*, Oct 2020.
[208] Forcier, REALISE Rapid mid-point assessment, November 2020.
[209] Forcier, REALISE Baseline evaluation, October 2018.

and or lack of energy more than half of the time."[210] During the endline, both girls and boys mentioned feeling lonely, bored, and uncomfortable during the school closures. This indicates that mental health issues are a significant barrier for girls (and boys), which has been aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Annex 11: Research challenges

- **Fieldwork delays:** there were some minor delays in Lomami due to flight delays; in Tanganyika the team was delayed because the head teacher was not available for several days and the team was not allowed to start their work before having spoken with the head teacher; and in Lualaba because PROVED, DIVAS and the project staff were in a meeting and thus not available on the day when those interviews had been scheduled.

- **Conflict with exams:** TENAFEP (national final exams of primary school) took place the 5th and 6th of August which was right at the start of collection. As a result, many head teachers and teachers, as well as boys and girls were unavailable before and during the exams. Also, the interviews with the respondents in Kinshasa were delayed because of the final exams.

- **Insufficient respondent knowledge/understanding:** A small number of teachers and head teachers were not familiar with the different types of clubs that the tools inquired about. The head teachers and teachers all knew that clubs existed, but some were not clear on how clubs were differentiated and therefore were not able to give fully coherent answers about the different, discrete interventions and their effects.

- **Data processing delays:** There were some minor delays in the transcription and translation process, mostly due to the rapid spread of COVID-19 during that time-period making it difficult for transcribers and translators to work regularly. Many family members of the research teams were affected, which meant that transcribers and translators needed to take time off to tend to sick relatives.

- **Logistical delays:** There was a strike of the airline CAA which caused one researcher to remain stuck in Mbuji-Mayi (Kasai Oriental) for several days instead of being able to return to Kinshasa.

Annex 12: Research limitations

- **Limited measurable impact due to COVID-19:** Independent of the specific research design employed in this study, the primary barrier to assessment of impact in this endline study is the fact that most interventions were substantially modified for a period of approximately one year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is entirely possible that substantial improvements on key outcomes were achieved prior to the start of the pandemic but that much of this progress was lost due to a year of social isolation and limited intervention that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also worth noting that the exclusively qualitative research design employed here does not lend itself to the making of clear inferences about impact. This limitation is noted above and is independent of the fact that we expect impact to have been heavily attenuated (and therefore difficult to detect) as a result of COVID-19.

- **No measurement in comparison sites:** In order to maximize the number of interviews across intervention schools on a smaller budget, this study does not include a sample of comparison sites. In an exclusively qualitative research design, there are fewer advantages to conducting interviews in control or comparison sites, as qualitative interviews produce narrative data that does not lend itself to counterfactual

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[210] Rapid Assessment on Girls' Wellbeing Synthesis of Findings, December 2020.

comparison in the same way that quantitative data does. With that being said, the lack of measurement in comparison schools limits the comparisons that can be made within the data and makes our analysis more reliant on what changes respondents attributed to the project. Put differently our analysis cannot compare stories of change in intervention areas with stories of change in comparison areas, and this axis of comparison would have been particularly advantageous when making inferences about the impact of interventions.

- **Social desirability bias in survey responses:** Several of the outcomes measured in this evaluation are prone to social desirability bias, depending on the precise manner in which they are measured. Attitudinal outcomes, such as community members' support for SRH education, are especially subject to such bias. On one hand, project activities mean that respondents may know that expressing support for this type of education is the socially desirable response, i.e., the response that will not be stigmatized socially. On the other hand, SRH is more controversial than other types of education, and the cultural and religious stigma around these issues may also bias some respondents toward expressing disapproval even when they approve. The first type of social desirability bias is especially common when respondents know that the sponsor of a survey supports one view over another. The countervailing social pressure that might be anti-SRH education is also likely present. These biases point in opposing directions and make it especially difficult to interpret the responses of respondents, such as teachers, who were likely to be influenced by both biases. A number of steps have been taken to mitigate social desirability bias in this baseline evaluation:

  - First, data has been collected from a variety of sources, where possible, to triangulate outcomes between respondents with different incentives to misrepresent their attitudes. For instance, community attitudes will be assessed via responses from community members, responses from female students and responses from both teachers and head teachers, in addition to qualitative data collected from a wide range of audiences. As noted above, community members may have an incentive to misrepresent their views on girls' education or SRH education; however, female students and head teachers do not have obvious incentives to misrepresent community attitudes.

  - Second, in many cases, we have designed questions which allow respondents distance from the answers that they provide. In the household survey, we ask caregivers direct questions that assess their attitudes toward girls' education. We also ask them to assess the extent to which men in their household support girls' education. Because responses to this question may be subject to stigma (i.e., respondents may feel that enumerators or others will judge them or their family members if they respond negatively), we also ask respondents to assess the extent to which men in their community support girls' education. By allowing respondents to report the attitudes of community members writ large, we are more likely to receive truthful answers, as respondents may feel more comfortable reporting that "men in this community do not support girls' education" than that "men in this household do not support girls' education" or "I do not support girls' education."

- **Respondents' understanding of interventions:** A specific instance of this problem was highlighted above in relation to teachers' knowledge of school clubs. However, there may be other instances of this problem where lack of understanding is less obvious, but nonetheless will introduce uncertainty into our findings. While many of the outcomes targeted by REALISE have straightforward definitions that most respondents will understand, some consist of more complex concepts or include multiple facets. This is a particular problem when community members are asked to assess performance on a complex indicator. For instance, one approach to measuring

the quality of teaching is to directly ask community members, via the household survey, about the quality of their child's teacher. Unfortunately, community members may not understand what constitutes high-quality teaching, especially if they do not have a strong educational background themselves. In addition, they may focus their attention on a narrow aspect of teaching with which they are familiar. To mitigate this limitation, the data collection often includes questions designed to assess particular aspects of key outcomes directly, rather than asking respondents their opinions about key outcomes.

Annex 13: Sampling Framework

The qualitative endline sample was constructed using intervention schools that were part of the baseline sample to serve as the sample frame for purposively selecting schools in accordance with their performance at baseline. In order to maximize the diversity of schools included in the sample, two schools were selected from each province, and one school in each province was selected from the highest levels of achievement on baseline literacy and numeracy scores.

It should be noted that, in the case of Tanganyika province, only one school was selected because Kongolo district (in Tanganyika) was removed from the sample due to budget restrictions and this reduction in the representation of Tanganyika schools in the sample frame suggested that reducing Tanganyika's representation in the sample overall might be justified. Ultimately, the budget could only support the inclusion of one school in Tanganyika, and so this decision had a weak methodological justification, but was a necessity given the resources available.

The full, sample frame appears below, with selected schools highlighted in yellow. The table also presents the average literacy and numeracy scores for each school.

province	district	community	school_name	lit_comp	num_comp
Haut Katanga	Kambove	Kansalabwe	2 Lufira	7.904041	37.55659
Haut Katanga	Kambove	Luambo	kaponda	6.054174	42.75727
Haut Katanga	Kambove	Lukoshi	Lukoshi	9.826887	31.5
Haut Katanga	Kambove	Mission Mulungui	Kitabataba	22.23289	55.65399
Haut Katanga	Kambove	Muleji	Dyese	4.526515	41.19542
Haut Katanga	Kasenga	Munene	Munene	2.405303	26.74026
Haut Katanga	Kasenga	Mwalimu	mano	9.24287	40.71552
Haut Katanga	Kasenga	Ngando	Ngando	1.423913	17.95179
Lualaba	Lubudi	Fungurume Cite	MAJENGO	8.632851	40.22331
Lualaba	Lubudi	Fungurume Cite	KAKANDA	13.28566	43.72523
Lualaba	Lubudi	Fungurume Cite	MULUNGA	13.54406	48.18739
Lualaba	Lubudi	Fungurume Cite	LUMIERE DU CHRIS	18.24944	57.52226
Lualaba	Lubudi	Lubudi Cite	SONGE MITUMBA	9.499279	56.05288
Lualaba	Lubudi	Village Kisanfu	MWANGAZA2	17.08514	51.9377
Lualaba	Lubudi	Village Mukabe K	TENKE 2	7.243687	42.07638
Lualaba	Mutshatsha	Village Mupanja	IMANI	10.92439	44.24652
Lomami	Luilu	Muene Ditu	MUSANGILAYI	27.90877	57.67347
Lomami	Luilu	Muene Ditu	BUPOLE	13.63909	62.12214
Lomami	Luilu	Muene Ditu	LUMU LUIMPE	24.99108	65.55066
Lomami	Luilu	Muene Ditu	TUTANTE	33.10315	63.88079
Lomami	Luilu	Tshilomba	KUHUMBU	10.0133	47.28942
Kasai Oriental	Commune De Bipem	Commune De Bipem	DU 14 OCTOBRE	10.97203	58.27489
Kasai Oriental	Commune De Bipem	Commune De Bipem	LONGO	17.52626	57.18151
Kasai Oriental	Mbujimayi 2	Mbujimayi 2	CRS Donbosco	33.73775	69.15257
Kasai Oriental	Mbujimayi, Commu	Mbujimayi, Commu	NYONGOLO	9.704508	54.75188

Kasai Oriental	Mbujimayi, Commu	Mbujimayi, Commu	KALENDA MUDISHI	11.98361	49.63853
Kasai Oriental	Mbujimayi, Commu	Mbujimayi, Commu	KATEKELAYI 1	6.389722	50.34728
Kasai Oriental	Mbujimayi, Commu	Mbujimayi, Commu	BUTUMIKE	6.408519	51.60173
Kasai Oriental	Mbujimayi, Commu	Mbujimayi, Commu	TSHIYA	10.42381	45.94824
Kasai Oriental	Tshilenge	Kapeta	TSHIPUKA	14.77504	51.81416
Tanganyika	Kalemie	Kianza	Mwanana Lusanga	12.25037	51.65399
Tanganyika	Kalemie 1	Kalemie 1	CRS Divas Katamb	4.131141	34.12893
Tanganyika	Kalemie 2	Kalemie 2	CRS Asdipev	20.15888	63.4675
Tanganyika	Kalemie 2	Kituku	Mujinga	6.772612	41.59219
Tanganyika	Kalemie 2	Kituku	Katanga	15.2083	53.45514
Tanganyika	Kalemie 2	Sinfo	2 Kibwe	14.89538	51.94438

REALISE Endline Evaluation:

Save the Children Management Responses

Activity	Recommendation	Key finding	Save the Children Management Responses
TPD	Consider introducing a TPD module about approaches for adapting teaching strategies to better accommodate children living with disabilities.	The data suggested that most teachers do not have experience teaching children living with disabilities. As it is now, the level of education of children with disabilities learning is dependent on the extra effort that their teacher chooses to dedicate to their specialized needs.	**Partially Accept** The baseline found that '*Based on this sampling, the project did not consider disability as a significant criterion of marginalisation given the low percentage of disability identified*'. The Baseline indicated that there was less than 3% with a hearing impairment and less than 2% for others, with the exception of 'difficulty with remembering or concentrating' (5%). Thus, the focus of the project was on the last of these as it would not have been possible to specifically target all of these sub-groups with such a small sample in such a large project. Instead, action was taken to improve the abilities of teachers, facilitators, parents/caregivers and community member to support girls' mental health. While specific support across all other areas of disability was not a possibility for the project given limited time and budget, and the adaptations needed for COVID-19, this would benefit all teachers if taken forward by other providers. Save the Children has the 'SNAP' Toolkit, specifically for literacy and supporting children with disabilities, which could be used once teachers have mastered the foundational practices in literacy and numeracy (the aim of this project). However, it is worth noting that in DRC there are specific schools for children with hearing or sight impairments and these should ideally be specifically included in any future programming. These schools were not included in the REALISE cohort of schools.

Activity	Recommendation	Key finding	Save the Children Management Responses
TPD	The module on Positive Discipline under TPD should be revisited and reinforced to include demeaning tasks such as kneeling in class as corporal punishment and to provide appropriate alternatives to teachers to having students clean the classroom and school as punishment.	Although children did not classify these as corporal punishment, there were several reports of children saying teachers were making them kneel or forcing students to sweep the classroom, pick up trash, sweep outside the classroom, and bringing chalk to school.	**Partially Accept** The content of the TPD modules covered does provide opportunity for teachers to reflect on practices wider than corporal punishment and different forms of humiliating punishment. However, teacher practice takes time to change entirely and will vary among teachers in terms of speed and extent of adoption. Behaviour change and depth of understanding takes time and ongoing support. There are arguments and reasons for why helping clean or look after the school might be a suitable discipline for unacceptable or inappropriate behaviour. It is difficult without knowing more about the teachers and these instances how 'school cleaning' (a general school activity not child labour) was used and whether it is really deemed inappropriate. It is important that 'appropriate consequences' are in place for negative behaviour. Expanding CP and Safeguarding and TPD/ Positive Discipline Training to all teachers in the schools, not just TPD teachers, could be an effective way to ensure that all teachers and school management (including those head teachers and prefects responsible for discipline) are onboard. However, this would of course mean increasing the project budget and/or a reduction in the number of project schools. Looking forward the project and SC will continue to advocate—including during the project closure ceremonies—for the MOE to take meaningful action to require all teachers in all schools to sign the Code of Conduct annually.
VSLA	Strengthen and develop more income-generating trainings to support VSLAs and develop skills	Several community members requested for more capacity building on this topic, including	**Partially Accept** Agree, with more time and without COVID-19 restrictions, more support could have been provided. VSLAs develop and mature at different rates. There are some VSLAs that thrived and

Activity	Recommendation	Key finding	Save the Children Management Responses
	in farming, raising livestock.	specific skills development (such as farming, livestock keeping) that would support them to set up such businesses.	seem to more quickly master IGA concepts. REALISE has documented some case studies of successful groups including one that had a successful cattle-rearing project. A Learning Brief has been developed on VSLA more widely and specifically these findings which will be posted on the GEC website and available to REALISE partners as well as other practitioners/stakeholders. Ideally, with more time and without restrictions, it would have been possible to do more training everywhere and to allow different groups to travel and visit successful IGAs. However, COVID-19 impacted the ability for the project VSLA specialist to travel widely to other provinces, and to train many groups together.
VSLA	Expand outreach of VSLAs to the most vulnerable families and consider providing income-generating activities starting kits to them.	VSLA leaders noted that the most vulnerable families do not have access to credits nor the independent means to set up IGAs.	**Partially Accept** Establishing VSLA groups is a well-developed process that is expandable, in areas free of conflict. However, it requires that members contribute to the group and collectively save and then agree to lend credit to each other. IGA training then follows for mature groups. Providing other support to vulnerable families, such as cash transfers, nutrition support, food security, and seeds and tools are not in the realm of the majority education projects. Given the impact of COVID-19 on the economy, combined with conflict, floods, drought and crop failures, it would be useful to look at ways other projects can work together in a community to provide holistic support to vulnerable families and communities, which would reinforce all activities and benefit children's health, well-being, enrolment and learning. For example, as part of our SB2S response we have developed 'Catch Up Clubs' for the

Activity	Recommendation	Key finding	Save the Children Management Responses
			furthest behind in literacy and numeracy which have a 'CVA/cash' component for facilitators and families'.
SRH and Learning Clubs	Consider sustainability strategies for the clubs to continue and include more children, especially to catch up on learning deficits incurred by COVID-19 (for Learning Clubs) and to reinforce the impact made with community-level perceptions change on the value of girls (girls, boys, and parents' sessions with SRH Clubs).	Many teachers noted that the learning clubs could have included more children for greater results.	**Partially Accept**

The project expanded community Learning Clubs (LCs) to all primary schools in its MTR plan. The number of children in a club was fixed at 30 to ensure maximum benefits for every child in the club. Clubs were impacted by many constraints. Learning gains drop when the ratio per child increases and 30 is already the maximum we would advise, generally we have 20-25 children per group. There are also only so many cycles that can be run due to time and commitments of facilitators and complications during school holidays with facilitators and children's time. This would also involve an additional cost for the project.

Also, it was not possible to find community volunteers with appropriate skills and so most LC facilitators were teachers and most LCs were implemented in the school compounds due to lack of appropriate and secure community facilities. The LCs were then impacted by school closures and COVID restrictions. When schools reopened, clubs had to meet in smaller numbers, reducing the number of sessions that each facilitator could manage per week.

The concept of 'volunteer' self-sustaining clubs in DRC is a challenging one. This is not something that communities are likely to be able to support and fund with their own resources and time due to the economic marginalisation for the majority of these families. The fact that schools struggle to provide basic chalk for classrooms & pay teachers reflects the limited resources within the education system itself. Where RECOPEs and local community groups could collaborate to extend/expand |

Activity	Recommendation	Key finding	Save the Children Management Responses
			these LCs this was done. With more time some case studies and sharing of practice from these schools could have been done but this was not possible due to the end date of the project. Perhaps with a lot more time and resource a link with LC/SRH C and successful VSLA groups could be made but this would be an intervention in and of itself to be successful and require significant time and input
Child Protection and Safeguarding	Spread awareness of the hotlines with children and parents through caregiver session. Consider including a module on child protection for teachers to present at the beginning of the year and hanging posters about it in the schools.	Many girls reported not being aware of the toll-free number.	**Partially Accept** Agree that Hotline promotion and awareness are critical at all levels and must be maintained. Promotion and awareness were made with children and parents at all levels during the project, including through caregiver sessions, all stakeholder trainings, community radio spots, FGDs with children and through printing of posters. Hotline reports show that the number of calls, especially from children, grew every quarter. Hotline days and FGDs with children were delayed and impacted by the outbreak of the COVID-pandemic but reports show that once schools reopened and hotline days were held, the number of calls to the SRH hotline increased greatly. Expanding CP and Safeguarding Training to all teachers in the schools, not just TPD teachers, would also increase awareness, but this would entail increased budget – or a reduction in the number of project schools.
SRH Hotline	SC should conduct an assessment to understand why in Ituri and Tanganyika the number of calls to the hotlines remained so low when compared to the	Ituri and Tanganyika registered extremely low numbers of hotline calls when compared to the other counties that demonstrated a clear	**Partially Accept** Agree that it is important to understand context especially in conflict-affected provinces, and that care should be made in selection of schools and communities to ensure a conflict sensitive and inclusive approach, as IDS research highlighted. Ituri and Tanganyika were two conflict affected provinces where access was extremely limited and implementation was carried

Activity	Recommendation	Key finding	Save the Children Management Responses
	other provinces. This could indicate problems with the effectiveness of the activity in the locations.	increase in the number of calls over the quarters.	out by implementing partners. It is also worth emphasizing that access to phones, network coverage and airtime becomes even more challenging in conflict contexts/areas – especially in a country like DRC where access is already very low. The selection of schools was made under GEC 1—Vas Y-Filles. Unfortunately, conflict and displacement led to increased violence and mistrust. Save DRC has nationalized the CSG hotline and is looking at ways to increase hotline promotion in Ituri where it is implementing humanitarian programming,
Bursaries	Consider fully or partially covering extra school costs, such as school supplies or uniforms, for the most vulnerable children targeted by the scholarships.	Teachers reported that because some girls could not afford other school-related expenses such as uniforms, some girls were expelled.	**Partially Accept** Budget constraints and DNH Lessons shaped project interventions. Bursaries were limited to G6-G8 girls. The project provided school kits and textbooks to schools within the limits of its budget. It was not feasible to provide funding for all student uniforms and kits for all students in more than 400 schools, and therefore to reduce risks of jealousy, kits were provided directly to schools. The project did provide funding for kits and uniforms for a much smaller number of vulnerable children in 16 AEP Centres.
Bursaries	Consider increasing the number of bursaries for girls from the most vulnerable families to be able to attend secondary school.	Teachers suggested the number of bursaries should be increased to target more vulnerable families not covered by *Gratuité*.	**Reject** Budget constraints and DNH Lessons shaped project interventions. Bursaries were limited to G6-G8 girls, so that all girls in the G6-G8 class were originally covered in all project schools. Fee-free education was instituted in primary schools in 2019, and so the project paid bursaries on behalf of all secondary G7-G8 girls until project end.
Beyond the	Coordinate or partner with food aid NGOs to provide school meals for	Some teachers said that there are many children who are food insecure	**Partially Accept** SC agrees that a coordinated, holistic approach by donors and organizations to support vulnerable children in the most food

Activity	Recommendation	Key finding	Save the Children Management Responses
Interventions	children enrolled in the targeted schools.	and miss class as their household adapts.	insecure communities everywhere would benefit children's attendance and learning in schools. Education, nutrition, health and CP are key SC priorities. Unfortunately, food security and nutrition funding is extremely limited in DRC. It is also important to note that the schools selected for REALISE were part of an experimental research design and that even where possible nutrition or health provision was available this was never going to align with all the schools and could have created other challenges (especially when school leaders met together).
Beyond the Interventions	The project and the donor might consider increasing funding for the provision of classroom kits.	Teachers and parents noted that classroom kits were well utilized by children who received them, but teachers also suggested that the supply of such classroom kits was inadequate to meet demand.	**Accept** Agree. The project proposed to increase funding for classroom kits, textbooks and supplies, including school benches and blackboards as the implementation of fee-free education led to overcrowded classrooms and shortages of textbooks, benches and resources. Project budget cuts and constraints were an impediment, and the project was further impacted by COVID-19 pandemic. SC would recommend that the FM and DPs emphasise these basic needs in the ToRs/business cases of future programs.
Beyond the Interventions	In the future, it may be beneficial to plan and budget for larger numbers of field staff, or to budget for more/better transportation for staff traveling to and from the field.	The long distances and poor conditions of the roads posed logistical challenges for the staff who had to commute often to different and distant locations. Staff noted that the resources available (cars, staff and time) sometimes were	**Partially Accept** Agree, a larger budget would have been beneficial. All organizations and projects prioritize safety and security of field staff, and work within the constraint of budget to ensure the best mix of staffing, transport and support costs. In a country the vast size of DRC with such poor infrastructure, travel was a real constraint. The project used a mix of motorcycles and vehicles and spent large sums on vehicle maintenance, fuel and per diems. Ideally projects should work with government

Activity	Recommendation	Key finding	Save the Children Management Responses
		not sufficient to cover the visiting schedules.	staff to reach the schools regularly but in DRC government staff faced challenges in respect to vehicles and fuel.
Beyond the Interventions	The project and donor might consider funding and/or partnering with government and other organizations to repair or build separate school latrine facilities.	Girls said that they do not feel comfortable or secure sharing latrines with boys, in particular, during menstruation. In addition, the evaluation found that many schools lack latrines, which prevent girls from utilizing their menstruation kits at school.	**Partially Accept** Agree. The lack of functional latrines in the project schools was a known constraint since GEC 1 which negatively impacted girls' attendance. Funding for school latrines, hygiene and sanitation and repair of basic school infrastructure should be provided in future education projects. The project would recommend that FM and DPs consider these needs in the ToRs/business cases of future programs.
Beyond the Interventions	Coordinate with government and private organizations to construct, rehabilitate, and equip classrooms to accommodate the large influx of children as a result of *Gratuité*.	Teachers and head teachers reported that classroom infrastructure was crumbling, and after *Gratuité*, the attendance of many more students meant that the school's resources were not sufficient to meet demand. There were several reports of children having to sit on the floor.	**Partially Accept** SC agrees the lack of budget to address shortages of materials, textbooks and equipment such as benches hampered the well-being and learning of children, especially with the onset of COVID pandemic. Funding for school latrines, hygiene and sanitation and repair of basic school infrastructure should ideally be provided in future education projects. The project would recommend that FM and DPs consider these basic needs in the ToRs/business cases of future programs. SC's Safe Schools approach includes guidance and tools for improvement of school infrastructure.