

# SHARING LESSONS

## from the field

Girls'  
Education  
Challenge



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## Sustainability and the Girls' Education Challenge

For the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC), sustainability means going beyond ensuring that girls enjoy the benefits of being able to complete a full cycle of education and are equipped for further education and employment. It also means that the programme achieves lasting change, leaving a legacy of better opportunities for future girls and boys. It means that families, communities, and schools are able to continue providing support to new generations of girls and boys – helping them to enter and progress through school, and gain a good quality education in a safe and stimulating environment.

Beyond the immediate context in which girls live, sustainability implies change at a broader system level, by demonstrating how interventions that improve teaching and learning and the school environment can be better supported by policies and institutions.

In the first phase of the GEC, projects were given a target sustainability outcome of ensuring mechanisms were in place for girls to achieve a full cycle of education. Projects interpreted the outcome according to their particular context, but in all cases projects had to firstly understand the education and social systems involved,

and what the entry points were for influence. Sustainability is not simply the continuation of activities, it can mean change at many different levels – from the empowerment of girls and the attitudes of the communities in which they live, to the replication of successful work by other NGOs and the adjustment of government policies and budgets. Indeed, “replicability” can be built into project design, so that from the outset the project is delivering and demonstrating approaches that can be adopted and adapted by government systems, structures and people within a feasible government budget.

Over the course of the first phase of the GEC, a number of lessons have emerged about what sustainability looks like in practice. Two overriding lessons are that:

- **Sustainability needs to be planned for from the start.** From the outset, GEC projects were expected to identify the mechanisms they would put in place to sustain their impact at the end of the GEC. However, there was early recognition (including in the business case) that there may be a trade-off between sustainability and achieving short term results. In practice, the urgency and pressures of delivering outcomes meant that sustainability was not always given emphasis until closer to the completion of the project.
- **It's important to articulate and define sustainability in the context of each project.** Unlike other GEC outcomes, it is not practical to have a standard measure for sustainability across all projects. It is better that each project sets out its unique sustainability strategy, integrated into its overall theory of change, which also shows how sustainability will be built, from the outset, into the work on the ground and how it will be measured.



Strategies for sustainability are varied and might include a combination of the following:

- Securing government and others' financial commitments to scale up or sustain project outputs
- Mainstreaming project interventions into national and local education systems and plans
- Purposefully generating and using evidence and data about 'what works' to influence government plans and budgets
- Demonstrating cost effectiveness
- Accessing or catalysing private funding for girls' education
- Testing self-financing approaches in schools / communities
- Building institutional capacity and processes to address girls' needs, working with key individuals who can have influence
- Securing commitments from girls' families and communities, including for example identifying individuals who can be 'champions for change'
- Using media and coalitions to create groundswell and thereby change attitudes towards girls' education

Successful sustainability usually 'works with the grain', that is it picks up on and adds weight to influences that are already at work, sometimes under the surface.

This paper highlights a number of examples of the successes and challenges projects have experienced in executing these strategies. It looks at the changes they have made to their approaches, the progress that has been made and the lessons learned.

## What has sustainability looked like so far?

The GEC Evaluation Manager found that in phase one all projects had engaged with governments to some degree and there were some positive examples of effective advocacy and the integration of GEC materials into national training and curricula. The second phase of GEC is in itself providing a form of sustainability, through the GEC Transition Window (GECT), which is funding the majority of GEC projects to continue supporting the education of the same girls, building on the successes of phase one, and with a stronger emphasis on creating lasting change. This should result in strong partnerships and cooperation between communities, schools and education authorities which will ensure a better educational future for the children and young people in their communities.

## Learning from success

### Leonard Cheshire Disability, Kenya



In Kenya, Leonard Cheshire Disability (LCD) is working to promote systemic changes in education. They are working with several stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, County Education Offices, NGOs, community-based organisations and communities themselves in order to promote and facilitate disability inclusive education. They have collaborated closely with seven civil society organisations to mainstream disability issues within their work. These groups are engaging local government and advocating for disability-friendly policies.

Though these working groups, LCD is leading on promoting inclusive education and has been instrumental in influencing some county governments to introduce three county bills critical to inclusive education (Bursary Bill, Disability Act and Early Childhood Education Bill). They have directly contributed to the integration of disability indicators into the government's education monitoring system for decision making and resource allocation. Through memoranda to relevant government units, they have contributed to the content and the orientation of training for new teachers, ensuring that an inclusive education component is included. Through advocacy with other like-minded stakeholders, they have also contributed to the creation of a Special Needs Education Directorate within the Ministry of Education.

**LCD attributes the success of their advocacy and sustainability approach to genuine and intentional engagement right from the start of the project, and to the clear aims it set out to achieve. The organisation describes 'pushing on a half-open door' and acknowledges that its voice is one among several calling for change in this area, so seeks collaboration for maximum effectiveness.**

## Education Development Trust, Kenya



The Education Development Trust (EDT) project in Kenya has also aligned its activities with the Ministry of Education's (MoE) policies, structures and systems at central and local government levels. The project works with MoE to improve skills and knowledge of teaching and supervisory staff to deliver quality education. EDT also engaged with other school and community stakeholders, enabling their active participation in improving girls' education through better understanding of the barriers girls were facing and strategies which could help overcome them. As a result, the Kenyan government is considering EDT's mentoring and teacher coaching approaches (which have been shown to result in improved teacher-learner interaction and peer mentorship) as part of its approach to supporting teachers and improving school leadership.

**Crucial to these achievements have been an open dialogue with the MoE about the challenges and barriers girls face getting to school as well as inside the classroom. This dialogue is built on a level of trust and an acknowledgement that all parties are working towards the same aims.**

## Link Community Development, Ethiopia



As part of its sustainability strategy, Link Community Development has worked very closely, from the outset, with the Ethiopian government, aligning its activities with government plans and priorities. The MoE Gender Directorate's revised gender education strategy has identified the project's Mothers' Groups intervention as best practice and commends the approach as a way of engaging and involving parents in their daughters' education. In addition to policy alignment, Link supports existing structures and builds the capacity of government education personnel at all levels from community workers, classroom teachers, deputy and head teachers to government education managers such as district experts and cluster supervisors, enabling these personnel to better execute their work.

**Link Community Development emphasise that their approach is low cost and low tech, which makes it easier for the local government to adopt.**

## Health Poverty Action, Rwanda



In Rwanda, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has decided to integrate Health Poverty Action's (HPA) 'changing room' model for girls to use for sports lessons and during menstruation advocated in their GEC 'REAP' project into national policy. This model ensures that schools have separate and adequate changing rooms for girls. All new school buildings and all school refurbishments will now adhere to a new national norm for school/toilet construction. Since 2016, the MoE has also made available a budget to cover supplies for girls' changing rooms (sanitary pads, soap, etc.) in the grants they provide to schools.

**HPA's focus on health and sanitation enabled them to approach this issue from a cross-sectoral perspective and highlight to the government a key barrier to girls' full participation at school which is relatively straightforward to address.**

## Camfed International, Tanzania and Zimbabwe



In Camfed's GEC project, the introduction of a 'Step Up' fund has been an important mechanism for exploring, with communities, the level of support needed for girls to retain their hold on education, and the forms of reciprocal support that can be contributed by girls' communities. The National Advisory Committees, mechanisms that have been set in place at the national level to bring together key Ministry stakeholders, are providing a valuable forum for raising these issues and injecting them into the national dialogue on education.

A micro-loan scheme, introduced with Camfed's partner, Kiva, has enabled the project to offer interest-free loans to CAMA members (a network of women who were supported through school by Camfed) to incentivise their engagement in the Learner Guide programme by repaying 'social interest' in helping marginalised children in their communities. There is potential for a major scale-up of this model, which is highly sustainable, and Camfed is taking forward discussions with Kiva and with CAMA leaders.

**Sustainability and leverage are core to Camfed's model, in terms of reinforcing the local community infrastructure and government partnerships to sustain action for the long term. As such, Camfed plans for sustainability routinely, and facilitates continued participation and involvement of the girls it supports.**

## Cheshire Services Uganda, Uganda



Cheshire Services Uganda (CSU), a project focussed on improving educational opportunities for girls with disabilities, has joined forces with two key national consortia on gender and child rights (FENU and UCRNN respectively) to push for tangible and lasting changes that will improve disability inclusion and reduce the educational marginalisation disabled girls and boys experience. Working together with others intensified the impact they could have and served as a platform for advocacy on disability rights and inclusive education. It has also fostered sharing of good practices, resource mobilisation and joint strategies. In the UCRNN network, CSU successfully put forward the Inclusive Education agenda in the SDG discussion on children and this has now been included in the national resolution. There is already a good working relationship between the project, the Ministry of Gender and Social Development and the Ministry of Education and Sports.

At community level, the project has invited and organised parents of disabled girls to be part of local groups where they can build their own capacity and understanding about the possibilities of inclusive education and also to stimulate income generating activity. So far, 44 different parent support groups have been formed and parents are actively engaged in raising their own and others' awareness about the educational needs and rights of their daughters and other children with disabilities.

**This twin approach (networking with others and boosting community engagement) is proving to be effective in building a groundswell of expectation and attention to the issue of equity in terms of educational opportunities for all children.**

## Learning from challenges

Sustainability planning is difficult by its very nature, as projects cannot predict how the context in which they are operating will change during the course of the project, and beyond it. Political and economic shifts can interrupt and distort the setting, sometimes making intended influence and change redundant or impossible.

Sustainability is also difficult to measure, for two reasons. Firstly, in order to know for sure that change is lasting rather than limited to the project span, measurement and evaluation would need to continue for a substantial time period after the project ends, which is rarely possible. Secondly, indicators for sustainability are likely to be incremental steps towards a desired change in the policy or practice of other stakeholders and actors, outside the project's direct control. Indicators may need to be changed if progress is not being made as planned and the project decides to try a different approach.

Further, some projects have found additional challenges specific to their context. Below are two examples of where such challenges have arisen, how they have impacted on the projects' approach to sustainability and the actions that have been taken as a result.

### Sustaining community-based education – BRAC, Afghanistan



BRAC Afghanistan's sustainability plan for its community-based education project targets the education system at every level – community, school and national government.

- At the school level, BRAC aims to increase teachers' capacities at government schools, make lasting improvements to school buildings, including the installation of sanitary latrines and safe drinking water points, and promote and facilitate community-level ownership of the community-based girls' schools (CBGS).
- At the school level, BRAC aims to increase teachers' capacities at government schools and promote and facilitate community-level ownership of the CBGS.

- At the national level, BRAC aims to work in partnership with government to respond to the need and demand for girls' education. It also works to enhance the capacities of School Management Shuras (community-based school councils) to be able to manage the school beyond project duration.
- BRAC also aims to support the absorption of CBGS girls and teachers into government schools.

This comprehensive set of strategies is well thought out as a platform for the sustainability of the project's approach, but its execution relies wholly on the human and financial resources of the government to take over the operation and running of the schools. This is a major commitment and one that BRAC cannot control but does work to influence key stakeholders through comprehensive advocacy initiatives.

To mitigate this unpredictability, BRAC is doing two additional things: firstly, it is also exploring the possibility of transforming the 23 CBGS into schools which are fully operated and managed by communities, including financing. Secondly, it is working closely with other NGOs involved in community-based education to have a joint voice when speaking to government about the possibilities and potential process of integrating with government schools. As BRAC continues into GECT, it will continue to work collaboratively and push for sustainable impact.

### Working in fragile environments – Plan, Sierra Leone



Plan International's GEC project in Sierra Leone works in close collaboration with the national government. The project's aim is that community, local and national government officials value the interventions and allocate resources to educate girls and children with disabilities. Project activities are aligned to support vital government policies, strategies and programmes, and build government capacity. The project meets regularly with the Ministry of Education to share learning and conducts joint monitoring visits to the study groups. Project staff also jointly

monitor the training of community-based rehabilitation volunteers and co-facilitate gender-sensitive teaching and learning methods for teachers.

The project coordinates on child safeguarding issues, making the link between children's voices, to local authorities, to the Ministry, and engaging social welfare groups where required. The project implements a 'score-carding' model which allows any children to speak up where they feel unsafe in the schooling environment. The ownership of anonymous reports is held by the board of governors in schools and shared with relevant stakeholders with a clear action plan for change. The training involved in this model is co-facilitated by project staff and Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs as a way of jointly promoting inclusive education and the protection of the rights of children.

Further, sustained in-school individual learning support for beneficiaries will be provided by a new cohort of 250 Learning Assistants who will support teaching and learning to enable beneficiaries with disabilities to engage more fully with learning activities and assist teachers in developing and enacting more participatory classroom activities.

Despite these efforts towards sustainability through strengthened systems and infrastructure, progress towards long term change remains elusive. The key challenge is that although the project has sought to achieve broad alignment and engagement, it is operating in a country and context which is still recovering from the devastating effects of Ebola, compounded by underlying chronic poverty, and the focus on short term and emergency measures that this necessitates. This makes setting realistic indicators for sustainability targets difficult, and achieving lasting change even more so.

### OVERALL LESSONS

- Sustainability has to be planned for, and takes time to establish
- Governments and other actors need time to accept new approaches and to put in place the resources
- Working closely with local stakeholders lays the foundations for sustaining commitments and activities
- Communities also need time to adjust and embed change
- Continued, external funding is often still required

## Next steps

From one perspective, the sustainability of GEC activity in the long term would best be measured through evaluation of its effect on the learning and transition outcomes of its beneficiaries a specified number of years after projects have ended. This is not a mechanism that has been built into the standard evaluation process, however there are other perspectives from which to consider sustainability, tracking and recording sustainable effects and impacts of the project implementation.

To this end, a sustainability framework has been designed for the second GEC phase which prompts projects to define, plan for, monitor and report on the legacy their project is creating at the levels of community, the school and the system. Each project will therefore determine its own sustainability outputs and outcome. As sustainability is a core outcome for all GEC projects, it will be evaluated as part of each project's external evaluation at midline and endline points. In this way, sustainability has been planned for from the start of the new phase. Projects have each developed a sustainability strategy, based on strong context analysis and which identifies the key drivers of improved learning and transition. The sustainability outcome is crucial to determine whether changes can be sustained for future generations of girls and boys in these communities and schools, and in the education system more broadly.



©Link Community Development, Ethiopia

## Developing a sustainability strategy for each project

The specific sustainability outcome for each project will be based on its sustainability strategy which is built into the theory of change and articulates which changes will be crucial to sustain and how this will be achieved.

The evaluation of learning and transition will help identify which outputs are working as drivers of improvement, but from the start some assumptions must be made and the sustainability strategy and indicators should be aligned with these assumptions.

To do this, and to provide some comparability across the portfolio, GECT projects have been asked the following questions which will feed into a sustainability scorecard for each project:

| LEVELS                       | DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN THE THEORY OF CHANGE  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>Outcomes</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will learning and transition outcomes continue to have an impact on the lives of beneficiaries into the future?</li> <li>• How can learning and transition outcomes be sustained for girls beyond our current beneficiaries, in communities, schools, and broader systems?</li> </ul> |
| <b>Intermediate outcomes</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which are the key changes needed to sustain outcomes?</li> <li>• For each Intermediate Outcome, which outputs will be needed to sustain this change?</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Outputs</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What would it take to sustain these outputs?</li> <li>• What are the key roles / functions?</li> <li>• Who will perform these (when project staff are no longer there)?</li> <li>• What will it take to do this, in terms of capacity, will, and funding?</li> </ul>                  |

Setting measurable, annual targets at outcome level will then be done project by project based on the agreed sustainability strategy, and in light of baseline data when it has been collected.

## KEY PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABILITY

- Clear and specific aims
- Effective communication
- Demonstrable evidence
- Local focus
- Approaches which adapts/incorporates existing materials, curricula and infrastructure
- Represents added value and value for money
- Collaboration with government institutions and policies

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**Girls' Education Challenge**



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