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Independent Evaluation of the Girls' Education Challenge Phase II – Education Pathways for Marginalised Adolescent Girls Beyond Formal Schooling

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Acronyms

Aarambha	Accelerating Life Skills Literacy and Numeracy of Out of School Adolescent Girls
AEP	Accelerated Education Programme
APBET	Alternative Provision of Basic Education and Training
CBE	Complementary Basic Education
CLC	Community Learning Centre
EfL	Education for Life
EGMA	Early Grade Mathematics Assessment
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESWG	Evaluation Studies Working Group
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FM	Fund Manager
GBP	Great British Pound
GEC	Girls' Education Challenge
GEC II	Girls' Education Challenge Phase II
GEC-T	Girls' Education Challenge – Transition
GESI	Gender and Social Inclusion
Ghs	Ghanaian Cedi
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IAG	Independent Advisory Group
IDI	In depth Interview
IE	Independent Evaluation
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPs	Implementing Partners
KII	Key Informant Interview
Ksh	Kenyan Shilling
LNGB	Leave No Girl Behind

NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
Npr	Nepalese Rupee
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
REAL	Research and Equitable Access and Learning Centre
RQ	Research Question
SAGE	Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education
STAGE	Strategic Approaches to Girls' Education
STAGES	Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Education Success
TEACH	Teach and Educate Adolescent Girls with Community Help
ToR	Terms of Reference
TVET	Technical and Vocational Educational and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCO-UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Summary

Background and Objectives

This study is the fifth in the series of the Independent Evaluation of the Girls' Education Challenge Programme Phase II (GEC II), with a specific focus on the **Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) Window**. The LNGB Window was launched as part of the GEC II to support extremely marginalised adolescent girls who either never enrolled in formal schooling or dropped out prior to completion. There are 14 LNGB projects in 10 countries which provide “*educational pathways beyond formal schooling*”. This is a term we use throughout this report to describe the projects' activities aimed at equipping girls with literacy, numeracy, and life/ vocational skills, through programmes which include accelerated learning pathways, catch-up pathways, remedial learning pathways and alternative learning pathways. These pathways were designed by LNGB projects with the intent to transition girls back into formal schooling, vocational training, or income-generating activities.

The **primary objective of this study** is to explore the perspectives, agency, and choices of younger and older marginalised adolescent girls to understand how LNGB education pathways beyond formal schooling have met their needs and increased their opportunities in education and beyond.

The first two **research questions** (RQ1 and RQ2) below prioritise the voices of girls with respect to their experiences prior to and during the delivery of LNGB projects. The third research question (RQ3) more explicitly draws out issues relating to girls' agency and choice with respect to their education and livelihood journeys. The specific Research Questions (RQs) framing this study are as follows:

- **RQ1:** How do LNGB projects mitigate barriers that the most marginalised adolescent girls face in education?
- **RQ2:** To what extent, and how, have LNGB projects influenced the most marginalised adolescent girls' academic and non-academic outcomes?
- **RQ3:** How have LNGB projects influenced the most marginalised adolescent girls' transition to formal schooling and/ or work opportunities, and agency in making decisions?

The study also includes two cross-cutting themes throughout the design, analysis, and reporting:

- **Political Economy Analysis (PEA):** This accounts for the wider policy and political environment that influences how LNGB projects are able to support marginalised girls' learning and future opportunities.
- **Gender & Social Inclusion (GESI):** This study integrates a GESI lens throughout, with the most marginalised girls in the LNGB contexts being the primary focus of this study. The definition of the most marginalised girls is based on the classifications adopted by each LNGB project. Examples of what constitutes the most marginalised include girls with disabilities, girls who are married or girls who have children (or their intersections). The analysis centres girls' voice, choice and agency, choices, which are incorporated in the design of the primary data collection tools and reporting of findings.

Methodology

To answer these research questions, the study included both **portfolio-level review as well as three LNGB case study projects**. The portfolio-level review drew on three data sources: (1) interviews with all 14 project Implementing Partners (IPs); (2) project documentation (including external evaluation/ technical monitoring reports); and (3) secondary analysis of quantitative external evaluation data at baseline and follow-up (either midline or endline, depending on data availability). The three selected project case studies were: (1) *STAGE* in Ghana; (2) *Education for Life (EfL)* in Kenya; and (3) *Aarambha* in Nepal. The team analysed quantitative monitoring data collected by project IPs along with in-depth primary qualitative data collected in-country, in addition to the data sources used for the portfolio review. Given the main objective of the study is to capture the perspectives of adolescent girls, a particular focus was given to collecting data from girls on their education and livelihood journeys using the River of Life participatory research method. Primary qualitative data were collected between January and March 2023.

Our methodology also included a **review of existing evidence**, which was used to frame and contextualise this study. The review was conducted using a purposive search strategy to identify global evidence from the last 10 years, drawing on multiple sources including academic literature, as well as working papers, project evaluation reports and other unpublished papers. The review examined: the barriers the most marginalised girls faced in accessing

education and their transition into work; how different types of education pathways beyond formal schooling reduce barriers for out-of-school adolescent girls, help them transition to formal schooling; equip marginalised adolescent girls with foundational literacy and numeracy skills; and effects on girls' choice, agency and aspirations for their education and livelihood journeys.

Key Findings

Research Question 1: How do different LNGB projects mitigate barriers that the most marginalised adolescent girls face in education?

- **In total, LNGB projects aimed to reach around 230,000 girls.** All LNGB projects specifically target marginalised out-of-school girls between 10-19 years of age.
- **The most common barriers that these girls faced in accessing formal schooling** were economic (e.g., girls could not afford schooling or had to work), travel-related (e.g., long distances to school and/ or safety risks) and barriers related to gender social norms, resulting in early marriage and motherhood.
- **Barriers varied for younger and older adolescents:** while economic constraints negatively affected all girls, barriers relating to travel to school are more likely to negatively affect younger adolescents, while gender social norms are more likely to adversely affect older adolescents.
- **LNGB projects were successful in targeting marginalised girls by using context-specific marginalisation criteria:** All 14 projects targeted girls who had never enrolled in formal school or dropped out prior to achieving basic literacy and numeracy skills. Most LNGB projects targeted married girls (including those waiting to enter a union⁵), young mothers (including girls who were pregnant), and girls with disabilities.
- **LNGB projects succeeded in targeting the most marginalised girls compared with girls identified through household survey data:** In almost all cases, IPs indicated that they consulted with national-level stakeholders to help identify the areas that projects would work in, together with using available data to help better target the most marginalised girls.
- **However, there were challenges in meeting the original targets for enrolling girls with particular vulnerabilities, as identified by the three case studies:** Among the reasons identified were girls or their families' unwillingness to enrol in the project (e.g., for married girls), or project facilities being inadequate to support girls with disabilities. Inaccurate information was also a reason cited, meaning that the planned numbers of target girls with identified background characteristics were not reached.
- **All LNGB projects delivered a range of activities to support girls' academic and non-academic outcomes, as well as to improve their learning and work opportunities:** The activities varied according to context, taking into account the specific characteristics of the marginalised girls enrolled in their projects. Across the portfolio, they included academic learning-related activities, life skills sessions to support non-academic skills, training LNGB educators (including in gender-responsive pedagogy), and material or financial support.
- **The material and financial support provided by projects helped to reduce financial barriers:** The share of girls identifying economic costs as a barrier to participating in education fell from around half before their enrolment in the LNGB project to around one-fifth when participating in the LNGB project.
- **Hygiene and dignity kits (e.g., soap, sanitary pads, etc.)** were beneficial in the three case study projects, alongside menstrual hygiene management information provided during the life skills sessions. These were identified as particularly important in mitigating barriers to attending the learning centres during girls' menstrual cycles.
- **Engagement with parents and community members to sensitise them to the importance of girls' education was found to be important,** based on interviews in the three case study projects. These included door-to-door campaigns as well as media campaigns by locally recruited community members. In addition to encouraging families and community members to educate girls, they also spread awareness on delaying early marriage and pregnancy. The engagement of community religious leaders was also identified as important.

⁵ The term 'waiting to enter a union' (*gauna*) refers to girls who are married but do not live with their spouses till after they begin menstruation.

Research Question 2: To what extent, and how, have LNGB projects influenced the most marginalised adolescent girls' academic and non-academic outcomes?

- **Girls' learning levels in literacy and numeracy at baseline were low, with differences in learning levels depending on girls' prior formal schooling experience.** Across the 10 LNGB projects with data, girls who had been to school but dropped out, on average, scored higher in literacy and numeracy than girls who had never attended school prior to the LNGB project.
- **For girls enrolled in LNGB projects, literacy and numeracy levels have considerably improved between baseline and follow-up, more so for girls who never attended school prior to the project.** We also find a considerable reduction in the proportion of girls unable to answer a single item correctly.
- **The majority of girls interviewed from the three case study projects identified the literacy and numeracy sessions as the most positive aspect of being enrolled in the LNGB projects:** They noted that this provided them with the opportunity to read, write and count. Interviews with teachers in formal schools suggested that girls who transitioned into their schools demonstrated learning improvements, though not all girls were able to keep up with the curriculum as easily as their peers who had been in formal school for a longer period.
- **Girls from all three case study contexts identified an improvement in their non-academic outcomes, particularly in their levels of confidence:** One-third of girls interviewed mentioned how the life skills training increased their self-confidence and self-esteem and equipped them with practical skills for their daily lives.
- **Some of the challenges affecting girls' participation and learning persisted when they were enrolled in the learning centres:** Challenges include household chores, distance to travel to the learning centre, negative community/ family attitudes (particularly for older adolescent girls), and inadequate support to meet the learning needs of girls with disabilities. According to external evaluation data, these challenges may have contributed to some girls dropping out of the learning centres.

Research Question 3: How have LNGB projects influenced the most marginalised adolescent girls' transitions to formal schooling and/ or work opportunities, and agency in making decisions?

- **Most of the 14 LNGB projects only offered younger adolescents the choice of joining formal school pathways, whereas older adolescents were only offered skills or employment opportunities:** National child labour laws meant that many projects only offered younger adolescent girls the option of transitioning to formal schooling after graduating from the learning centre. Due to the age of older adolescent girls, interviews with project IPs suggested that most of the 14 LNGB projects either did not offer, or actively discouraged, older adolescent girls from joining formal schooling – instead offering them employment or skills related opportunities.
- **With girls' transition pathways often being pre-determined by most of the LNGB projects, there was sometimes a mismatch between the transition pathways girls selected compared with their preferences:** The evaluation data at the beginning of the project, for five LNGB projects with relevant data found that 23% of girls assigned to the work opportunities pathway indicated they would have liked to transition to formal schooling. Conversely, for girls assigned to formal schooling pathways, 22% signalled wanting to transition into a work opportunities pathway. Qualitative data from the three LNGB case study projects found that, while most girls transitioned into their preferred pathway, a few older adolescent girls identified their wish to return to formal schooling but were instead encouraged by projects to pursue work-related opportunities.
- **Continued support from LNGB projects after girls graduated from the LNGB learning centre was identified as integral to girls' success in their transitions to education and work-related opportunities:** While a majority of girls successfully transitioned into their pathways, some did not. Across all three case studies, material and financial support, training in specific skills and continued involvement by LNGB project staff in supporting girls, their caregivers and school-level actors of support were identified as critical to enable girls to succeed in their formal schooling and work-related transitions.
- **Girls transitioning into formal schooling identified ongoing barriers** which included school-related costs, changes to the learning environment (compared with what they had experienced at the learning centre), distance to travel to school and household chores as the main challenges in their participation and learning.
- **For girls transitioning to work-related opportunities (either skills-related or employment-related), barriers** included the capital needed to viably run their businesses, the shortage of master artisans, and the gap in entrepreneurship and technical skills that girls needed to run their businesses. In addition, the saturation of market spaces in their selected vocations and 'cultural taboos' towards girls entering the labour market were identified as key challenges.

- **Across the three case study projects, girls on the skills and work-related training pathways specialised in sectors traditionally associated with women (e.g., hairdressing and tailoring):** Only in the case of *EfL* (Kenya) did a small percentage of girls (less than 5%) select vocations traditionally associated with men (e.g., plumbing and carpentry). The low uptake of these vocations was partly due to their availability, but also due to embedded gender social norms which discouraged or prevented girls from pursuing these vocations.
- **For the three case study projects, the vocations that girls specialised in were highly concentrated amongst a few vocations:** This was partly due to the economic conditions characterising the remote contexts within which LNGB projects operated – factors which were outside of the project's control. These conditions created challenges relating to the supply of materials and master artisans needed to support girls' training, resulting in girls' businesses operating in an already saturated market. Reasons why girls specialised in different vocations varied. Some selected vocations because they perceived them to be profitable, while others expressed an interest in a vocation or because they were encouraged to select it by the LNGB project facilitators.
- **Girls identified that their engagement in decision-making had enhanced due to greater confidence related to improvements in literacy, numeracy, and life skills:** However, there appears to be variation in the types of decisions they were now able to make themselves. A larger proportion of girls reported being able to make decisions over their day-to-day lives, such as household expenditure, or to visit the market/ health clinic/ friends. A smaller proportion were able to make decisions over their education, marriage, and income-generating activities with husbands or other family members retaining decision-making powers, particularly for younger girls.
- **Girls who were unmarried, without children, or did not self-report a disability were more likely to feel that their decision-making capabilities had increased:** When looking at older and younger adolescent girls, many decisions continued to be taken by external stakeholders in girls' lives, particularly for younger adolescent girls. However, across all case study contexts, girls stated that after joining the LNGB project, they had the increased confidence needed to express their opinions in front of their families, even if they did not consider themselves to be the sole decision-maker.
- **There is evidence to support how participating in the LNGB projects made girls want to aspire to “do better” compared to if they had not taken part in the project:** Over half of the girls who transitioned into formal schooling reported that had they not chosen to attend school, they would have either been doing household chores or would have pursued tailoring. They reported choosing the path they did to become more responsible or prominent. For those on work-related pathways, a smaller number of girls – seven in total – indicated that they would have married instead.

Conclusion

Overall, projects succeeded in targeting and reaching the most marginalised girls and improving their academic and non-academic skills – more so for girls who had never attended school prior to participating in the LNGB project. They were able to break down many of the barriers the girls faced in their education, although some systemic barriers remained. Many of the younger girls were supported in their transition to formal schooling, while older girls were supported along a skills or work-related pathway. However, they had limited choice over their pathways, or the vocations they pursued. Many adolescent girls followed traditional vocations (such as hairdressing and tailoring). This was partly due to economic and labour market conditions and partly due to embedded gender social norms. An important feature of the LNGB projects was the positive effect that improvements in literacy, numeracy, and life skills had on **girls' confidence, voice, and agency over decision-making** in their day-to-day lives. The main challenge is sustaining the benefits beyond the lifecycle of the project, given the time needed to master basic literacy and numeracy, and that gender social norms, which continue to limit their opportunities to make bigger decisions about their lives (e.g., about their education, marriage, livelihoods), take a longer time to shift.

Recommendations

The proposed recommendations are for FCDO and Implementing Partners to consider for the design of future education programmes aimed at reaching the most marginalised girls. They can also inform other stakeholders involved in the design of such programmes.

Targeting the most marginalised adolescent girls

- **In order to identify the most marginalised girls for specific contexts, there is a need for accurate data on different population subgroups.** Certain groups, such as children with disabilities, children who have never enrolled in school, and pregnant girls, can be more difficult to identify and it is important that they do not fall through the gaps due to inaccurate or unavailable data.
- **Engaging with national and local stakeholders is important for effective targeting.** Engagement with national government stakeholders is needed to identify locations where the most marginalised girls reside. Collaboration with sub-national and community stakeholders is needed to effectively target marginalised girls given their in-depth knowledge of the locality. Engaging with national and local stakeholders is also important to identify areas where other similar programmes are operating to avoid duplication.

Designing projects to support the most marginalised adolescent girls

- **Projects should design activities tailored to meet the specific needs and characteristics of marginalised adolescent girls,** such as their age, disability status, whether they are married/ have children and whether they are first-generation learners. For example, this could involve designing activities that differ for younger and older adolescents; providing child-care facilities for girls with children; and providing psycho-social support to girls who may have faced trauma.
- **Financial support is needed to address economic barriers girls face in participating in education.** Financial support can help overcome direct costs and opportunity costs (e.g. caring for siblings, household chores, participation in family businesses) faced by adolescent girls in attending education.
- **The provision of material support, such as hygiene and dignity kits, together with training on hygiene,** is important for helping adolescent girls navigate challenges associated with puberty.
- **Longer-term material and financial support are also needed for adolescent girls to set up businesses and meet ongoing work-related costs.** For example, adolescent girls can be linked to microfinance institutions, community savings and loan facilities, and avenues to access low-interest loans to help them set up businesses and meet their ongoing running costs.
- **The successful design of programmes requires a cross-sectoral approach.** This includes coordinating across Ministries of Education and Labour as well as joining up with other livelihoods, employment, and economic growth initiatives to ensure girls continue to receive support (including after the project ends).
- **The length of projects should be sufficient to allow girls to adequately master literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills.** Recognising the low levels of literacy and numeracy of the most marginalised adolescent girls, the length of projects needs to be sufficient to allow them to gain these skills and not fall behind once project support ends. They also need sufficient time to gain vocational skills to enable them to access productive work.

Promoting adolescent girls' agency

- **Co-designing programme activities with adolescent girls themselves helps to ensure their needs are being met.** Participatory data collection approaches such as those used in this report can support this co-design, by capturing marginalised girls' needs, voices, and experiences both in education as well as in skills and work-related training.
- **Teaching life skills to girls, which encompasses training on communication skills and financial literacy, is important for their empowerment:** These skills can vastly improve girls' self-confidence, ability to express their opinions, input into decisions, and be more aware of issues relating to delaying pregnancy and marriage. Providing girls with the tools and knowledge to recognise, know what to do and who to contact if they witness or experience gender-based violence is important.

Facilitating adolescent girls' transitions

- **Older adolescent girls should be offered the choice and further support to transition into continued education opportunities.** For those returning to formal schooling, this may require addressing social stigma that over-age adolescent girls can face when entering formal education.

- **The provision of bridging or after-school classes for girls transitioning to formal school can better prepare them for the formal school environment.** These classes can help mitigate the challenges girls face when adjusting to the formal schooling curriculum.
- **Providing girls with career guidance is needed to help them make viable choices about work-related pathways.** Providing detailed information based on market assessments of work opportunities including market demand, start-up costs and profitability of businesses can help girls decide on their training and avoid local job market saturation.
- **Community sensitisation campaigns and girls acting as role models can help encourage girls to engage in work, including in vocations which are not traditionally available to women.** These can help change attitudes of girls, their families, and communities to take up different opportunities.
- **Once girls have started on their transition pathway, home visits and ongoing engagement by programme educators and mentors is important to encourage and motivate girls and their families.** This will help to maintain attendance and retention.

Sustaining projects into the future

- **The policy and regulatory environment need to demonstrate a political commitment to programmes supporting out-of-school adolescent girls back into education and their transition into work.** This requires an explicit budgetary allocation from governments to such programmes. Projects need to engage with governments throughout their lifecycle to help foster such political commitment.
- **Projects need to be designed to ensure the sustainability of community engagement to shift gender social norms.** Embedding 'change champions' such as religious leaders and village heads within communities and providing training to groups such as school management committees and mothers' groups can ensure the benefits of projects in changing harmful practices (e.g. those associated with early marriage, early pregnancy, and gender-based violence) are sustained. In addition, this will help counter gender social norms and facilitate girls' choices to engage in non-traditional work.

1. Introduction

The Girls' Education Challenge Phase II (GEC II) portfolio includes a focus on Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB), which aims to reach up to 230,000 highly marginalised girls, providing them with literacy and numeracy opportunities, as well as skills relevant for life and work. The 14 LNGB projects operate in 10 countries across Africa and South Asia. The projects provide “*education pathways beyond formal schooling*”, an umbrella term used throughout this report to capture education opportunities accessed by adolescents who have never been to school or dropped out early (see [Annex A](#) for the study's Terms of Reference (ToR)). These adolescent girls receive support in several areas including foundational literacy and numeracy; skills and livelihoods; empowerment, agency, and rights; sexual and reproductive health and rights; community-based awareness-raising and advocacy; and systems-level capacity building and advocacy.

1.1. Purpose and objectives of this study

The primary objective of this study is to explore the perspectives, choice, and agency of younger and older marginalised adolescent girls, to understand how LNGB projects have met their needs. The first two Research Questions (RQs) do this by prioritising the voices of marginalised adolescent girls with respect to their experience before and during the LNGB projects. The third research question more explicitly draws out issues relating to girls' agency and choice with respect to their education and livelihood journeys. The specific RQs are as follows:

RQ1: How do LNGB projects mitigate barriers that the most marginalised adolescent girls face in education?

RQ2: To what extent, and how, have LNGB projects influenced the most marginalised adolescent girls' academic and non-academic outcomes?

RQ3: How have LNGB projects influenced the most marginalised adolescent girls' transition to formal schooling and/or work opportunities, and agency in making decisions?

The study also includes two cross-cutting themes throughout the design, analysis, and reporting:

- **Political Economy Analysis (PEA):** This takes account of the wider policy and political environment that influence how LNGB projects are able to support marginalised girls' learning and future opportunities.
- **Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI):** The study integrates a GESI lens throughout, with the most marginalised girls being the primary focus of this study. The definition of the most marginalised girls is based on the classifications adopted by each LNGB project. Examples of what constitutes the most marginalised could, for example, be girls with disabilities, girls who are married or girls who have children. The analysis centres girls' voice, choice, and agency, which are incorporated in the design of the primary data collection tools and reporting of findings.

1.2. Report structure

The report is organised around the three overarching research questions, to include the following:

- **Section 2** draws on the background literature to provide an overview of the key concepts and evidence that have informed this study.
- **Section 3** provides an overview of the research approach and methodology. Further detail on the methodology is provided in [Annex B](#) (Research Design and Methodology).
- **Section 4** provides the wider context within which projects that offer education pathways beyond formal schooling operate in Ghana, Kenya, and Nepal – the countries of particular focus in this report.
- **Section 5** addresses **RQ1** related to whether and how LNGB projects mitigate barriers that the most marginalised adolescent girls face in education.
- **Section 6** addresses **RQ2** which looks at how LNGB projects have influenced the most marginalised adolescent girls' academic and non-academic outcomes.
- **Section 7** addresses **RQ3** which looks at how LNGB projects have influenced the most marginalised adolescent girls' transition to formal schooling and/or work opportunities, and agency in making decisions.

- **Section 8** and **Section 9** build on these findings to provide conclusions and recommendations for the Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), the Fund Manager (FM), Implementing Partners (IPs), and the wider academic and practitioner community.

2. Review of existing evidence

This section provides an overview of key evidence that informs the framing and contextualisation of this study. The review was conducted using a purposive search strategy to identify global evidence from the last 10 years, and includes multiple sources including academic literature, as well as working papers and project evaluation reports and other unpublished papers (see [Annex B](#) for more information on the search strategy).

2.1. Barriers the most marginalised girls face in accessing education and work

Adolescence is a period of a girls' life where social norms become more pronounced: With the onset of puberty, the expectations of a girl's position within her family and community structures may begin to shift ([Jones et al., 2018](#)). These expectations, which begin with the onset of adolescence, become more pronounced in late adolescence as this is when “social norms around marriage and motherhood are more likely to intensify” ([Rose, 2021](#); pg. 4). Additionally, when girls reach adolescence, they are often required to take on increased responsibilities surrounding household chores with their labour substituting the time spent by their mothers on completing these tasks ([Jones et al., 2018](#)). [Winter \(2016\)](#) finds that gender gaps relating to aspirations for education and livelihoods begin for parents and children between middle childhood and early adolescence – in part due to social norms about roles girls are expected to fulfil later in life. These norms may also negatively influence the subject and vocational training opportunities for girls, restricting their choice of livelihoods ([UNICEF-ITU, 2020](#)).

A combination of social, economic and physical barriers means that marginalised adolescent girls are particularly likely to be excluded from formal schooling systems: Out-of-school adolescents are proportionately more likely to come from poorer households with fewer working or educated adults, live in rural areas and be female ([Inoue et al., 2015](#)). Data from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (UIS) estimates there were 93 million adolescent girls of secondary-school age who were out of school in 2020 – an increase of one million since 2019 ([UNESCO-UIS, 2022](#)).

The pandemic exacerbated gender inequities particularly amongst older adolescents. When schools reopened after Covid-19 school closures, in many contexts drop-out rates amongst adolescent girls had increased, particularly for those from poorer households. In some sub-Saharan African countries, this was associated with increased rates of early marriage and pregnancy ([Kwauk et al., 2021](#)).

Until recently, evidence on interventions aimed at meeting the needs of adolescent girls has been limited: While there is evidence for understanding the barriers that marginalised adolescent girls face, understanding of what works for adolescent girls from different backgrounds is more limited. Where such evidence does exist, it does not adequately distinguish between younger (10-14 years old) and older (15-19 years old) adolescents despite their very different development needs ([Jones et al., 2018](#)).

Marginalised adolescent girls' lower levels of education means that they often lack the types of skills needed to enter decent and secure work: Adolescent girls require a combination of three types of skills for secure and productive livelihoods: foundational, vocational and transferable ([UNESCO, 2012](#)). Not only are marginalised girls unlikely to complete primary school, but they are also least likely to acquire transferable skills such as critical thinking, confidence, communication, or problem solving which are critical for entering the formal paid work sector. This translates into longer and more unstable school-to-work transitions for marginalised adolescent girls ([Rose, 2021](#)). Female adolescents aged 15-19 years old are twice as likely to be outside of the labour force and not participating in education compared with their male counterparts ([ILO & UNICEF Girlforce, 2018](#)).

Most marginalised girls who have not completed education will transition into insecure and unsafe work: Work that is available to marginalised girls may often be “insecure, unsafe and pay a wage below the poverty line” ([Rose, 2021](#); pg. 6). In addition, they will often have little choice over the type of work they engage in. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), two in three young female workers in Asian countries are in vulnerable employment. In sub-Saharan Africa the equivalent was 82% ([Elder & Kring, 2016](#)). Marginalised girls are also more likely to have greater care and domestic responsibilities than marginalised boys, with the differences and time spent on domestic chores increasing as a girl progresses through adolescence ([Rose, 2021](#)). A recent report by [ILO & UNICEF Girlforce \(2018\)](#) concluded that one in three unemployed adolescent girls in the Asia Pacific region reported entry requirements for their planned career path exceeding their actual education and training; the equivalent for unemployed adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa was one in five ([ILO & UNICEF Girlforce, 2018](#)).

2.2. Education programmes beyond formal schooling – what are they?

Education pathways beyond formal schooling aim to address the needs of many out-of-school marginalised adolescent girls: For many of the 93 million adolescent girls who are out of school, there are promising examples of education programmes beyond formal schooling – an umbrella term that represents an array of approaches through which children and adolescents can progress through education or training systems. These have shown positive results in terms of participation and learning gains for those “*who cannot access, or are struggling to learn in, formal learning environments*” ([UKAID, 2019a](#)).

For this study, we classify education pathways for marginalised adolescent girls to align with the terminology used by the FM: There are a variety of approaches that are adopted to support the education of adolescents who are not in the formal school system. The four pathways identified for the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) include: accelerated education programmes, catch-up programmes, alternative education programmes and community-based education. [Table 1](#) provides a definition of each of these, which cater to different groups of girls, including depending on their age.

Table 1: GEC classifications of education programmes beyond formal schooling

Pathway	Definition
Accelerated education programmes (AEPs)	AEPs cater to girls who have either never been in the formal school system or have dropped out. Typically, the curriculum is aligned with the formal school curriculum or a government AEP, and they are usually intended to transition girls back into formal schooling.
Catch-up programmes	Catch-up programmes are shorter than an accelerated education programme (e.g., less than 12 months) and intended to transition girls back into the formal school system.
Alternative education programmes	Alternative education programmes usually target older girls (e.g., 15-19) who may not be able to or may not want to re-enrol in secondary school. These programmes provide basic literacy and numeracy skills along with life skills (e.g., financial literacy or sexual and reproductive health knowledge). The transition pathways from these programmes include technical and vocational education and training (TVET), self-employment/ other employment, or continued daily life with improved skills.
Community-based education	Community-based programmes target learners who do not have/ cannot practically access government schools. The curriculum typically follows the government curriculum (though is autonomous from the formal school system).

Source: [UKAID \(2019a\)](#).

2.3. Education programmes beyond formal schooling reduce barriers for out-of-school adolescent girls

The design of education programmes beyond formal schooling can address some of the specific barriers marginalised adolescent girls face in accessing formal schooling: The timings of programmes aimed at reaching out-of-school adolescents are often more flexible to take account of work-related demands, including household chores ([Ayorinde & Adeniran, 2022](#)). In Mali, for example, Education Development Centres offered courses in the dry season, because learners were required to engage with farming activities during the rainy season ([Weyer, 2009](#)). In Northern Ghana, the *Complementary Basic Education (CBE)* programme mostly took place in the afternoon to enable participants to work around their household or farming chores ([Carter et al., 2018](#)). The curricula are also sometimes more flexible to ensure they are more responsive to girls' needs ([Gee, 2015](#)).

Despite their potential to reach out-of-school children and adolescents, education programmes beyond formal schooling suffer from poor recognition and weak endorsement by national governments and other stakeholders: Most funding for these programmes currently comes from external donor or international/ local NGO funding. This has meant high variability of quality within countries, including issues such as teachers having little to no qualifications ([Grant Lewis et al., 2022](#)). This source of funding also raises questions relating to their long-term sustainability. They are often poorly endorsed or recognised by national governments, and in some contexts these

programmes are perceived as second-class compared with formal school systems ([Menedez et al., 2016](#)). There are exceptions: for example, the *CBE* programme in Malawi has been integrated into government national planning structures. Introduced and piloted in several districts in Malawi in 2006 by donor agencies, the *CBE* programme was integrated into the 2010 National Education Sector Plan and was rolled out nationally in 2012 ([Jere, 2012](#)). As discussed in [Section 5](#), Ghana, Kenya and Nepal are also examples of government policy and political engagement in these programmes, although resources remain limited.

Access to education programmes beyond formal schooling can face similar barriers to formal schooling:

Accelerated education programmes sometimes suffer from high rates of learner drop-out or poor attendance, albeit better than formal school systems for marginalised learners ([Shah & Choo, 2020](#)). In some sub-Saharan African countries, these programmes are most likely to be physically situated in locations that “*are most affected by ongoing conflicts or areas that are recovering from a history of violence*” ([Ngware et al., 2018](#), pg. 13). Some of the same socio-cultural barriers preventing girls from attending formal schooling may also be reproduced negatively affecting girls' access to education programmes beyond formal schooling ([Ngware et al., 2018](#)).

Successful programmes are defined by several characteristics: Successful programmes have multiple entry and exit points (e.g., non-linearity and flexibility of pathways on offer), and have close ties to formal school programmes. Other successful traits have been adaptability to the local context; attracting diverse sources of funding; and having multi-stakeholder partnerships ([Ngware et al., 2018](#)). It is important to take account of equity and inclusion in the design of programmes, recognising that the barriers which different marginalised groups face will vary. A one-size-fits-all approach may inadvertently leave out the most marginalised ([Grant Lewis et al., 2022](#)). The programmes require good coordination amongst the different government entities who maintain responsibility for adolescents and young people ([Inoue et al., 2015](#)). Finally, ensuring that the programmes are well aligned to government priorities ensures their relevance and long-term success. It also elicits buy-in from government partners at all levels to ensure sustainability beyond the project cycle ([Grant Lewis et al., 2022](#); [UKAID, 2019a](#)).

Fostering engagement with families and communities is a vital part of the design of these programmes:

Without the support of family and community members, there is a risk that the benefits children and adolescents accrue through these programmes may not be sustained in the long-term, particularly for girls. Part of the success of the *CBE* programme in Northern Ghana, for example, has been attributed to community engagement being an integral part of its design ([British High Commission, 2018](#)). In the case of the *Sisters for Sisters Education* project in Nepal, engaging with older girls from the highly marginalised Musahar community by training them in socio-emotional learning helped younger girls (“Little Sisters”) navigate their education journeys better ([UKAID, 2023a](#)). Teachers working in these projects are typically recruited from the local community, are far more knowledgeable about the challenges and needs of children and adolescents within that setting, and are likely to be more accountable to the community at large ([UKAID, 2019a](#)).

Programmes need to be designed to elevate the knowledge and skills that are important to adolescents and their communities:

One of the criticisms directed at formal schooling is that it does not always provide adolescents with the skills required for them to transition to adulthood ([Kabeer, 2018](#)). Support for education programmes beyond formal schooling can be contingent on the types of skills that adolescent girls acquire, and the value that these girls, their families, and their communities place on these skills. In Northern Tanzania, through girls' acquisition of skills and knowledge relating to agriculture and taking care of livestock, household members placed a higher value on girls attending an alternative learning programme ([DeJaeghere, 2016](#)).

2.4. Learning in education programmes beyond formal schooling

Education programmes beyond formal schooling equip marginalised adolescent girls with foundational literacy and numeracy skills:

A growing wealth of evidence supports how these programmes can help improve learning outcomes, especially of the most marginalised. Several evaluations have concluded that improvements in literacy and numeracy skills are often significantly higher for children and adolescents enrolled in these programmes compared with their peers with similar background characteristics who are enrolled in government schools ([Shah & Choo, 2020](#); [Carter et al., 2018](#)). For example, in Mali, *Speed Schools* improved learners' scores in mathematics by 25% enabling them to catch up with their counterparts in formal schooling systems ([Ayorinde & Adeniran, 2022](#)).

If designed effectively, programmes can improve non-academic skills marginalised adolescent girls need for improved well-being as well as academic performance: A review of accelerated education programmes found that besides basic literacy and numeracy outcomes, these programmes also address outcomes among which are self-esteem/ confidence, employability/ work readiness, and knowledge in entrepreneurship ([Shah & Choo, 2020](#)). For

girls enrolled in an accelerated education programme in two conservative rural communities in Northern Nigeria, their skills necessary for their conditions of self-empowerment had improved. These included increased knowledge, positive attitude and behaviours, and improved ability to express themselves and partake in decision-making in the family. Girls enrolled in this programme were also able to acquire skills specifically related to business (e.g., calculating daily and weekly income, and learning how to improve saving habits ([Afolayan, 2021](#)). In Bangladesh, the *Social and Financial Empowerment of Adolescents* programme for young women aged 11 to 21 initiated a number of interventions, including girls' clubs, financial literacy projects and *livelihoods* and life skills training. Participants reported improved financial literacy, increased ownership of poultry and small livestock and increased involvement in economic activities ([Kamruzzaman et al., 2012](#)). The *Udaan Nepal* alternative learning programme found that girls enrolled in the programme had become more confident and outspoken due to their acquisition of leadership skills, and felt empowered to become agents of social change by openly challenging harmful gender norms ([NIDR, 2020](#)).

While marginalised girls do better in education programmes beyond formal schooling compared with their peers in formal schools, they continue to do worse in these programmes compared with boys: With respect to retention, completion, and transition, females continue to do worse than males ([Shah & Choo, 2020](#)). Like with formal schooling, gender-specific barriers which intersect with the wider socio-cultural context disproportionately affect female learners within the contexts in which education programmes beyond formal schooling operate. A review of accelerated education programmes finds that few have “*demonstrated a sustained commitment to gender transformative action*” ([Shah & Choo, 2020](#), pg. 6). Where programmes have addressed this, it is limited to reshaping teacher practices, and changing community perceptions around the value of girls' education.

2.5. Transitions back to formal schooling

Education pathways beyond formal schooling programmes can prepare marginalised adolescents to transition back to formal schooling: In Northern Ghana, 90% of children and adolescents who were enrolled in the *Complementary Basic Education* Programme enrolled back into the formal school system ([Carter et al., 2018](#)). In Bangladesh the *Alternative Learning Pathway* Programme helped those enrolled to develop foundational, vocational, and transferable skills. The success of the programme is further illustrated through the fact that 95% of the girls enrolled in the programme successfully transitioned into paid employment and, on average, increased their monthly income six-fold compared to before the start of the programme ([ILO & UNICEF Girlforce, 2018](#)).

However, without the appropriate support to support girls once they have transitioned to formal school, improvements in participation and learning may slow down or be reversed: A review of evidence on accelerated education programmes found a number of barriers negatively affecting graduates from these programmes to successfully transition into formal schooling. These include barriers that limited girls' participation previously, such as the availability of government schools; distances children needed to travel to attend these schools; and a school-based environment which is violent ([Shah & Choo, 2020](#)). Girls graduating from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) funded *Girls Access to Education* programme in Nepal who transitioned to formal school faced several challenges. Firstly, their participation was negatively affected due to caregivers' inability to pay the school fees. Secondly, they faced stigmatisation from their peers and teachers which discouraged their participation and attendance ([Chavez et al., 2019](#)).

2.6. Girls' choice, agency and aspirations for their education and livelihood journeys

Aspirations are often influenced by the socio-economic environments of marginalised adolescent girls: Aspirations are “*future-oriented, driven by conscious motivations, indicative of an individual or a group commitment to a particular trajectory or endpoint*” ([Hart, 2016](#)), p. 326). Girls' aspirations are identified as being heavily influenced by community and family members ([Khattab, 2015](#)). In contexts of poverty, high employment and structural and social barriers, the relationship between education and future livelihoods can be tenuous ([DeJaeghere, 2016](#)). This can lead to “*low aspirations emerg[ing] as a consequence of their initial disadvantage*” ([Dalton et al., 2016](#)), pg. 172). In India, poverty was identified as a strong predictor for pathway choices made by poor women in India ([Sahai \(2021\)](#)). Similarly, in Northern Ghana, aspirations of participants in a *Complementary Basic Education* programme were viewed as being constrained by economic factors ([Carter et al., 2018](#)).

Education programmes beyond formal schooling have the potential to change marginalised adolescent girls' aspirations: An assessment of an NGO sponsored education and training programme in rural Tanzania which

targeted out-of-school female adolescents concluded that it directly contributed to participants' increased agency in helping them realise their educational aspirations and therefore being able to change their livelihoods ([DeJaeghere, 2016](#)). A study on the GEC II *Strategic Approaches to Girls' Education (STAGE)* project in Ghana reports how girls' aspirations in many cases was to complete primary and secondary education – something that was absent before these girls enrolled in the programme ([van de Waal et al., 2022](#)).

Education programmes beyond formal schooling can challenge gender stereotypes, and so influence girls' future pathways: In Malawi, the *Competency Based Education and Training* programme was designed to create more flexible pathways to training and qualifications. As part of this, girls were supported in acquiring certification in non-traditional areas such as joinery, plumbing and electronics ([Jere, 2012](#)). Similarly, in Bangladesh, UNICEF's *Alternative Learning Pathway* programme placed girls in non-conventional trades, such as mobile phone and refrigerator repair thereby challenging workplace gender stereotyping ([ILO & UNICEF Girlforce, 2018](#)). In rural Tanzania, girls in an NGO education and training programme supporting out-of-school adolescents were enrolled into non-traditional areas of study and “were soon challenged to ‘see’ themselves as not only getting an education but also using their knowledge and skills to work in areas they had not previously imagined” ([DeJaeghere, 2016](#); pg. 248). One example of this was masonry (an otherwise male-dominated sector) where – largely due to strong support from male teachers and male family members – girls described this as an emergent aspiration despite it being contrary to expectations of women within their wider community. Without the support of these male teachers and family members it appears unlikely girls would have pursued these vocations. This is important to consider as often within the development discourse, the focus is on the *individual* decision-making of girls which may miss important factors at play when it comes to how aspirations and agency are both constructed and enacted ([DeJaeghere, 2016](#)).

3. Research design and methods

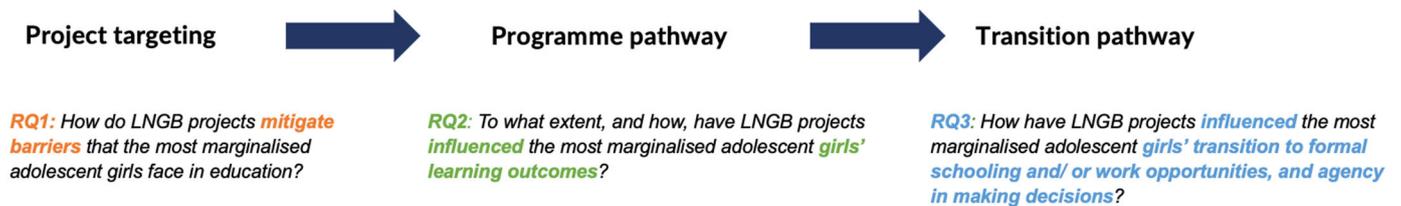
3.1. Objective of study

As noted in the introduction, the primary objective of this study is to explore the **perspectives, choices and agency** of the most marginalised adolescent girls, to understand how LNGB education pathways beyond formal schooling have met their needs and increased their education and livelihood opportunities. The definition of the “most” marginalised girls for the study is based on the categories identified by each LNGB project, dependent on the context. This includes, for, example girls with disabilities, girls who are married or girls with children. A focus on the most marginalised girls is important because there is a higher probability that they have either never gone to school or have dropped out of school early.

The research questions, as set out in Section 1.1, relate to the LNGB project cycle (*Figure 1*), namely:

- Project targeting: Girls are selected and enrolled into the project based on specific girl and socioeconomic characteristics that satisfy projects’ marginalisation criteria.
- Programme pathway: Once selected and enrolled into a cohort, the girls receive interventions through one of the education programme pathways (see *Figure 1* for more details).
- Transition pathway: After completing the programme pathway, the girls’ transition either to a formal schooling pathway, where they enrol in formal schooling, or to an employment-related pathway, where they engage in vocational training, apprenticeship, employment, or self-employment.

Figure 1: Research questions and project cycle



The study objectives differentiate between younger and older adolescents where possible and relevant, given their different needs. Of the 14 LNGB projects, seven offer a single type of education programme, six offer a different programme approach for younger and older girls, and one targets older girls only⁶ (*Table 2*).

Table 2: Types of education programmes, by younger and older girls

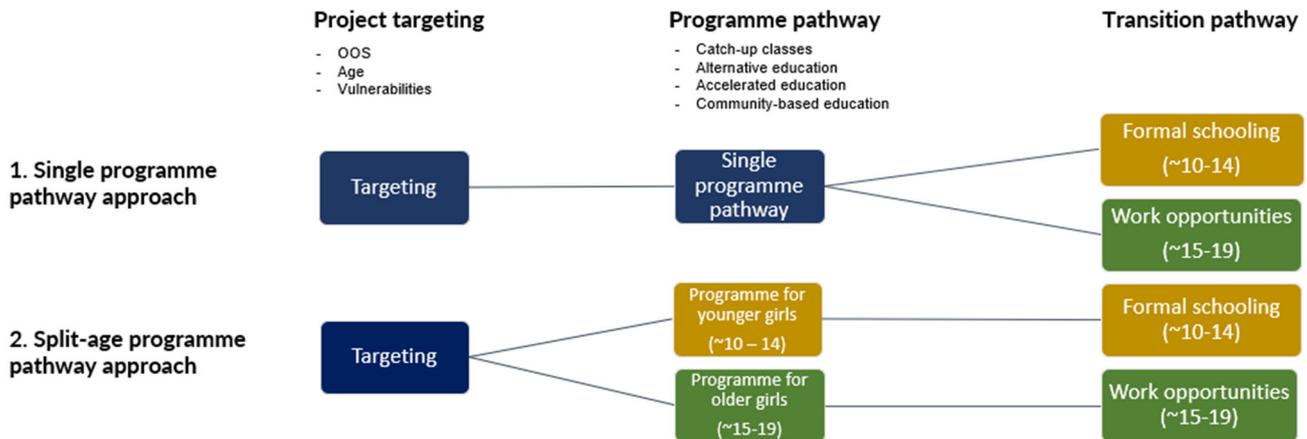
	With single programme approach	Younger girls	Older girls
Accelerated education programme	1	4	0
Alternative education programme	0	0	5
Catch-up programme	0	1	0
Community-based education	0	0	0
Mix: Accelerated and Alternative education	3	1	1
Mix: Catch-up and Alternative education	2	0	1
Mix: Alternative education and Community-based education	1	0	0
Total	7	6	7

Source: Table created by the authors based on analysis of project documentation, using classifications in Table 1.

⁶ EAGER (Sierra Leone).

LNGB projects either offer one programme pathway for girls irrespective of their age (“**single programme pathway**”) or offer two separate projects (“**split-age programme pathway**”) – one for younger adolescents aged 10 to 14 and one for older adolescents aged 15 to 19 (*Figure 2*).

Figure 2: Project and transition pathways by age groups



Source: Diagram created by the authors based on analysis of project documentation and key informant interviews.

3.2. Research methods

This section presents a short description of the research design and methods for this study. For the full research design and methods see *Annex B* (Research Design and Methodology).

All 14 LNGB projects were included for analysis for this study as part of the portfolio level review. Of these 14 LNGB projects, three LNGB projects were selected as case studies for more in-depth study and included the collection of primary qualitative data. Information on the criteria used to select the three projects is presented in *Section 3.3.1*.

The portfolio-level review drew on three sources of data:

- Interviews with all 14 LNGB project IPs;
- A review of project documentation, including external evaluation and technical monitoring reports, GEC II FM documentation, and GEC II project websites;
- Secondary analysis of quantitative external evaluation data at baseline and either midline or endline (depending on availability) collected between 2019 and 2023. This included 17,664 girls from 30 cohorts⁷ across 13 projects⁸ with baseline data suitable for analysis, and 11,841 girls from 22 cohorts from 11 projects with available follow-up data (either midline or endline).

The case studies drew on three main sources of data:

- A review of project documentation, including external evaluation and technical monitoring reports, GEC II FM documentation, and GEC II project websites which related to the three case study LNGB projects;
- Monitoring data collected by project implementers;
- Primary qualitative data:
 - ‘River of Life’ drawings (see *Box 1*) and semi-structured interviews with 98 girls who participated in the LNGB projects;

⁷ Each project enrolls beneficiaries by cohort. In most cases, cohorts were grouped together against a timeline of when the intervention was received e.g., Cohort 1 enrolled on the programme and completed; following this Cohort 2 enrolled on the programme and completed and so on and so forth. In addition to the enrolment of cohorts by timeline, some projects assigned girls to a specific programme pathway which was often contingent on their age (see *Figure 2*).

⁸ The only project excluded from the study is *STAGES+* in Afghanistan due to data not being accessible in a suitable format that allowed for analysis and a lack of accompanying data collection tools and codebooks for reading the data.

- 45 in-depth interviews (IDIs), including with LNGB educators (13), formal school teachers (14), vocational trainers/ mentor (10) and local downstream partners whom the project IPs partnered with (8);
- 16 key informant interviews (KIIs) with government officials at both the national and sub-national levels; and
- 12 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with community members, including 6 female-only FGDs and 6 male-only FGDs.

3.3. Sampling Design and Procedure for case studies

3.3.1. Case-study selection

Criteria used to select the three case studies from the 14 LNGB projects include:

- The LNGB project had to offer more than one transition pathway.
- The LNGB project had to have available quantitative data.
- The context in which the LNGB project was operating had to make it feasible to collect primary data.
- Geographic diversity across the selected projects.

Of the six projects that met these criteria, IPs for two (*Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE)* and *Teach and Educate Adolescent Girls with Community Help (TEACH)*) indicated that they did not have the capacity to support the study in collecting primary data.⁹ The IP for one project (*Closing the Gap*) had agreed to be part of this study but following the devastating floods that affected one-third of Pakistan in August 2022, primary data collection for this project were no longer considered feasible as the project was conducting emergency relief efforts.

The final three projects selected were as follows:

- Strategic Approaches to Girls' Education (STAGE), implemented by World Education in Ghana.
- Education for Life (EfL), implemented by Action Aid International Kenya.
- Accelerating Life Skills Literacy and Numeracy of Out of School Adolescent Girls (Aarambha), implemented by People in Need in Nepal.

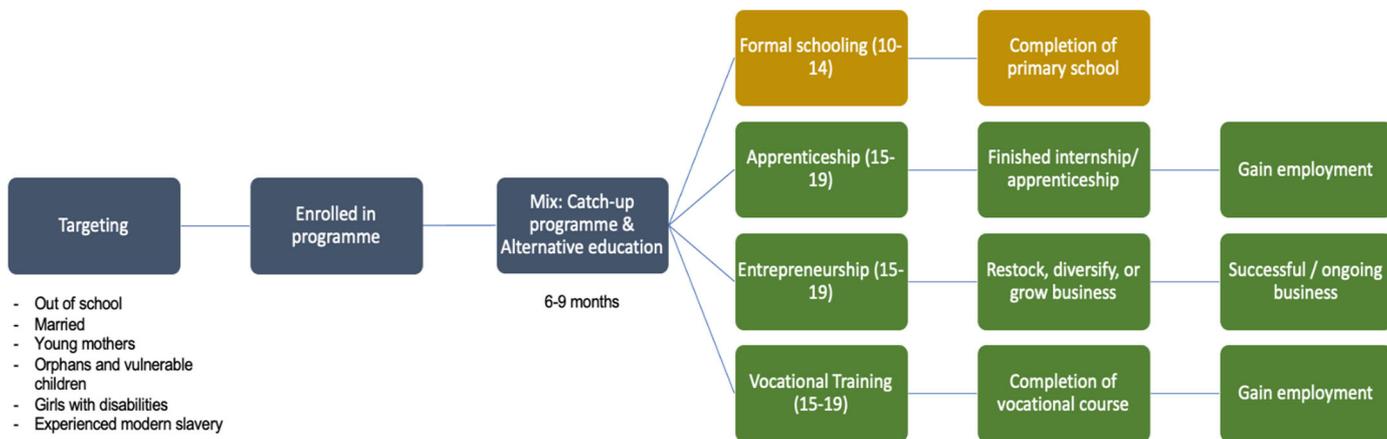
Figure 3 illustrates in more detail the transition pathways offered to girls by each of the projects. The information shows how these transition pathways are often related to the age of the girl. This shows that, across the three projects, younger adolescent girls (aged 10-14) are only able to transition into formal schooling pathways. For *EfL*, older adolescent girls (aged 15-19) had the choice of transitioning into apprenticeship, entrepreneurship, or vocational training. The project did not offer older adolescent girls the choice of transitioning to formal schooling. However, it should be noted that while the *EfL* project delineates transition pathways according to age, the project monitoring data suggest that 49% of 10–14-year-olds selected a work-related pathway (predominantly in entrepreneurship or apprenticeships). Similarly, a small share (2%) of 15-19-year-olds have transitioned into formal schooling. The *STAGE* project design pre-determined that older adolescent girls would transition into entrepreneurship activities in most cases, although in a very small number of cases girls were able transition into further vocational skills training. In the case of the *Aarambha* project, older adolescent girls either transitioned into formal schooling or vocational training.

⁹The IP for the *SAGE* project declined to participate in the study due to limited team capacity as the external endline evaluation of the project was due to be taking place in June 2023. The IP for the *TEACH* project stated that the project had finished in October 2022. Therefore, by the time fieldwork would have commenced for this study (in January 2023), there would have been no field staff to facilitate data collection. Additionally, extreme weather conditions in Balochistan during the expected fieldwork period would have meant communities and fieldwork sites would have been inaccessible to the data collection team.

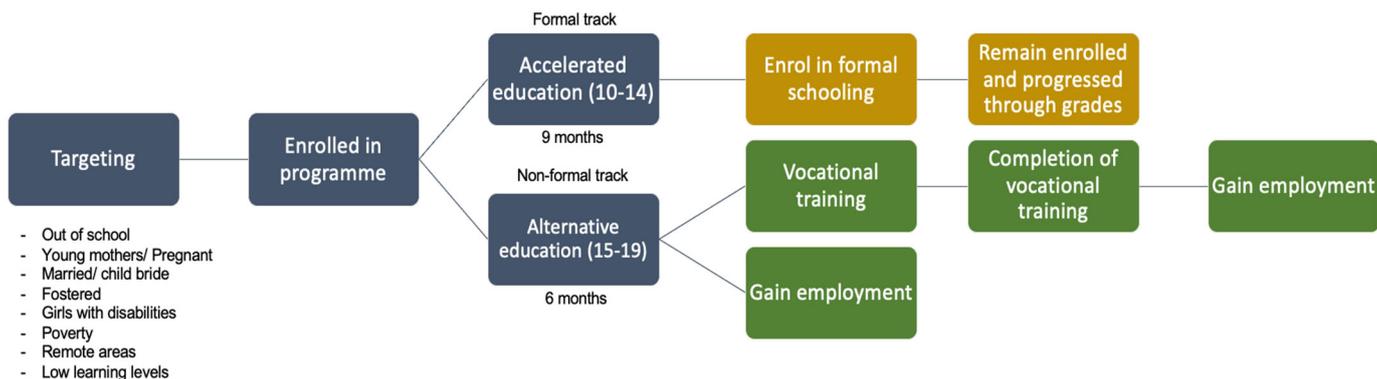
Figure 3: Project programme, transition, and post-transition design



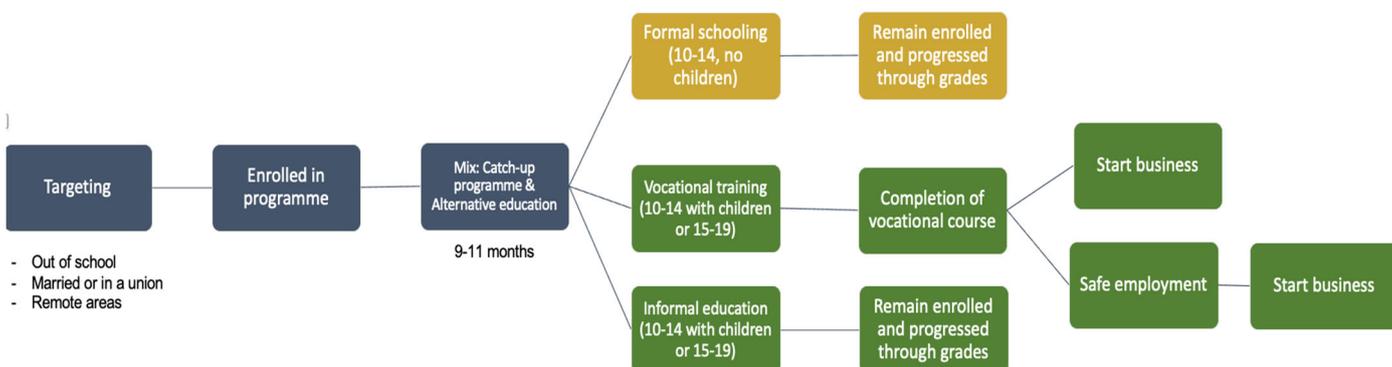
Education for Life (EfL) - Kenya



Strategic Approaches to Girls' Education (STAGE) - Ghana



Accelerating Life Skills Literacy and Numeracy of Out of School Adolescent Girls – Aarambha - Nepal



Source: Diagram created by the authors based on analysis of project documentation and key informant interviews.

3.3.2. Location and learning centre selection

In each of the three countries, two geographical locations were identified. One learning centre per geographical location was selected, meaning there were a total of two learning centres per country. For this study, a learning centre is defined as the physical centre used by each of the selected LNGB projects to implement GEC II programming.

The criteria for selecting learning centres were as follows:

- Learning centres were ones from which girls from the latest cohort (Cohort 3) had graduated.
- The learning centre/ community had to have a minimum number of five girls for each of the transition pathways offered by the LNGB project, together with at least five girls who had dropped out of the LNGB project before completing. The transition pathways offered across the three projects included formal schooling, technical and vocational education/ apprenticeships, and/ or entrepreneurship/ income-generating activities.

The research team liaised with the IPs to identify two learning centres per country that met these criteria, namely, counties in Kenya – Garissa and Kilifi; districts in Nepal – Bara and Rautahat; and regions in Ghana – Upper East and Upper West.

3.3.3. Stakeholders selected for primary data collection

Table 3: Summary of research participants and methods summarises the data collection tool used for each of the research participants included in the study, the duration of each method, the numbers targeted and reached, and the approach to data collection.

Girls engaged by the LNGB project

Girls were selected from the latest cohort of girls who had graduated (Cohort 3). The rationale for this was, firstly, these girls were more likely to still be in the immediate vicinity, and available. Secondly, they would have a better sense of recall when asked about the LNGB project, having graduated more recently compared with earlier cohorts. The aim was to include at least 10 girls per transition pathway (formal schooling, and skills- or work-related), and 10 girls who had dropped out before completing the LNGB project, with an overall target of 100.

Girls were selected from each of these groups according to the following criteria:

- Focusing on the most marginalised, based on available data. Given information available, this meant those selected included girls who had children, girls who were married, and those who had a disability.
- Including a mix of younger and older adolescents on each transition pathway, as well as amongst those who dropped out of the LNGB project.

Overall, 98 adolescent girls were included in the study. With the exception of dropouts, the number reached met (or slightly exceeded) the intended numbers. For *EfL* in Kenya and *Aarambha* in Nepal, fewer dropouts were identified (five in Kenya; and eight in Nepal). This was due to challenges IPs faced of tracking dropouts once they had left the project.

Community members/ leaders

Two FGDs per learning centre were facilitated with community members/ leaders who were directly engaged with the LNGB projects. These were divided according to gender and made up of 6-8 community members, all aged under 60.

LNGB educators

All educators who had taught the girls selected for this study were interviewed. In most cases, only one or two educators had taught the girls in each project. The number interviewed was less than half anticipated as, in all cases, the actual number of educators available in each learning centre was less than the original target.

Transition pathway providers

Transition pathway providers include formal schooling, skills trainers/ master artisans and business coaches who taught, trained, or mentored girls after they had transitioned from the LNGB project. The transition pathway providers were identified from a list of people who were directly linked to the girls selected for this study. A smaller number were interviewed than intended due to challenges in locating them.

Government officials

Key informant interviews were conducted with national and subnational government officials who supported relevant education programmes, and who had experience of engaging with each of the three LNGB projects. The officials were identified with the support of the IPs of each of the projects.

Downstream partners

Interviews were undertaken with local implementing partners of the projects within the geographical vicinity. They were identified with the support of the project IPs.

Table 3: Summary of research participants and methods

Research participants	Data collection tool	Duration	Numbers targeted	Total numbers reached	Approach
Girls enrolled in the project	River of Life	2 to 3 hours	100 girls: 40 in Kenya 30 in Ghana 30 in Nepal	98 girls: ¹⁰ 38 in Kenya 31 in Ghana 29* in Nepal	The River of Life was conducted with groups of approximately five girls each per learning centre. Girls were organised according to the transition pathway: 4. Formal education 5. Vocational Training/ apprenticeship 6. Employment/ entrepreneurship A group was also held with girls who had dropped out of the project.
	Semi-structured interview	1 hour	100 girls (as above)	98 girls (as above)	All girls who participated in the group workshops were involved in individual interviews.
Community members/ representatives	Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	1.5 to 2 hours	12 FGDs (4 per project)	12 FGDs (4 per project)	Groups of 6 and 8 community members engaged in the projects were selected, with separate groups for males and females.
Educators	In-depth interview	1 hour	24 educators (8 per project)	13 educators: 7 in Kenya 2 in Ghana 4 in Nepal	All educators who taught girls selected for this study were interviewed.
Transition pathway providers	In-depth interview	1 hour	40 transition pathway providers: 16 in Kenya 12 in Ghana 12 in Nepal	24 transition pathway providers: 10 in Kenya 6 in Ghana 8 in Nepal	Representatives from each transition pathway who either taught or mentored the girls were selected.
Government officials	In-depth interview	1 hour	18 officials (6 per project)	16 government officials: 6 in Kenya 5 in Ghana 5 in Nepal	Government officials from sub-national and national levels of government who have been directly engaged by IPs of the selected LNGB projects were interviewed.
Downstream partners	In-depth interview	1 hour	6 (2 per project)	8 downstream partners: 2 in Kenya 2 in Ghana 4 in Nepal	Implementing partners on the ground who work in the counties/ districts/ regions that were selected for this study.

3.4 Participatory methods

Given the objective of this study is to explore the perspectives, choice, and agency of the most marginalised adolescent girls, an important part of this study's design was to utilise data methods which captured their voices. To do this, the study adopted a participatory data collection method that addressed the power dynamics that contribute to marginalisation of these groups, and consequently makes their perspectives visible (Pincock & Jones, 2020).

Specifically, the research used the **River of Life participatory method** (see *Box 1*). A "River of Life" workshop with girls was organised according to which pathway they transitioned into after completing the education programme in

¹⁰ A breakdown of girls reached according to their transition pathway and those that had dropped out is included in *Annex Table 18*.

the learning centre (whether on the formal schooling or work-related pathway). A separate workshop was held for girls who had dropped out before completing the LNGB project. Individual semi-structured interviews were carried out with all girls who attended the River of Life workshop.

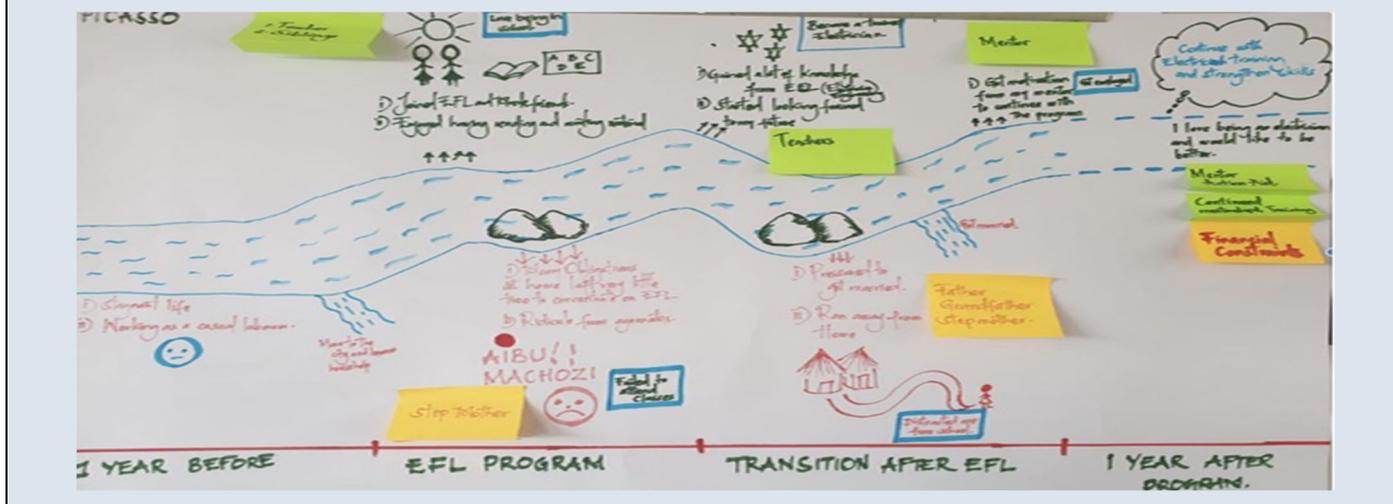
In places where the Study has presented an individual girl's River of Life photo and the girl's accompanying story (see [Sections 5, 6, and 7](#)), the report has used pseudonyms to present the girl's story.

Box 1: River of Life

The River of Life is a participatory method which allows for adolescents to map out and provide critical insights into their lives ([Pridmore & Yates, 2006](#)). Using the metaphor of a river, participants are asked to capture their experiences of services, peer and family influences, barriers and negative experiences, and enablers and empowering experiences at different stages of their lives ([Percy-Smith, 2011](#)). For the purpose of this study, the method enabled girls to unpack the choices (or lack of) they experience during their life journeys, changes over time, stakeholder influences and aspirations for the future. The main information that was collected included:

- A girl's education and livelihoods journey which delineates between the periods before, during and after their participation in the LNGB project;
- The obstacles/ enablers girls identify in their individual education and livelihoods journeys;
- Which stakeholders girls identified as enablers/ barriers to their education and livelihood journeys;
- What girls identify would have been their alternative pathways; and
- Girls' aspirations one year into the future.

An example of a River developed during the training session with data collection partners in Kenya is presented below.



3.5 Ethics and safeguarding

The study planned to engage with girls under the age of 18 years old, and therefore designed plain language statements consent and assent forms for girls and their caregivers to ensure meaningful consent (and assent) prior to their participation in the study. Detailed information about the planned research was shared, including about the content and purpose of the interview, possible benefits and risks of participation, the anticipated uses of the data, how data will be stored and kept secure, and details of how participants can remove their data at a later stage. The forms designed by the study team were translated into local languages by our data collection partners and distributed to all participants including girls (and their caregivers) by our local data collection partners in collaboration with the implementing partners.

Given the study's focus on the most marginalised girls, additional safeguarding measures were put in place due to the additional vulnerabilities these girls were likely to experience. A psychosocial counsellor who would have the experience to know how to respond to trauma that girls may exhibit when responding to the facilitator was available at the River of Life workshop and individual interviews with girls. Where the psycho-social counsellor identified instances of trauma, they were able to provide girls with professional support and submitted information as part of the safeguarding procedures, where relevant. Specialised training was also mandatory for all enumerators, supervisors,

and psychosocial counsellors who would be working with marginalised populations. This training offered specific considerations and protocols for working with adolescents with vulnerable characteristics, and what they must do in the event of a safeguarding concern.

During the data collection and analysis phase, any potential welfare or safeguarding incidents were raised by the data collection partners, fieldwork manager or Independent Evaluation (IE) team. These were reported to the FCDO, the FM, and the respective IPs.

For further information see [Annex B](#) and [Annex D](#).

3.6 Limitations

Several limitations should also be considered in interpreting the findings of this study.

LNGB portfolio-level

Secondary analysis of projects' external evaluation data

- The external evaluation data were collected when girls were attending the LNGB learning centres, so before girls' transition into schooling or employment opportunities. As a result, this source does not have data on girls' actual transition pathways. To overcome this data gap, when we analysis the data by pathway, we do so by making assumptions of girls' transition pathways based on the projects' aims for girls based on their age group, which are reported in evaluation reports.¹¹
- Apart from the *Aarambha* project, the LNGB Window projects did not use comparison groups as part of their evaluation designs for ethical reasons.¹² Consequently, we cannot attribute gains in learning outcomes to project interventions.
- While projects targeted girls based on specific criteria of marginalisation, not all these criteria were part of the data collection information used for the evaluations (e.g., being affected by violence and conflict). Therefore, we are limited by the reported data (e.g., being married, mother, orphan, and disabled).
- As projects followed different targeting and sampling strategies, they do not always collect the same data. Maintaining a consistent sample by including only girls with available data across all variables led to a significant reduction in sample size. Therefore, the analysis uses the girls with available data for the variables in question and as such the sample included changes across these variables.
- Projects assess learning using the standardised and structured Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) and Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) tests. Projects used a different selection of subtasks from these standardised assessments. Analysis could only be done for common subtasks administered across all projects. For projects that administered subtasks not used by other projects, these subtasks were used for calculation of overall literacy and numeracy, but not reported separately at a subtask level.
- Changes in outcomes related to agency and choice can only be conducted on a subset of projects and are not representative of the portfolio. Hence, these results should be read as specific to the included projects, rather than as a portfolio-wide analysis.

LNGB case studies

Project documentation

- While the primary data collected were from the latest Cohort of girls (Cohort 3) for all three LNGB case study projects, at the time of writing the latest endline evaluation reports available for the documentary analysis from the *Aarambha* and *STAGE* projects related to Cohort 2.

Monitoring data

- Monitoring data for *STAGE* girls are gathered by each downstream partner using semi-standardised forms. The information is collected using girls' names rather than girls' unique identifier. This presented a challenge at the time of merging across different sources.

¹¹ Projects identify preferred transition pathways based on age (see [Figure 2](#)), with younger girls typically transitioning to formal school and older girls to the work opportunities pathway. We analysed data separately for younger and older girls to mirror this distinction.

¹² Due to the marginalised nature of targeted girls, it is considered unethical to randomise some to treatment condition and withhold the others from joining school or vocational institutions. Full information can be sourced from the FM on this decision if required.

- Data from Cohort 1 of the non-formal track in *STAGE* were excluded from the analysis as there was no information on girls' characteristics and vulnerabilities, nor dropouts.

Primary data

- The purposive selection strategy used to select the three projects for inclusion in this study means that findings are not necessarily representative of the wider LNGB portfolio.

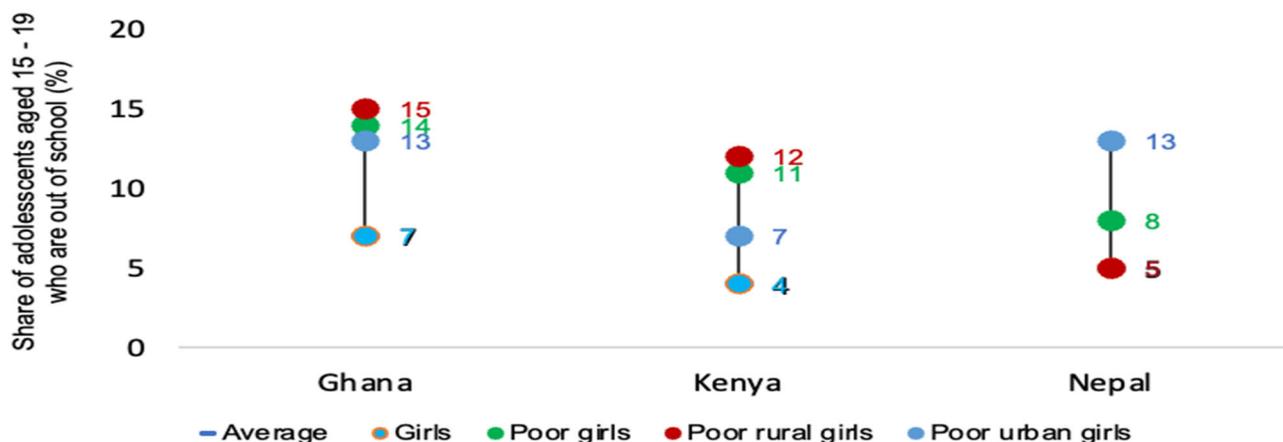
A detailed discussion of limitations and mitigation strategies is available in [Annex B](#) (Research Design and Methodology).

4. Education pathways in the context of Kenya, Ghana, and Nepal

This provides an overview of the macro-level political environment within which the three LNGB projects have been implemented and sets out the policy environment within which education pathways beyond formal schooling operate in Ghana, Kenya, and Nepal. It also highlights macro-level challenges within these contexts. This section identifies ways in which the broader regulatory and policy environment is conducive to the three projects that are the focus of this study. It examines how these projects have engaged with government and aligned with national initiatives. The evidence draws on a review of secondary documentation and interviews with government stakeholders across the portfolio.

Despite international and national commitments to ensuring that children and adolescents have access to education, in all three countries a sizeable number of children and adolescents remain out of school. In Ghana, approximately 1.2 million children aged 4-to-17 years old were estimated to not be attending school in 2021 ([Ghana Statistical Service, 2022](#)); In Nepal, 0.8 million children and adolescents were estimated to be out of school in 2017 ([UNESCO-UIS, 2023](#)). In Kenya, more than 2 million children and adolescents aged 4-to-17 years old were estimated to be out of school in 2021 ([UNESCO, 2021](#)). In general, girls from poor households and those living in rural areas are more likely to be out of school in the three countries ([Figure 4](#)).¹³

Figure 4: Out-of-school rates for adolescents of lower secondary school age, latest year available



Source: Authors' calculations using data from UNESCO-WIDE database. Accessed April 2023.

Note: The indicator relates to the share of adolescents of lower secondary school age neither primary nor secondary school.

Adolescent girls are also less likely to be in employment and training compared to their male counterparts in all three countries. The ILO estimates that the share of female youth not in education, employment and training was 25.3% in Ghana, 25% in Kenya and 45.8% in Nepal. The equivalent for male youth was 20.8%, 12.2% and 21.2% respectively ([ILO, 2023](#)). For those who are currently employed, the female workforce is more likely to be in vulnerable employment compared to their male counterparts. In Ghana, 78% of women in employment are likely to fall in this category, compared to 63% of men. The equivalent for Kenya was 69%, compared with 52% for men. For Nepal, it was 90% and 62% for men ([World Bank, 2023](#)).

¹³ Many adolescents are often still in primary school. Data collected by UNICEF for sub-Saharan Africa found that only 29.2% of the poorest adolescents aged 10-to-19 years of age were in secondary school in sub-Saharan Africa. Of the remainder, 16.4% had never been to school, 11.9% had dropped out of primary school, 33.7% were in primary school, and 8% dropped out of secondary school (UNICEF adapted data in [Zubairi & Rose, 2018](#)).

4.1. Legislation and policies

Ghana, Kenya, and Nepal have all ratified the key international treaties which guarantee the right to education for all¹⁴ and have the legal and policy frameworks that guarantee every child the right to free and compulsory basic education and provisions to reach and support the education of marginalised children.¹⁵ All three countries have also implemented legislation and policies relating to the provision of education programmes for out-of-school children and adolescents.

In Ghana, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) programmes have been active in the delivery of *CBE* provision for the past 25 years ([Carter et al., 2023](#)). The Complementary Education Agency and the Ghana Education Service in the government are also key stakeholders responsible for supporting complementary basic education with two government agencies spearheading the delivery of these programmes. The Ghanaian government has implemented a range of regulations (e.g., the CBE policy 2012, and Complementary Education Bill 2019) and policies related to the education of those outside of the formal school system. There are also policies specifically related to addressing the issue of girls dropping out of schools due to early pregnancy (The 2018 Guidelines for Prevention of Pregnancy among School Girls and Facilitation of Re-entry into School after Childbirth 2018).

According to the endline evaluation report ([UKAID, 2022b](#)) and supported by government official interviews, the *STAGE* project in Ghana has been unique in its engagement with government officials in several ways. At the level of regional governance, officials indicated that they have worked with *STAGE* to mobilise the communities that they would be engaging with. In addition, the project has also helped build the capacity of officials working in non-formal education according to key stakeholders interviewed. According to government officials, as part of this capacity building, *STAGE* staff have been noted to have helped officials build relationships with other government departments, including in an aim to facilitate cross-sectoral dialogue.

In Kenya, the government has been similarly pro-active in providing a conducive environment. In 2009, it launched the Alternative Provision of Basic Education and Training (APBET) Policy as the main framework which guides the provision of alternative basic education in Kenya. The latest statistics estimate that APBET institutions, which often reach the most underserved communities, reach more than two million learners across Kenya ([Umutoniwase, 2021](#)).

In 2020, the Government of Kenya initiated the Alternative Education harmonisation process in recognition that many non-governmental organisations were responding to the increased demand for alternative education interventions in an uncoordinated manner. Following this in 2021, the Ministry of Education approved the Alternative Education harmonisation process.

Together with government, the *EfL* project was among those engaged in developing the guidelines, along with Norwegian Refugee Council, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and RefuSHE¹⁶ ([UKAID, 2022c](#)). As well as engagement at the national level, the *EfL* project also engaged with government officials in the five counties they worked in to help support sub-national policies. In Kilifi, for example, the team reported supporting the drafting of the teenage pregnancy campaign, gender and economic empowerment policy and child protection policy. By the end of the project, *EfL* had also intensified its partnerships with Adult & Continuing Education as well as with the departments responsible for skills development training and Special Needs Education ([UKAID, 2022c](#)). There are other policies that also support projects aimed at supporting out-of-school children and adolescents, such as *EfL*, in fulfilling their aims. For example, the 2020 National Guidelines for School Re-Entry in Early Learning and Basic Education was mentioned by one government official interviewed as being particularly important given that early pregnancy has been highlighted as the main reasons why adolescent girls drop out of school in Kenya (Government official, National level, Kenya; [Africa Education Watch, 2022](#)).

The Nepalese government has endeavoured to design and adopt policies to promote the education of those outside the formal schooling system for many years. In 2007, Nepal published its Non-Formal Education Policy that set out clearly formulated strategies on non-formal education provision in the country and proposed that learning centres (established in 2002) be the venue through which non-formal education is delivered. It also emphasised the expansion of non-formal education resource centres and technical vocational schools ([GoN, 2007](#)). The 2007 Non-

¹⁴ All three countries are signatories to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention of the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Convention against Discrimination in Education, and Convention of the Rights of the Child.

¹⁵ For example: Ghana: 1992 Constitution, Article 25(1); Ghana RTE 2012, Ghana Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) 1996; Kenya: 2010 Constitution Article 55(a), the 2013 Basic Education Act, Part IV; Article 39 of Kenya's Basic Education Act. Nepal: Constitution (2018), legal frameworks to help consolidate the provision of non-formal education e.g., Act 16 of the 2018 *Compulsory and Free Education Act*.

¹⁶ RefuSHE is a non-profit organisation operating in Nairobi with a specific focus on working with refugee children and youth aged 13 to 23 years old. As part of its wider remit, it provides education to participants.

Formal Education Policy placed a strong emphasis on the need to collaborate with NGOs and INGOs working in the non-formal sector to ensure implementation was achieved in a coordinated manner (GoN, 2007). Nepal's 2016-2023 School Sector Development Plan and 2022-2032 National Education Plan have also put emphasis on non-formal education, understanding that non-formal education programmes can help bring out-of-school children and adolescents back into formal schooling, and provide alternative basic education for older children (GoN, 2016).

Since 2021, the government has specifically recognised the importance of data collection and management and the role that these monitoring and evaluation efforts play in supporting non-formal education, through incorporating this aspect within the national data management systems (namely Education Management Information System (EMIS)). This was in order to aid government officials to better pinpoint the population groups that are being left out of mainstream education, and design and implement education strategies that are more relevant to their needs (UNESCO, 2023).

The Government of Nepal has implemented several non-formal education and skills development programmes (GoN, 2014), with organisations such as UNICEF also playing a critical role in the provision of these programmes (Chavez et al., 2019). Communities and village development committees were highlighted as being critical stakeholders in the non-formal education sector in this context. There has been evidence of cooperation between community learning centres and schools to enact mobilisation, assess needs, manage/ implement, and monitor non-formal programmes in the community. This is supported by government officials interviewed for this study, who noted the important role that communities play in the establishment and the proper functioning of both formal and non-formal schools.

4.2. Challenges in implementing education programmes beyond formal schooling

4.2.1. Financing and resourcing

In Ghana, Kenya and Nepal, government public expenditure on education programmes beyond formal schooling is less than 1% of the education budget based on the latest data available. In 2018, the Government of Ghana pledged to take over the *CBE* programme (that was originally provided by NGOs with funding from donors). It committed to earmark 1% of its total basic education budget to fund *CBE* programmes. However, just 0.06% of the 2022 basic education budget was allocated towards its implementation (Montrose, 2022). One official interviewed estimated that the shortage in funding has led to only one-quarter of the out-of-school children targeted by the *CBE* programme having been reached (Government official, National level, Ghana). In Kenya, the Directorate of Adult & Continuing Education receives an annual sum of Ksh. 80 million (equivalent to just under GBP 0.5 million) – which was approximately 0.1% of the total education budget in financial year 2019/2020 (Silah, 2019). In Nepal the latest sector plan shows that for both non-formal education and lifelong learning the government plans to dedicate Npr. 1,618 million (equivalent to GBP 9.6 million) for the financial year 2026/ 2027 (GoN, 2022). This is estimated to be just 0.8% of the education budget in 2022 (UNESCO, 2023).

The shortage of funding has had a knock-on effect on the quality of provision: A challenge identified in an interview with a national government official in Kenya was that instructors or teaching staff on the government payroll who retired were not being replaced, resulting in an over-reliance on volunteers. The main challenges facing the Adult & Continuing Education sector were the lack of qualified teachers, high turnover of teachers and volunteer educators, inadequate facilities and the irrelevance of curricula offered to participants attending Adult & Continuing Education centres (GoK, 2019). The inadequacy of learning materials was also identified, with these materials being provided using a cost sharing arrangement (Government official, National level, Kenya). In addition, Adult & Continuing Education centres use community infrastructure (e.g., social halls, churches, schools) meaning that “*when the owners are using their premises, the learners lack the opportunity to continue their learning*” (Government official, National level, Kenya). An independent evaluation of the Global Partnership for Education’s country-level support concluded that APBET schools “*could benefit from more comprehensive strategies to ensure they receive a quality education*” (Rawal et al., 2020; pg. 70). In Nepal, government officials noted that non-formal centres lacked the resources to be more inclusive, with there being a need for policy to focus more specifically on gender (safety, female teachers, child-friendly environments, and the provision of sanitary facilities for girls in these settings).¹⁷

¹⁷ Government officials from Ghana interviewed for this study did not explicitly discuss the negative consequences of poor funding. However, similar challenges are likely given that the budget available for *CBE* is much lower than what has been targeted.

Skills development opportunities are limited: In Ghana, the scarcity of places available to provide skills development is inhibited by the limited infrastructure available ([Amedome & Fiagbe, 2013](#)). In Kenya, there is a shortage of TVET centres which is further exacerbated by these centres lacking the facilities to support girls with disabilities or those with children (Government official, Kilifi County, Kenya). The scarcity in infrastructure is at odds with the government drive towards increasing enrolment on skills development pathways to support goals as set out under Vision 2030 which targets an expansion of the blue-collar sector and creation of more jobs in the formal sector. In Nepal, there are just 50,000 places in TVET centres compared with 600,000 at higher secondary level. For adolescents who do not complete secondary school (estimated to be 80% of adolescents), the lack of places at TVET centres means students have to travel longer journeys, putting girls at greater risk of harm ([Paudel, 2019](#)).

Transitions to work through a skills training route have been perceived as inferior compared with formal schooling pathways: In Kenya, a government official interviewed noted that the perception of the inferiority of the skills training route has had consequences for who is favoured when government scholarships are issued, with students progressing through the formal school system being favoured over those who pursue skills training (Government official, Kilifi County, Kenya). Government and community perceptions towards vocational education have reportedly improved in part due to the *EfL* project which one government official indicated had been due to the project's success in helping to elevate its status as a viable alternative pathway to formal schooling (Government official, Kilifi County, Kenya). The *EfL* endline evaluation supports this, reporting a change in attitudes among government agencies to vocational training, which has also helped change community perceptions ([UKAID, 2022c](#)). Similarly, in Ghana past studies have pointed to the stigmatisation associated with skills development, with one study concluding the root causes of these perceptions were due to the curriculum deficiency of these programmes, inadequate funding of TVET centres and the poor linkage of skills development to industry ([Essel et al., 2014](#)). In Nepal, one study concluded that 38% of respondents perceived TVET programmes as inferior to the formal schooling route for students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds ([Adhikari et al., 2022](#)).

In Ghana, despite laws to ensure CBE can lead to routes beyond formal schooling, operationalising these transitions to skills development opportunities remains weak: This is partly due to a lack of an official framework necessary to create pathways from *CBE* to routes beyond formal schooling such as skills training.

Many programmes are short-term in nature and lack sustainability: This was a criticism directed at many programmes in operation in Kenya, including the *EfL* project. According to one government official, *“Like this EfL you see if it had an intervention that is to support our students access to education and its now ending so what measures have been put so that what it was doing can continue to be done.”* (Government official, National level, Kenya). Similarly, in the case of Ghana, while the expectation was for the government to take control of funding the *CBE* programme, in reality it continues to rely on external funds which *“can be subject to change at short notice and may lack the local ownership that is essential for sustainability”* ([Carter et al., 2023](#); pg. 1).

4.2.2. Data systems

Education data and management systems tend to be weak in tracking out-of-school children and adolescents: In Ghana, identifying out-of-school children and adolescents is seen as a weakness in national data systems, making targeting beneficiaries for *CBE* difficult ([van de Waal et al., 2022](#)). The *CBE* policy indicates that the Statistics, Research, and Information Management Division would analyse the number of out-of-school children to help inform decisions relating to *CBE* programme implementation. However, currently the 2018-2030 Education Sector Plan and EMIS do not capture data on out-of-school children and adolescents, negatively affecting long-term planning, budgeting and coordination ([Montrose, 2022](#)). In Nepal, the government has plans to capture information on out-of-school children and adolescents in its data systems more accurately. However, several government spokespeople interviewed for this study pointed to how the current EMIS system captures data on this sub-set of children and adolescents and the associated problems with it. Information is collected at the start of the school year which would typically be the time when the numbers counted as being in-school are at their highest, thereby inflating the figures as children and adolescent who drop out mid-way through the school year are not captured (Government official, National level, Nepal). One study in Kenya found that there are substantial differences in the estimates of out-of-school children and adolescents between what administrative and household data report. An explanation for why this may be the case is the high participation rates in non-formal unregistered schools ([FHI 360, 2013](#)). As discussed further below in [Section 5.3](#), the IP for the *EfL* project also alludes to how the poor reliability of data created challenges in being able to effectively target girls who had never been to school.

4.2.3. Governance

Poor coordination between different government agencies weakens the implementation of policies relating to education pathway programmes: In Ghana, an improvement in the coordination between Ghana Education Service, Complementary Education Authority and Colleges of Education has been identified as being needed ([Montrose, 2022](#)). According to government officials, the number of agencies involved also leads to unnecessary competition between the various entities. In Kenya the APBET policy recognises different categories of APBET institutions. However, in the most recent 2018-2030 Education Sector Plan, the focus is quite narrow and mainly talks about Adult and Continuing Education rather than the broader APBET policy.

5. How do LNGB projects mitigate barriers that the most marginalised adolescent girls face in education?

This section explores the first research question, beginning with an overview of the barriers to education that girls faced prior to their enrolment in an LNGB project, based on a review of portfolio-wide documentary analysis, quantitative analysis and insights from our three case studies. This is followed by an examination of which girls were targeted by LNGB projects, how they were identified, and reported challenges that IPs faced in reaching those they intended to target, according to interviews with IPs. It then discusses the ways in which the project interventions helped mitigate the barriers girls previously faced in accessing education, using portfolio-wide documentary analysis and interviews with IPs, complemented by in-depth insights from the three case study contexts.

5.1. Summary of key findings

- **In total, LNGB projects aimed to reach around 230,000 girls.** All the LNGB projects specifically target marginalised out-of-school girls between 10-19 years of age.
- **The barriers to formal schooling that these girls faced were most commonly** economic (e.g., girls could not afford schooling or had to work), travel-related (e.g., long distances or safety risks) and ones related to gender social norms, resulting in early marriage and motherhood.
- **Barriers varied for younger and older adolescents:** While economic constraints negatively affected all girls, barriers relating to travel to school are more likely to negatively affect younger adolescents, while gender social norms are more likely to adversely affect older adolescents.
- **LNGB projects were successful in targeting marginalised girls using context-specific marginalisation criteria:** All 14 projects targeted girls who had never enrolled in formal school or dropped out prior to achieving basic literacy and numeracy skills. Most LNGB projects targeted **married girls** (including those waiting to enter a union¹⁸), **young mothers** (including girls who were pregnant), and **girls with disabilities**.
- **Projects in the portfolio succeeded in targeting the most marginalised girls compared with girls identified through household survey data:** In almost all cases, IPs indicated that they consulted with national-level stakeholders to help identify the areas that projects would work in, together with using available data to help with better targeting.
- **However, there were challenges in meeting the original targets of enrolling girls with particular vulnerabilities, as identified by the three case studies:** Amongst the reasons identified were girls or their families' unwillingness to enrol in the project (e.g., for married girls), or project facilities being inadequate to support girls with disabilities. Inaccurate information was also a reason cited, meaning that the planned numbers of girls with identified background characteristics were not reached.
- **All LNGB projects delivered a range of activities to support girls' academic and non-academic outcomes, as well as to improve their learning and work opportunities:** The activities varied according to context, taking into account the specific characteristics of the marginalised girls enrolled in their projects. Across the portfolio, they included academic learning-related activities, life skills sessions to support non-academic skills, training LNGB educators (including in gender-responsive pedagogy), and material or financial support.
- **The material and financial support provided by projects helped to reduce financial barriers.** The share of girls identifying economic costs as a barrier to participating in education fell from around half before their enrolment in the LNGB project to around one-fifth when participating in the LNGB project.
- Insights from the three case study projects indicate that **hygiene and dignity kits** (e.g., soap, sanitary pads, etc.) were beneficial, alongside menstrual hygiene management information provided during the life skills sessions. These were identified as particularly important in mitigating barriers to attending the learning centres during girls' menstrual cycles.

¹⁸ The term 'waiting to enter a union' (*gauna*) refers to girls who are married but do not live with their spouses till after they begin menstruation.

- **Engagement with parents and community members to sensitise them to the importance of girls' education was found to be important**, based on interviews in the three case study projects. These included face-to-face campaigns as well as radio campaigns by locally-recruited community members. In addition to encouraging families and community members to educate girls, they also spread awareness on delaying early marriage and pregnancy. Engagement of community religious leaders was also identified as important.

5.2. What barriers to education did LNGB girls face prior to joining the projects?

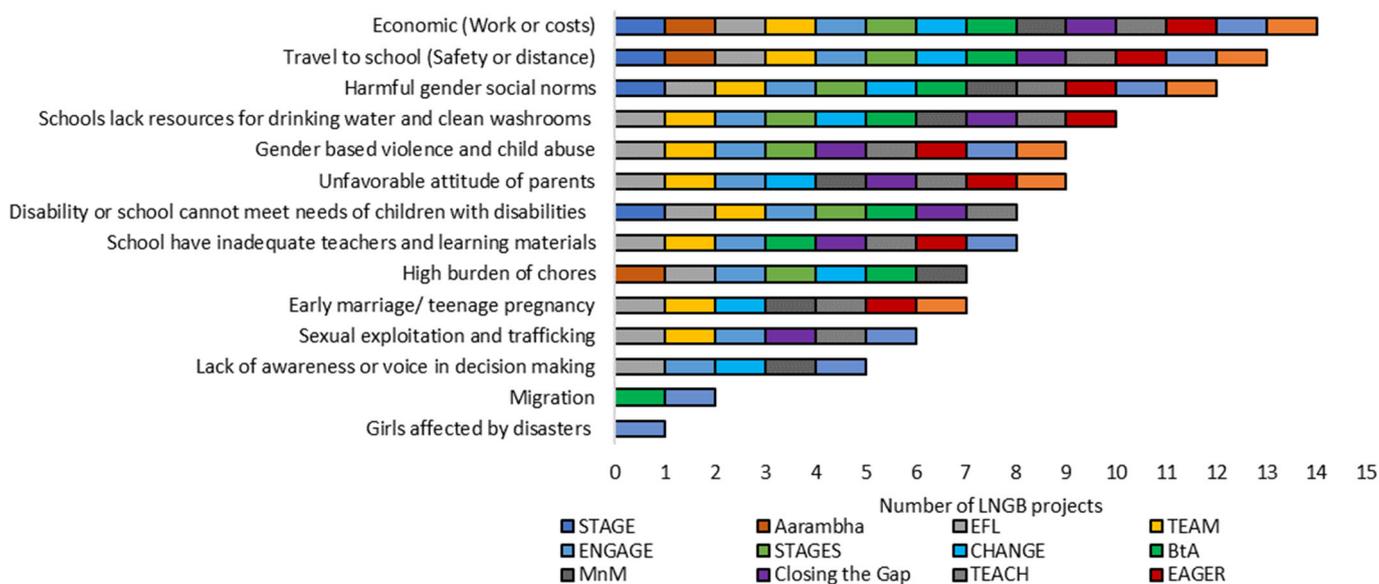
"[After dropping out of school because I had no money], I was forced by my mother to resign the house help job so that I can be married...though I was not ready, but my mother pushed me to get married."

(19-year-old girl on the Entrepreneurship track, Kilifi, Kenya)

This section reviews information across the portfolio from project documentation (*Figure 5*) and project external endline evaluation data (*Table 4*), together with interviews with girls and other stakeholders for the case studies on the barriers girls face prior to participating in LNGB projects. Of the ten countries within which the 14 LNGB projects operate, all make it a legal obligation to offer at least eight years of free education.¹⁹ In spite of governments' mandates for free education, marginalised adolescent girls continue to face various complex barriers to education.

Financial constraints were the most frequently reported barrier to schooling prior to joining the LNGB project: Based on data from 11 projects, the external evaluation data find that 64% of primary caregivers reported lack of funds to cover girls' schooling, and 29% mentioned the girls' need to work, which prevented girls from enrolling in formal schooling (*Table 4*).

Figure 5: Barriers identified by girls to participating in education before joining the LNGB project



Source: GEC II project external evaluation reports (at baseline, midline or endline, depending on data availability).

¹⁹ Ethiopia and Malawi offer eight years of free education, while it is nine years in (Ghana and Sierra Leone) and 12 (Afghanistan, Kenya, Nepal, and Pakistan) years of free education ([UNESCO-UIS, 2023](#)). There are no data for Somalia and Zimbabwe.

Table 4: Top five reasons girl did not attend school before joining the LNGB project (as reported by primary caregiver)

Reasons	All pathways	Formal schooling pathway	Work opportunities pathway
There isn't enough money to pay the costs of (name)'s schooling	64%	60%	67%
Girl needs to work, earn money or help out at home	29%	29%	29%
Transport services are inadequate	17%	20%	14%
Girl has a child or is about to have a child	9%	1%	14%
School is too far away	17%	22%	13%

Source: GEC II project external evaluation data (at baseline, midline or endline, depending on data availability). Information on the reasons for not attending school is available for 11 projects.

School accessibility was also a key barrier across most projects: A total of 17% of caregivers from 11 projects with data highlighted issues relating to inadequate transport services and long distances to school.

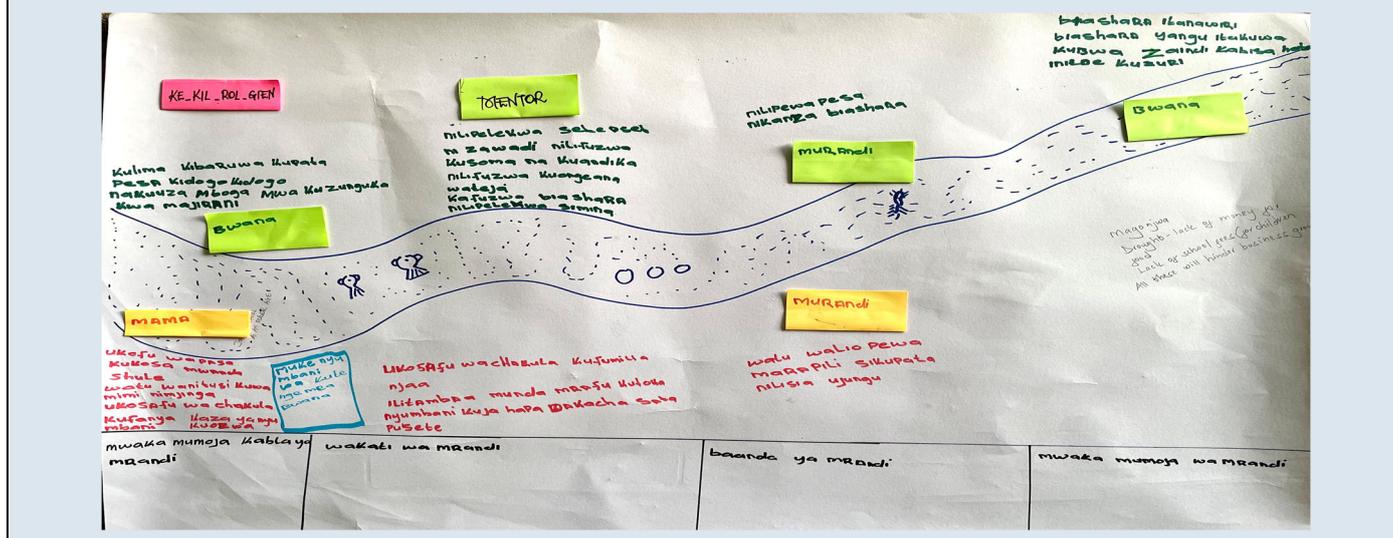
Similar barriers to education were identified in the study's three case study projects as those across the portfolio (see the example of Wambui from Kenya – *Box 2. See also Salemah's story – Box 18*): The external evaluation report for the *STAGE* project formal track identified barriers related to economic factors (work or financial costs) (95% of girls), travel (safety or distance) (42%), and harmful gender social norms (15%). For girls enrolled in *STAGE* non-formal track economic barriers (94%), social norms (6.9%) and unsafe schools (5.9%) were identified as the main barriers (*STAGE baseline report, 2020*). For those enrolled in the *EfL* project, caregivers identified the main barriers as education was too costly (39%), learning needs were not met at school (37.7%) and girls' inability to learn (36%) (*UKAID, 2019b*).²⁰ With respect to the *Aarambha* project, poverty, social isolation, early marriage, and vulnerability or experience of gender based violence were identified as the main barriers (*UKAID, 2022d*).

Box 2: In Kenya, due to extreme poverty after her father passed away, Wambui was married at a young age by her mother

Wambui is a 19-year-old and lives in the Kilifi County of Kenya. Before joining the *EfL* project, Wambui had earlier attended school and had progressed to Grade 6 when her father suddenly passed away when she was 12 years old. She was forced to drop out as the household lacked food and money. Wambui took on a job as a house maid to supplement the family income. However, when Wambui was 14 years old she was forced against her wishes into marriage by her mother as they needed the dowry of Ksh. 30,000 (GBP 166).

Wambui tells of how the mentor on the project provided her with a lot of support, and also advised her and other girls how to protect themselves from men. After completing the *EfL* project, she opened up a vegetable and goat business.

(Wambui 19-year-old on entrepreneurship track from the *EfL* project, Kilifi county, Kenya)



²⁰ The barriers differ considerably by region, however. For example, in Garissa County insecurity getting to and from school was identified by 54.8% of households, followed by marriage (54% of households).

Different types of barriers disproportionately affect younger and older adolescent girls: Based on external evaluation data across the 11 LNGB projects with data, the most frequently mentioned barriers for older girls were insufficient funds to pay for the girl's schooling, pregnancy, and marriage. Older girls are considerably more likely than younger girls to experience early marriage, motherhood, orphanhood, and disability. On the other hand, caregivers of younger adolescent girls cited distance to school as the most common reason they did not attend school. Irrespective of age, over half of the girls enrolled in LNGB projects experienced a high burden of household chores (51%).

Girls whose caregivers have no formal schooling were less likely to attend formal schooling prior to joining the project: Secondary analysis of the external evaluation data finds a correlation between the education attainment of the head of the household or primary caregiver and girls' prior experience of having attended formal school before joining the LNGB projects. Girls who live in a household where the household or primary caregiver has previous experience of schooling will also be more likely to have some previous schooling experience.

Barriers to education vary based on whether girls were never enrolled in school or enrolled but dropped out prior to completing primary schooling: Our quantitative analysis of the external evaluation data finds that the primary caregivers of girls who never enrolled in formal school were approximately twice as likely as primary caregivers of girls who enrolled but dropped out to report physical access to schooling as a reason for girls not attending school (15% compared to 8%), transport services being inadequate (20% compared to 11%) and needing special services or assistance to attend school (13% compared to 7%). Girls who have been to school but dropped out are more likely to report not having enough money as barriers to their participation in education. These results are all statistically significant.

5.3. Which girls do LNGB projects target, and how were they identified?

All 14 LNGB projects specifically target marginalised out-of-school girls between 10-19 years of age. In total approximately 230,000 girls were reached by the 14 LNGB projects.²¹

Typically, LNGB projects target those who have never been enrolled in formal school, or those who have previously enrolled but dropped out before achieving basic literacy and numeracy skills:²² Of the 14 LNGB projects, four²³ explicitly state they prioritise girls who have never been enrolled in formal school over dropouts. The remaining 10 LNGB projects target both groups. For girls in the non-formal track of the *STAGE* project, 32% had never been to school, while 68% had some experience of education (*STAGE* monitoring data).²⁴ Approximately 15% of girls had never been to school previously in the *EfL* project ([UKAID, 2022c](#)). For *Aarambha*, 55% of those reached by the project had never been to school (*Aarambha* monitoring data).

A majority of the projects targeted married girls, girls with disabilities and young mothers: The data on beneficiary targeting criteria, from baseline external evaluation reports, show that married girls (including those waiting or in union) have been targeted by the majority of LNGB projects (11 projects), followed by girls with disabilities (10 projects), and young mothers (including girls who are pregnant) (8 projects) (*Figure 6*).

For example, *Aarambha* operates in a context where there is a high prevalence of child marriage, hence this was a key focus for the project. The five dimensions of vulnerability identified by the *EfL* project as part of who it was targeting were girls who had a disability, who were married, who were pregnant and/or who had children, experienced modern slavery, or who were a household head.

About one third of the projects target those who are defined to be “educationally marginalised”, namely girls with low learning levels, or those with no literacy and numeracy skills. For example, the *EfL* project used low learning achievement as an eligibility criterion, as determined through tests in English, Kiswahili, and Maths. The *STAGE* project specifically targeted girls who dropped out before reaching Grade 4, as the accelerated programme is designed to bring their learning level up to that of Grade 4 students in formal schools.

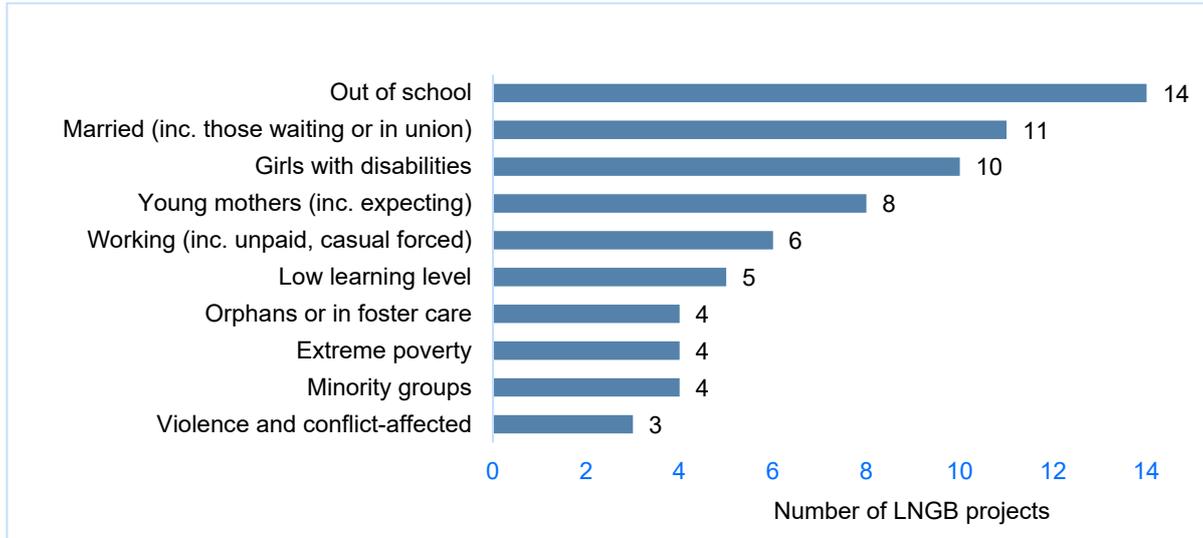
²¹ This is based on communication with the GEC Fund Manager, drawing reporting and evaluations from the 14 projects.

²² There is no standardised definition of 'drop-out' across the 14 LNGB projects.

²³ *Closing the Gap* (Pakistan), *STAGES+* (Afghanistan), *AGES* (Somalia), and *CHANGE* (Ethiopia).

²⁴ The monitoring data have no information for schooling status prior to joining the *STAGE* project for girls on the formal education track.

Figure 6: Types of marginalisation targeted by different LNGB projects



Source: GEC II project external evaluation reports (baseline reports).

Note: In addition, some projects targeted girls who do not speak the language of instruction, whose caregiver has no education, who were affected by the Ebola crisis in 2014 (*EAGER* project in Sierra Leone), who were just starting school and under 16, who practice a specific religion, or who live in a remote location.

Many of the LNGB project IPs stated that the locations and girls they targeted were based on consultation with various stakeholders and available data: In almost all cases across the portfolio, project IPs indicated that they consulted with national-level stakeholders to help identify the geographical areas that projects would work in, together with data sources to help with better targeting. In the case of the *Aarambha* project, for example, the two districts which were identified when deciding where the project would implement its activities relied on the Equity Index, which draws on EMIS and household survey data (see [Section 4.1](#)). As noted in [Section 4.2.2](#), however, one of the challenges with administrative education data is that they often do not collect data on out-of-school children and adolescents. Aside from drawing on national-level resources to help in identifying project beneficiaries, IPs also discussed worked closely with community level actors to help identify girls who were the most marginalised and to correctly identify the background characteristics of girls. For example, in the case of the *EfL* project, the process of identifying which girls would be enrolled on the project and placing them in the appropriate learning centres included six key steps. The initial steps included meeting at village and ward level and meeting with key stakeholders such as Traditional Chiefs, Civil Society Organisations, and Women Network groups. Focus group discussions were also held to help map out the village demography related to wealth, health, gender, and education status ([UKAID, 2019b](#)).

The LNGB projects succeeded in reaching adolescent girls who were more marginalised compared with the national population in their age group: For example, they reached a higher proportion of older girls who are married or are mothers compared with the overall population (using DHS data for comparison, see [Annex B](#)).²⁵ With respect to household education, a considerably higher share of household heads – both male and female – did not attain any form of education compared with the national average (using DHS data), other than Somalia.

Some IPs faced challenges in reaching some of the most marginalised girls:²⁶ The *EfL* project, for example, aimed that 30% of the girls they reached would be those with disabilities. However, only 8% were girls with disabilities ([UKAID, 2022c](#)). It had also set a goal that 70% would have never been to school. However, the actual proportion was closer to 15% ([UKAID, 2022c](#)). Similarly, the *Aarambha* project only targeted girls who were married.²⁷ However, the monitoring data suggest that only 41% of girls were married (*Aarambha* monitoring data).

Hard-to-reach locations, data inaccuracies and unavailability and socio-cultural factors were some of the reasons why certain groups of marginalised girls were not reached as planned: The *EfL* project IP signalled that the physical and human resources together with the remote contexts within which the project operated meant they did not have the capacity to support girls with severe disabilities. The IP sent the girls to other organisations who could more ably

²⁵ The project in Somalia is an exception.

²⁶ Across the portfolio, not all external evaluation online reports mapped out the number or proportion of girls by markers of marginalisation targeted versus the numbers actually enrolled on the project.

²⁷ For Cohort 1, the *Aarambha* project targeted only married girls. However, this changed from Cohort 2 onwards, with both married and unmarried adolescent girls included in the project.

support them. With respect to the low numbers of girls enrolled on the project who had never been to school, availability and accuracy of data was identified as a challenge. The *EfL* IP indicated that many of the girls enrolled in the project who were assumed to have previously never been to school had in fact attended school up until Grade 3. This was part of a larger problem identified by the IP that girls in some cases misled the IP about their age and schooling status hoping to increase their chances of being enrolled in the project. The *Aarambha* project signalled that socio-cultural factors made it difficult to enrol girls who were married despite this subset of girls being the original focus of the project.

5.4. How did LNGB projects help to mitigate the barriers girls face?

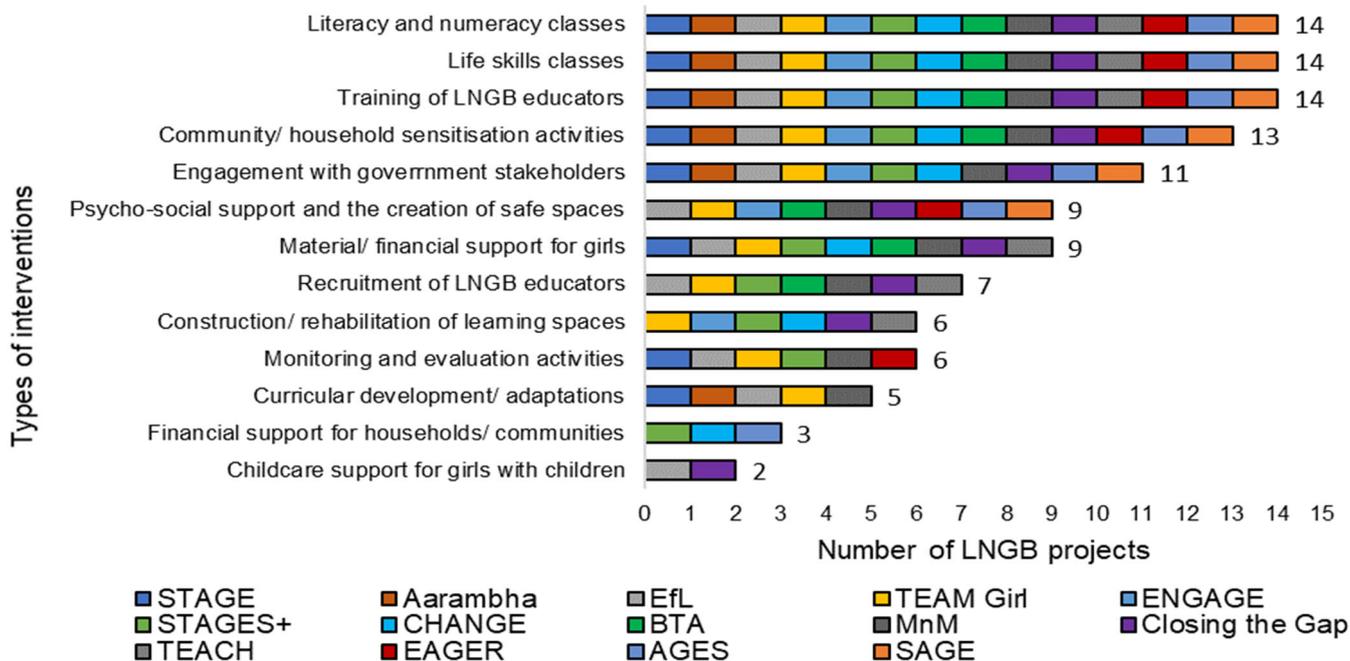
“In the past, according to our fathers spending money on a girl’s education was like pouring water into a basket (worthless).... but through STAGE we can all see what a girl can do.”
 (Female community FGD, Upper East region, Ghana)

“He [girl’s husband] told me not to go to [Aarambha learning centre] as he was newlywed and nobody from the neighbourhood went. But after sir [from Aarambha] made him understand, he told me to go.”
 (17-year-old on vocational training track, Aarambha project, Nepal)

“We didn’t know the importance of educating a girl child before but now we know. They taught our village girls different skills in their programme, they also discouraged [Female Genital Mutilation] FGM in our community and educated us [about] the risk of FGM.”
 (Vocational Training Provider, Interview, Garissa, Kenya)

All 14 LNGB projects offered the opportunity for girls to attend learning centres and, through this, provided multiple mechanisms to support girls in ways that helped to tackle systemic barriers to their education and work opportunities: IPs designed and implemented activities according to the context and types of marginalisation being addressed, as discussed below. Each IP provided a range of support at different levels of the system (namely at household, community, and government (sub-national and national) levels), which aimed at improving girls’ academic and non-academic outcomes, enabling their participation, and engagement (*Figure 7*Figure 7).

Figure 7: Main activities to support girls while they participate in the LNGB learning centre



Source: GEC II project external evaluation reports (baseline, midline or endline, depending on availability).

All 14 LNGB projects focused on girls’ academic outcomes through the provision of basic literacy and numeracy sessions: Since girls targeted by the LNGB projects had low literacy and numeracy levels at the start of the projects, projects aimed to provide girls with basic literacy skills and numeracy skills (counting, basic arithmetic,

etc.). Typically, the literacy and numeracy curricula were developed by individual IPs, and in alignment with national curricula.²⁸

All 14 projects provided training to LNGB educators: To foster positive learning environments, projects trained LNGB educators who delivered the lesson content using 'inclusive' or 'gender-responsive' approaches.²⁹ Based on our review of the project documentation, these approaches generally involved individualised teaching methods (such as paying attention to learners with difficulties, inclusive seating arrangements), peer learning, group learning and positive role modelling.³⁰

All 14 projects also paid attention to girls' non-academic outcomes through the provision of life skills sessions: Non-academic skills were highlighted as important given the multiple stresses marginalised adolescent girls on the LNGB project face ([UKAID, 2023b](#)). While the content of life skills varies from project to project to reflect the context, the objective of these classes across all 14 LNGB projects was to give girls the best chance at succeeding both in and out of school. For older adolescent girls, the content provided girls with the types of skills to prepare them for the transition to work and help lead to positive economic outcomes (e.g., communication, problem solving, critical thinking, goal setting). The *ENGAGE* project in Nepal, for example, used a model where "Big Sisters" helped mentor and inspire their "Little Sisters" to go to school by acting as role models³¹ ([UKAID, 2023c](#)). The *TEACH* project in Pakistan provided life skills support to help support non-academic learning through its *Girl Shine Project* which sought to address harmful gender social norms and gendered barriers (see [Box 3](#)).

Box 3: The *TEACH* project in Pakistan created a life skills curriculum to help address harmful gender social norms

The *TEACH* project in Pakistan incorporated the *Girl Shine* Programme into its life skills programme. The approach has mainly been used by the International Rescue Committee in humanitarian settings. It aims to build resilience, protection and empowerment for girls aged 10 to 19 years. It seeks to directly address the primary barriers to girls' education which may include violence, isolation, early marriage, and other harmful cultural practices. The approach uses a range of creative approaches to better engage with girls, with the content being designed by the girls themselves who base it on their own life experience. The *Girl Shine* Programme provided girls with the skills and knowledge to identify types of gender-based violence and seek support services if they felt that they were at risk.

Interview with TEACH implementing partner, [UKAID \(2021a\)](#).

All 14 LNGB projects incorporated the provision of activities to support girls with disabilities in their design: The types and extent of support varied by project. For example, the *EfL* project also provided assistive devices and training for teachers in inclusive education ([UKAID, 2022c](#)). See [Singal et al., 2023](#), for a full discussion of the activities included across the LNGB portfolio.

Engagement with community and household members was an integral part of the design of the vast majority of LNGB projects to help address negative gender social norms surrounding girls' education: A core assumption of the theory of change framework across the LNGB projects was the need to focus on the family and community level to address the barriers that girls face from this part of the system, and which can negatively impact their participation in education. The main project activities included sensitisation campaigns and activities to bring awareness around girls' education or practices which perpetuate harmful gender social norms. The *Aarambha* project in Nepal rolled out gender sensitisation activities and engaged with household and community members, with the specific aim of discouraging early adolescent marriage and pregnancy and underscoring the importance of education for both girls and boys. The project did this through several interventions, one of which included recruiting Change Champions, which is reported to have had some success in delaying child marriage (see [Box 4](#)).

Box 4: The *Aarambha* project (Nepal) used Community Change Champions to help address harmful gender social norms

As part of the design of the *Aarambha* project, Change Champions were recruited from the communities the project was working in to help change the harmful gender social norms that negatively affect the participation of adolescent girls in attending school. The Change Champions who were recruited by the *Aarambha* project as volunteers were typically faith leaders who had high standing in their communities. The Change Champions

²⁸ Details on the curricular content of these literacy and numeracy sessions were not available in project documentation reviewed by the IE team.

²⁹ Details on these inclusive or gender-responsive approaches (for example, training manuals used by the projects) were not available in project documentation reviewed by the IE team.

³⁰ For more information on teaching practices adopted by GEC II projects, see the [Independent Evaluation Study on Teachers and Teaching for Marginalised Girls \(2021\)](#).

³¹ For more information about these mentors, see the [Independent Evaluation Study on Educating Girls with Disabilities in the GEC II \(2023\)](#) which included the *ENGAGE* project as a case study.

delivered workshops on gender sensitisation within their communities. These focused on themes encouraging delaying harmful practices considered adverse to girls' participation in schooling, such as marriage and pregnancy. The Change Champions also conducted door-to-door visits to encourage parents and in-laws to send girls to the learning centre regularly. The evaluations found that because the Change Champions were recruited from within the same communities, they were more likely to be trusted by parents and more likely to help change negative practices.

According to the local implementing partner, the Change Champions had succeeded in stopping ten child marriages within the current cohort the *Aarambha* project (Cohort 4). They also helped modify family and community practices relating to child marriage: *"The Change Champions used to have dialogue with parents and representatives about different agendas, such as child marriage and dowry customs.... slowly they understood the importance of education."* (Downstream partner, Bara district, Nepal). Female community members discussed the project's role in sensitising them to the benefits of delaying girls' marriage to after 20 years of age (Female community FGD, Bara district, Nepal). According to the endline evaluation data, 37% of parents had changed their attitudes towards child marriage ([Aarambha endline report – C2, 2022](#)).

The use of religious places of worship to disseminate positive messages about girls' education was introduced later by the *Aarambha* project. The local implementing partner noted that the mobilisation of Hindu priests compared with Muslim imams has been easier and is an area the project is continuing to work on to try and improve, with messages disseminated through microphones at 83 temples and one mosque at the time of the interview. Information campaigns using radio or religious places of worship was mentioned as an effective medium to reach community members to change their perspectives on child marriage (Government official, Bara district, Nepal).

Interview with various stakeholders, UKAID, 2022d.

The *EAGER* project in Sierra Leone made use of radio as a means through which to reach households. The *Wae Gyai Pikin Tinap* radio programme was broadcast to help change perceptions relating to girls' education (see *Box 5*).

Box 5: The *EAGER* project in Sierra Leone addressed negative social attitudes towards girls' education by reaching caregivers through radio programmes

As part of the *EAGER* project's approach to challenging negative attitudes that prevent adolescent girls from participating in education, employment, and training, the *Wae Gyai Pikin Tinap* ("When the Girl Child Stands") radio programme was broadcast across Sierra Leone. These were 30-minute episodes which broadcast 104 sessions in total. The episodes covered issues related to girls in decision-making; valuing girls as equal to boys with regards to opportunities; and how girls can be supported in their learning after they have dropped out of school. The episodes included girls' own experiences and focused on ideas and solutions. Nine out of ten caregivers agreed that the show helped them better understand girls' learning, skills, and education opportunities. Adolescent girls said that the programme inspired and motivated them after hearing personal stories from girls of a similar age who had gone on to achieve something.

Interview with EAGER implementing partner, BBC Media Action (2023).

Engagement with government stakeholders was a core part of the project design in 11 out of the 14 LNGB projects with the focus of this engagement varying between projects: In some cases, such as the *Aarambha* project, LNGB projects provided government stakeholders with gender sensitisation training to making policy development and implementation more effective. The *EfL* project supported government officials in their development of education programmes beyond formal schooling: *"We are doing.... Education guidelines with the national government minister of education, so we are developing guidelines to inform literacy and numeracy for out-of-school learners in Kenya based on the lessons that can be taken from Education for Life project."* (IP, *EfL* project, Kenya).

Ten³² projects offered financial, material, and in-kind support to girls to better facilitate girls' participation at the learning centre: This support aimed to help mitigate the economic challenges that girls faced, recognising that a large proportion (46%) come from poor households who are unable to meet basic needs. Once enrolled in the LNGB project, the proportion of girls identifying these as a barrier fell to 19%. The provision of material support was identified by 30% of girls as helping facilitate their participation in the project. The majority identified either learning materials or school supplies as the type of support that they found most helpful (see the example of Grace from Ghana – *Box 6*). The Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Education Success (*STAGES+*) project in Afghanistan distributed

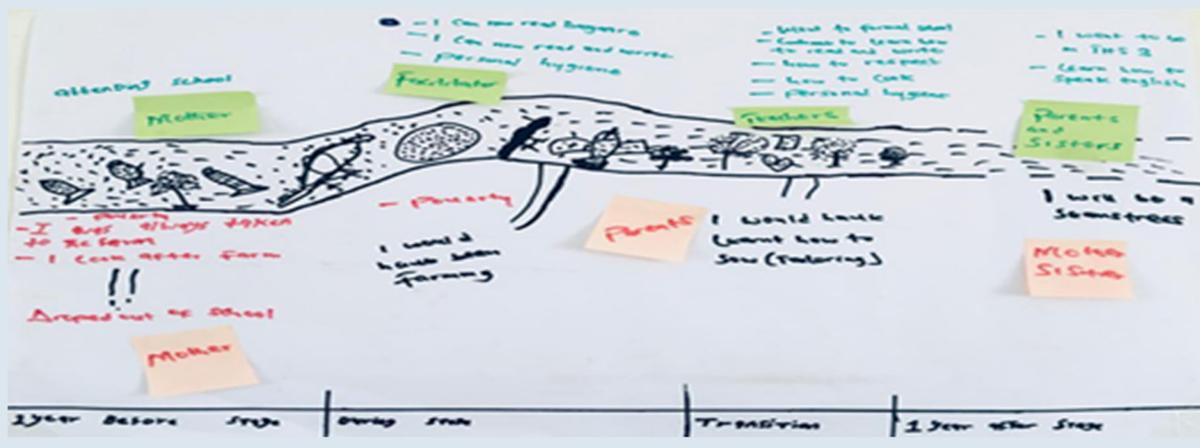
³² These projects were *STAGE* (Ghana), *EfL* (Kenya), *TEAM Girl* (Malawi), *ENGAGE* (Nepal), *STAGES LNGB+* (Afghanistan), *CHANGE* (Ethiopia), *BtA* (Ethiopia), *MnM* (Nepal), *Closing the Gap* (Pakistan) and *TEACH* (Pakistan).

food assistance to the families of girls due to the humanitarian crisis engulfing the regions the project worked in. The IP representative explained during our interview that “the package of food baskets that support girls’ families financially [have meant that] the [girl] students have felt very comfortable to continue the[ir] education.” (IP, STAGES+ project, Afghanistan).

Box 6: School supplies provided to Grace by the STAGE project in Ghana helped her at the learning centre, but she faces challenges with school supplies now that she has joined formal school

Grace is a 14-year-old adolescent girl living in the Upper West region of Ghana. Prior to joining the STAGE project, Grace was enrolled in primary school but due to poverty and the time she spent having to help her mother with farming activities, she had to drop out of school. After joining the STAGE project, Grace was given books, stationary, uniform and sandals which she said helped her a lot. The STAGE project taught Grace several skills, including how to read and write in her local language. She also learnt about personal hygiene. After completing the STAGE project, Grace returned to formal school. Grace indicates that at school, her teacher helped encourage her to build on her reading and writing skills, but also other inter-personal skills. However, Grace indicates that a big challenge she faces in regularly attending school is the distance she must travel, and not having a school bag to carry her books. Grace indicates that the STAGE project could have helped alleviate these challenges that she faces by providing her with a bicycle and a school bag.

(Grace, 14-year-old on formal school track, STAGE project, Upper West region, Ghana)



The provision of hygiene and dignity kits helped girls participate in education when menstruating: Interviews undertaken for the three case study projects identified that the provision of hygiene and dignity kits (which would typically include items such as soap, sanitary materials, toothbrushes, and toothpaste) together with the training received on personal hygiene and making sanitary pads through the life skills module helped girls to navigate barriers they traditionally face in participating in education. For example, a community member in Ghana noted: “Some [girls] use[d] to absent themselves from school when they are menstruating.... But ever since STAGE provided them with sanitary pads it has addressed one of their biggest challenges.” (Female community FGD, Upper West region, Ghana). Similarly, the endline evaluation for STAGE found that for girls on the non-formal pathway increased knowledge of personal hygiene through the life skills training was amongst one of the useful activities identified by girls as it gave them a greater awareness of their bodies, bodily autonomy and rights (UKAID, 2022a). The EFL endline evaluation concluded that the provision of hygiene kits was a key part of the project that girls reported as enabling their participation in the project (UKAID, 2022c). Community members in Nepal identified how girls’ hygiene and menstruation routines had improved both because of the hygiene and dignity kits and what girls were taught at the learning centre in matters relating to hygiene (Female community FGD, Rautahat district, Nepal).

Several projects offered girls, or their families, support to address the vulnerabilities they faced either through psycho-social support or through the creation of safe spaces: In the case of the TEAM Girl project (Malawi), for example, LNGB educators were trained to equip them with the skills to provide girls with psycho-social support when needed. The EFL project created “girl-safe” community spaces where girls could go when they needed support to address specific vulnerabilities, with LNGB staff providing them with the support services they needed.

Two projects provided childcare facilities and childminders: The EFL project in Kenya provided childcare facilities and childminders at over two-thirds of its learning centres for girls with young children. The project subsequently made these available for girls transitioning to vocational training centres (see Box 7).

Box 7: The EFL project in Kenya supported young mothers to participate in the catch-up and TVET centres

Experience from the start of the *EfL* project was that the attendance of young adolescent girls who were mothers was hindered by girls' attention being diverted to their babies/ young infants. As a result, the project made childcare facilities and childminders available in most of the learning centres operated by the *EfL* project to try and reduce barriers for young mothers enrolled in the project. A total of 69% of centres had childcare facilities and 72% made a childminder available (it should be noted however that this varied significantly from county to county). In addition, young mothers were provided with milk and porridge for their children. Once girls transitioned into their respective pathways, *EfL* identified the absence of child-friendly facilities at TVET centres as a problem for girls who were transitioning into vocational training. The safety of babies/ toddlers became a cause for concern, leading the *EfL* project to adapt its design to make childminders available. These were women recruited from the surrounding communities to where the TVET centre was located who looked after youngsters while girls attended the vocational training centre in certain counties.

Interview with EfL Implementing Partner, [UKAID, \(2022\)](#).

6. To what extent, and how, have LNGB projects influenced the most marginalised adolescent girls' academic and non-academic outcomes?

This section responds to the second research question, beginning by examining changes in girls' literacy and numeracy while attending a learning centre, based on analysis of 10 LNGB projects with available external evaluation data. The section further discusses insights from the primary qualitative data collected for the three case study projects in relation to girls' literacy and numeracy sessions. Changes in girls' non-academic skills (such as in confidence and self-esteem) are then identified, based on information from the three case study projects. The section concludes with a discussion of challenges that girls continue to face whilst enrolled in the learning centre, which hindered their attendance and participation.

6.1. Summary of key findings

- Girls' learning levels in literacy and numeracy at baseline were low, with differences in learning levels depending on girls' prior formal schooling experience. Across the 10 LNGB projects with data, girls who had been to school but dropped out, on average, scored higher in literacy and numeracy than girls who had never attended school prior to the LNGB project.
- For girls enrolled in LNGB projects, literacy and numeracy levels have considerably improved between baseline and follow-up, more so for girls who never attended school prior to the project. We also find a considerable reduction in the proportion of girls unable to answer a single item correctly.
- The majority of girls interviewed from the three case study projects identified the literacy and numeracy sessions as the most positive aspect of being enrolled in the LNGB projects: They noted that this provided them with the opportunity to read, write and count. Interviews with teachers in formal schools suggested that girls who transitioned into their schools demonstrated learning improvements, though not all girls were able to keep up with the curriculum as easily as their peers who had been in formal school for a longer period.
- Girls from all three case study contexts identified an improvement in their non-academic skills, particularly in their levels of confidence: One-third of girls interviewed mentioned how the life skills training increased their self-confidence and self-esteem and equipped them with practical skills for their daily lives.
- Some of the challenges affecting girls' participation and learning persisted when they were enrolled in the learning centres: Challenges include household chores, distance to travel to the learning centre, negative community/ family attitudes (particularly for older adolescent girls), and inadequate support to meet girls with disabilities' learning needs. According to external evaluation data, these challenges may have contributed to some girls dropping out of the learning centres.

6.2. Changes in girls' academic outcomes

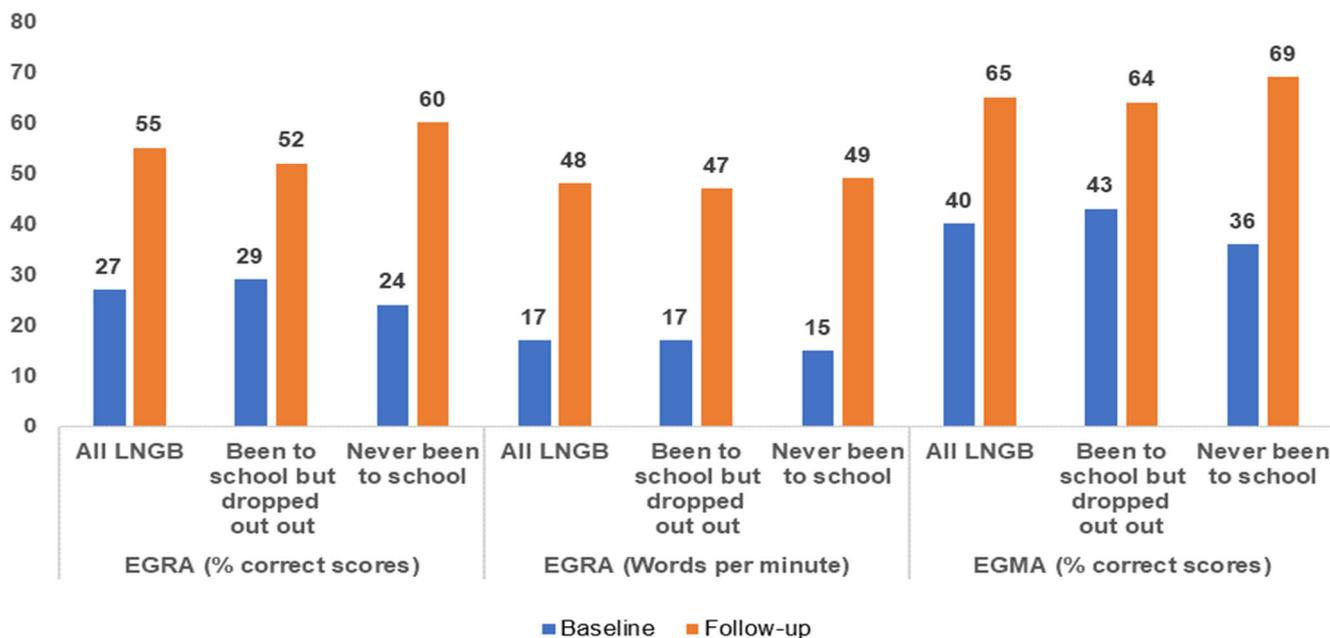
"I loved how the teachers taught and the way they used to motivate us and encourage us not to feel bad for ourselves when we compared ourselves to the girls who were able to continue with school."
(26-year-old girl drop-out, EFL project, Kilifi, Kenya)

"To provide education to these children who are deprived of education feels very good to a teacher like me.... they were brought for education, their curiosity increased. It was very hard in the beginning as they were back in their studies but as we went on teaching them, it became easier for them."
(Formal school teacher, Rautahat district, Nepal)

Literacy and numeracy skills of girls were at a low starting point at the beginning of the LNGB projects: Assessments used standardised Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematics

Assessment (EGMA) items, which are designed for early grade students covering elements from letter sound identification to writing/dictation for literacy and number identification to fractions in numeracy. As shown in *Figure 8*, for the 10 projects with data, at the beginning of the project, girls achieved an overall score of 27% in literacy, on average. Numeracy scores were higher relative to literacy, reaching 40% on average. Girls did somewhat better than the average score in easier tasks, including letter or number identification, and ability to make judgements about differences in quantities. Girls who had attended formal schooling prior to joining LNGB projects performed slightly better at the beginning of the project. In numeracy, they scored 7% higher compared with girls who had never been to school (differences are statistically significant). In literacy, they scored 4% higher compared to girls who had never been to school, however the difference is not statistically significant.³³

Figure 8: Learning improvements for girls who did and did not have previous schooling experience prior to joining the LNGB project - % correct scores



Source: Analysis based on baseline and midline/endline external evaluation data for 10 projects with available data.

Comparing the differences in the learning levels of girls between baseline and follow-up (midline or endline),³⁴ literacy and numeracy has improved: There is a statistically significant improvement of 28 percentage points for literacy and 25 percentage points for numeracy, using a panel sample and project-equal level weighting.³⁵ At follow-up, girls read, on average, 30 more words per minute compared with the baseline.

While LNGB girls without previous schooling experience started off with lower literacy and numeracy at the beginning of the project compared to girls with previous schooling experience, they show larger learning gains at follow-up: As shown in *Figure 8*, at follow-up, girls with no schooling experience perform higher in literacy, numeracy, and words read per minute compared to girls who had been to school. These results are statistically significant.

There is a significant reduction in the proportion of girls who were unable to answer a single item correctly: For overall literacy and numeracy scores, a score of zero implies that the girls were unable to identify any letters or numbers. For literacy, based on a panel sample with project-equal level weighting, there is a reduction of about 8 percentage points in the proportion of girls who scored zero in all subtasks. For numeracy, there is a reduction of 5 percentage points (*Figure 9*).³⁶

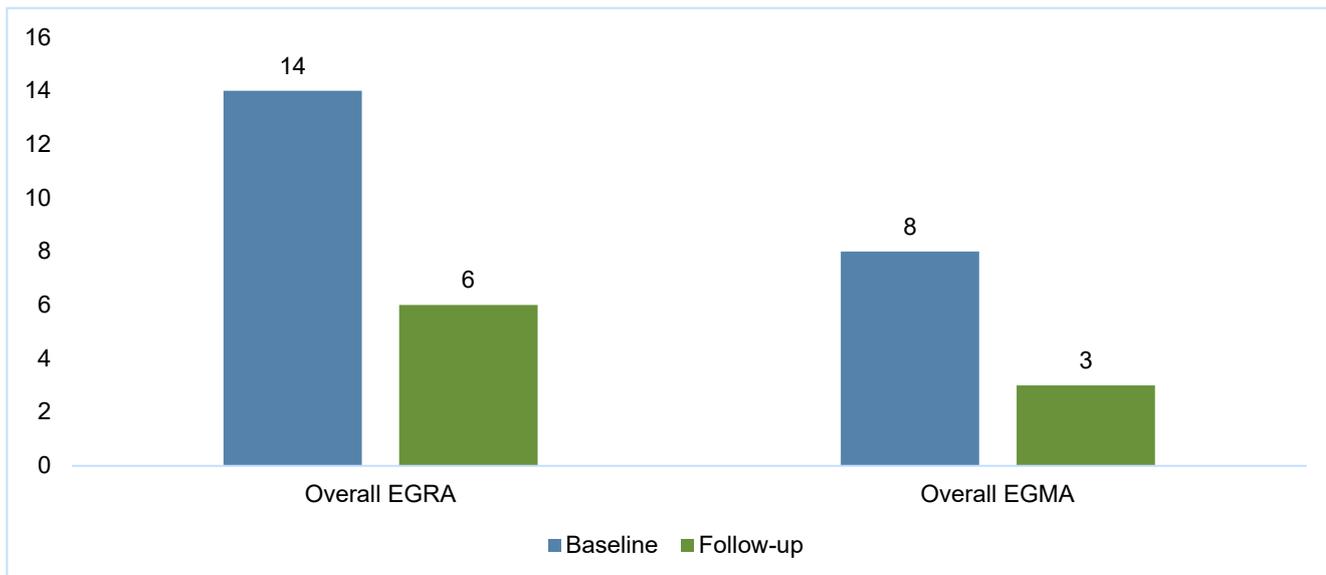
³³ The statistical significance assesses whether observed data differences are likely real or due to chance. In this study, the statistical significance of the simple difference coefficients is reported for P-values below 0.05 and 0.10.

³⁴ This uses a “simple difference” approach. This is because LNGB projects generally do not include a non-treated sample of girls meaning that the traditional difference-in-difference estimation cannot be used for this study.

³⁵ Using a cross-sectional sample with weights gives an estimated improvement of 25 percentage points and 24 percentage points in literacy and numeracy, respectively.

³⁶ Using a cross-sectional sample with weights gives an estimated reduction of girls scoring zero by 11 percentage points and 8 percentage points in literacy and numeracy, respectively.

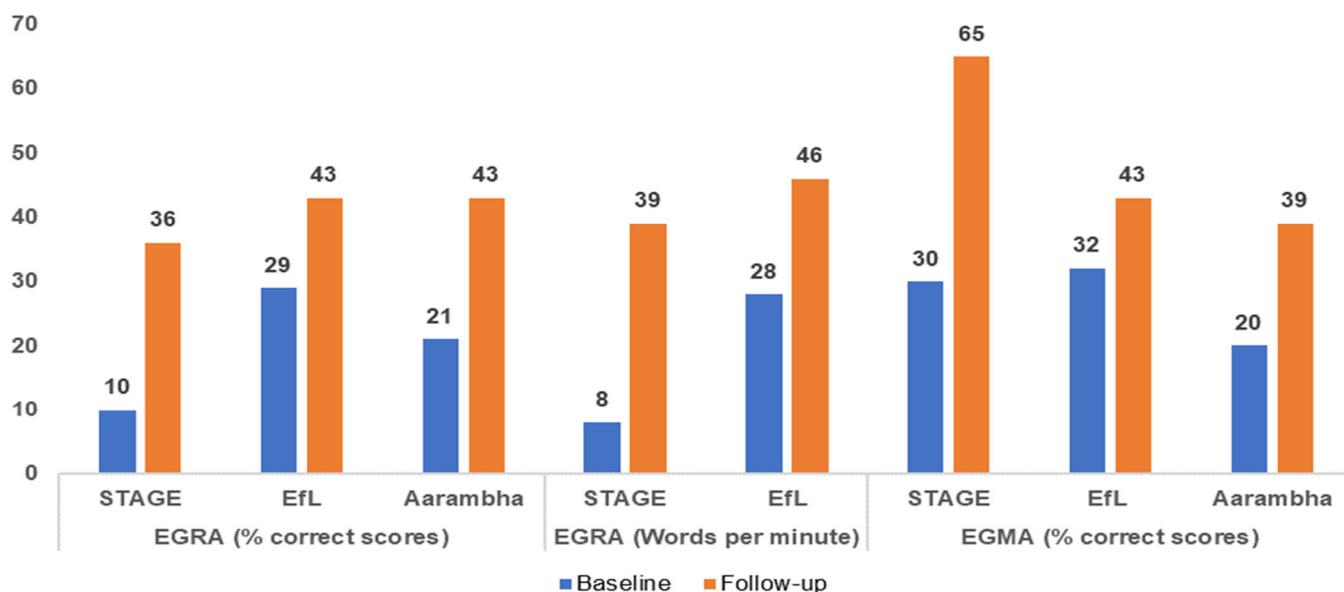
Figure 9: Learning improvements of LNGB girls on average - % zero scores



Source: Analysis based on baseline and midline/endline external evaluation data for 10 projects with available data.

Girls' literacy and numeracy skills improved significantly by the time they transitioned to formal schooling in all three case study projects: Similar to the average across projects, scores in literacy for girls in all three contexts were low at the beginning of the project (Figure 10). Girls in *STAGE* performed lowest in overall EGRA, with an average score of 10%. Girls in *EfL* and *Aarambha* performed better at 29% and 21%, respectively. In terms of numeracy, scores at the beginning of the project were slightly higher for *EfL* and *STAGE*, with *EfL* girls scoring on average 32% in overall EGMA, *STAGE* girls scoring 30% and *Aarambha* girls scoring 20%. Interviews with LNGB educators in all three contexts stated that girls previously had extremely low literacy levels and were unable to count from zero to ten or write the alphabet in their local dialects. Teachers interviewed in formal schools also noted that those who had completed the LNGB project were able to read and write and keep up to a similar degree as their peers who had been in school for a longer period.

Figure 10: Learning improvements of LNGB girls on average - % correct scores (three case studies)



Source: External Evaluation data based on a panel sample of *STAGE*, *EfL*, and *Aarambha*.

Most girls in the three case study contexts identified the literacy and numeracy lessons they received at the learning centre to be the most useful aspect of being enrolled in the LNGB projects: 91% of girls interviewed across the three contexts identified the basic literacy and numeracy lessons to be the most positive aspect of the

LNGB projects in their River of Life drawings. This was also supported by the respective endline evaluations carried out for each of the projects. The *STAGE* endline evaluation reported that approximately three-quarters of girls on the formal school track found the literacy and numeracy classes provided by *STAGE* to be useful in helping them understand these lessons in school ([UKAID, 2022b](#)). For the non-formal track, 73% found the numeracy intervention the most useful ([UKAID, 2022a](#)). The *STAGE* endline report for the non-formal track reports that girls' positive experiences of the Alternative Learning Programme classes were due both to the pace and the behaviour and attitude of the facilitators in delivering the content ([UKAID, 2022a](#)). For the *EfL* project, 44% of Cohort 3 girls selected basic education skills as the most useful intervention that they received ([UKAID, 2022c](#)). For the *Aarambha* project, however, the endline external evaluation report concludes that older girls were more motivated to enrol in the project to learn vocational skills such as tailoring and embroidery ([UKAID, 2021b](#)).

Despite improvements, not all girls were able to catch up with their peers who had been enrolled in school from a younger age when they transitioned to formal schooling in the three case study contexts: For girls involved with the *STAGE* project, the formal schooling curriculum included several other subjects which they struggled with as they had not learnt this at the learning centre (Downstream Partner, Upper East region, Ghana). Similarly, in Nepal, a small number of formal school teachers stated that girls required additional support and were slightly behind their peers. As a result, they learned through peer-to-peer teaching (e.g., in groups) or teachers monitored their learning more closely. These findings were noted in the endline external evaluation of the *Aarambha* project, which found that 46% of the girls were in the emergent learner category (where they scored 1%-40% in EGMA)/ EGRA tests) – this means that, while they were able to identify letters and words, they struggled with reading passages or stories ([UKAID, 2021b](#)).

The majority of girls from the *Aarambha* and *STAGE* projects succeeded in transitioning into the target formal schooling grades set by these two projects, although many girls were over-age for the classes into which they transitioned: According to the project design, the *STAGE* target was that girls achieve, at minimum, Grade 4 literacy and numeracy levels so that by the end of their time in the learning centre girls should have been able to transition into Grade 4³⁷ ([UKAID, 2022b](#)). Over one-third (35%) of girls entered Grades 1 to 3, while 65% transitioned into Grades 4 to 9 (*STAGE* monitoring data). The *Aarambha* target was that girls who achieve Grade 3 literacy and numeracy levels by the end of their time in the learning centre transition into Grade 4 ([Aarambha endline report – C2, 2022](#)). Just over 74% of girls transitioned to Grades 4 and above (*Aarambha* monitoring data). The *EfL* project did not have a specific target as to which Grade girls would transition into on finishing at the learning centre. However, the data show that the largest share of girls transitioned to Grade 1 (28%) followed by Grade 3 (21%) (*EfL* monitoring data).

6.3. Reported changes in girls' non-academic outcomes

“Also, I used to be the shy type and [it] was very difficult for me to speak in public but after I joined STAGE, this has been a thing of the past. No matter the number of people available I will be able to speak in their midst.”

(17-year-old girl on the formal schooling track, *STAGE* project, Upper East district, Ghana)

“After I joined [the learning centre], I was able to read and understand the answers properly. Whenever the teacher asked someone else, I used to answer it myself, which made me confident.”

(18-year-old girl on the Vocational training track, *Aarambha* project, Rautahat, Nepal)

“Right now, I am confident enough to face anything, I feel like I can also give guidance to those that need it”

(21-year-old girl on the Entrepreneurship track, *EfL* project, Kilifi, Kenya)

Approximately one-third of the girls interviewed in the three case studies stated that life skills have provided them with knowledge or practical skills to make informed life decisions: Across all three contexts, girls mentioned how the life skills training had given them increased confidence (see Mercy's story – [Box 8](#)). This is supported by the endline evaluation reports where measures used by the three projects to track confidence appear to show an improvement compared with the beginning of the project. Discussions with community members in Ghana and Kenya similarly noted that, through their participation in the project, girls' confidence had increased allowing them to express themselves better: *“Those who complete in the afternoon school [catch-up centre] are able to express themselves in public or even in the house, they mingle with friends during the afternoon school....most of these girls*

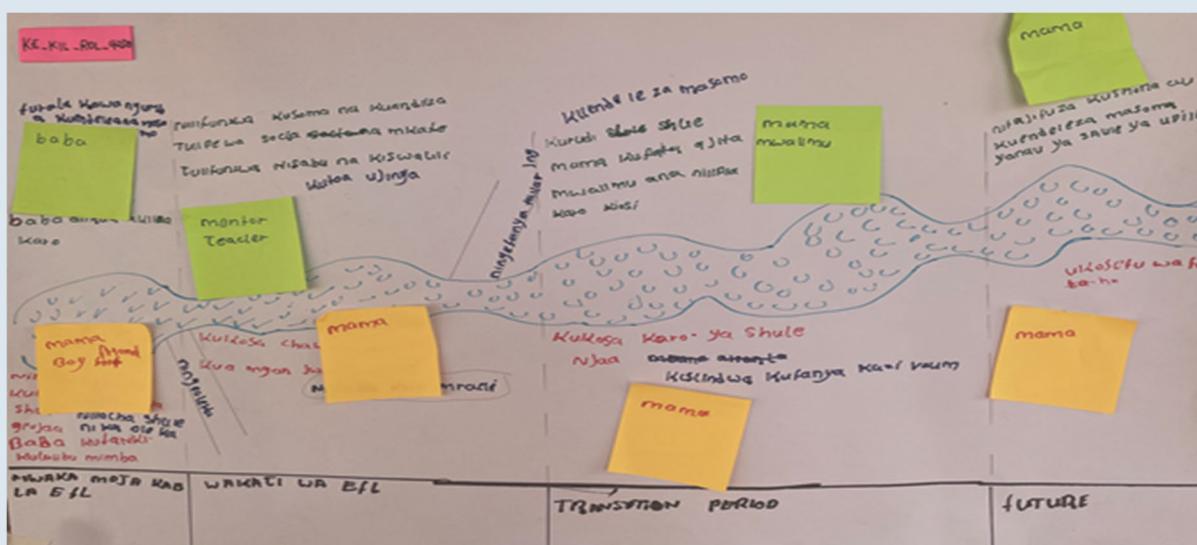
³⁷ Correspondence with *STAGE* officials indicated that this was an improvement compared to previous *CBE* programmes in Ghana where most students transitioned into Grade 2 or Grade 3.

now have confidence.” (Male community FGD, Upper West region, Ghana) and “When you look at them [the girls] now, they have courage and have self-esteem.” (Male community FGD, Garissa County, Kenya).

Box 8: After joining the EFL project in Kenya, the information from the life skills classes helped Mercy express her opinions more confidently

Mercy is an 18-year-old who lives in the Kilifi County of Kenya. Before joining the EFL project, Mercy had been in formal school. However, shortly after her father died, she had to drop out because her mother was unable to afford to send Mercy to school. Shortly after, Mercy fell pregnant. During her time at the EFL learning centre, Mercy learnt mathematics, reading and drawing. The training also provided Mercy with the communication skills she needed to confidently express her opinions to those around her. For example, she discussed how the project helped in telling her mother what she wanted to do. And while she continued to experience hunger which negatively affected her concentration, Mercy indicates that the project staff tried to alleviate this by providing her with food while she was at the centre, as well as money to buy food. Unfortunately, Mercy had to drop out of the project three months after she had joined due to an unexpected illness.

(Mercy, 18-year-old drop-out from the EFL project, Kilifi County, Kenya)



Some girls pointed to specific examples of the types of practical knowledge they gained through the life skills component: Girls in the Aarambha project, for example, pointed out that knowing how to use contraception to prevent early pregnancies, together with understanding the importance of delaying marriage was discussed. One girl said that it “taught us about contraceptive methods to not give birth to a child.... I did not know anything like that before [and] I learned it after coming to the CLC [Community Learning Centre].” (Girl on vocational training track, Aarambha project, Bara district, Nepal).

In Kenya, formal school teachers and vocational trainers³⁸ agreed that there were wider benefits to participating in the project in terms of contributing to a positive change in attitudes within their communities, including motivating those around them: As one vocational trainer from Garissa described, “Most of the girls who have businesses are the girls from the EFL programme and they have opened eyes for their friends, families and neighbours to work hard like them and do some business.”

Girls ‘giving back’ to their communities has contributed to positive shifts in community perceptions: Three educators described how girls who completed the project are more dependable, and have greater opportunities (e.g., one spoke of a girl being employed as a teacher), due to the knowledge and skills they learned during the project. As respondents from one community stated: “[They give] back to the society [and] formed groups especially those who did tailoring course and they have their centre where they do their work. Most of the uniforms worn by the schools nearby, [the EFL graduates] are the ones who make them.” (Male Community FGD, Kilifi County, Kenya). Similarly, another educator from Kilifi County in Kenya spoke about how “those who joined EFL are respectable and dependable, the community is depending on them because there is one girl whose neighbour had a baby and she is helping her with hairdressing, so they have become a great help to the community.”

³⁸ These findings were noted by all six formal education teachers and three vocational trainers we interviewed as part of this study.

Improvements in girls' academic and non-academic outcomes, as well as employment opportunities made available to them, were frequently mentioned by stakeholders in all three contexts, as noted by LNGB educators, transition pathway providers (e.g., school teachers, vocational trainers) and wider community members. Across all three contexts, most of these respondents attested to LNGB project graduates being better educated, more empowered and able to support themselves because of the project. As one community stakeholder in Ghana stated, *"I can testify that most of these girls now have confidence than their peers who refused to join the afternoon school. If you send them to any place to carry out any activity, they are always confident to do it without fear or been shy as compared to those who are not part of the STAGE project."* (Male community FGD, Upper West region, Ghana).

6.4. Challenges affecting girls' participation and learning in LNGB projects

"They [community members] would say things like, 'You are just sitting there [at the EFL learning centre]. What do you think these people will do for you?' It was disheartening because I thought they were right. I wanted to stay back at home."

(20-year-old girl on vocational training track, EFL project, Kilifi County, Kenya)

"I used to walk, and the Community Learning Centre was very far. There was no time to work after going home. That is why they [my family] asked to leave."

(12-year-old Jarina dropout, Aarambha project, Rautahat district, Nepal)

Across the portfolio, girls continued to face barriers which impeded their attendance or learning while enrolled in LNGB projects. In some instances, these may have led to girls dropping out of projects: Reasons for dropout include girls getting married or waiting for "gauna" (marriage ceremony), and employment and family obligations, including household chores.³⁹

Although there was a reduction in the frequency with which household chores were mentioned as a challenge by girls compared with before they enrolled in the project, this affected their attendance and learning in half of the LNGB project contexts:⁴⁰ Household chores were the barrier identified most by girls interviewed for this study who dropped out of the three LNGB projects. They were noted as a barrier to their participation in the LNGB project by one-third of the girls who had dropped out (see Jarina's story – [Box 9](#)).

The distance to travel to the learning centres hindered girls' attendance and participation in four contexts across the portfolio:⁴¹ Though projects set up the learning centres as 'hubs', given that many projects work in quite remote areas, some girls had to travel further than other girls enrolled across the LNGB projects which led to challenges relating to participation. In the case of the SAGE project (in Zimbabwe), learners had to walk several kilometres to reach the learning centre which led to erratic attendance: *"Some of the buildings that were given to use as hubs would be far away from the centre making it difficult for some learners who are on the borders of the community to access."* (IP, SAGE project, Zimbabwe). For the three case studies, in Nepal and Ghana, this was a challenge for a small number of girls (9 out of 98). In Nepal, this contributed to girls dropping out of the project prior to completion (see Jarina's story – [Box 9](#)). This is related to gender social norms in terms of concerns of girls leaving the house alone – a barrier also identified in the evaluation report ([Aarambha endline report – C2, 2022](#)). Educators at the learning centre observed that the *"CLC was far and [the girls] were shy. Their parents even asked them not to go, saying who would be responsible if anything happened on the way."* (Aarambha Educator, Rautahat district, Nepal). In another context in Nepal, one government official discussed that, for girls who were already extremely shy, the distance was further compounded by them having to interact with communities they were unfamiliar with. A downstream partner indicated that interacting with strangers was particularly difficult for girls from Muslim communities who were especially shy in interacting with those from outside of their communities. Of the three girls who identified distance as a contributor to dropping out of the LNGB project, all were in Nepal: *"My mother said I was alone. I had a friend in my locality, and she also did not go. So, my mother did not let me go... both my mother and father said I should not go long distances every day."* (13-year-old dropout, Aarambha project, Bara district, Nepal). While distance was not mentioned by girls in the EFL project, one educator from the project identified distance as a challenge for girls with disabilities.

³⁹ It is not possible to estimate dropout rates of the programme based on the external evaluation data as attrition can stem from data quality issues (for example EAGER reported changes in centre names and a lack of unique identification at baseline to partially explain attrition) and changes in implementation (Closing the Gap reported that changes in the implementation partner at a field level led to a reduction of learning spaces previously sampled at baseline).

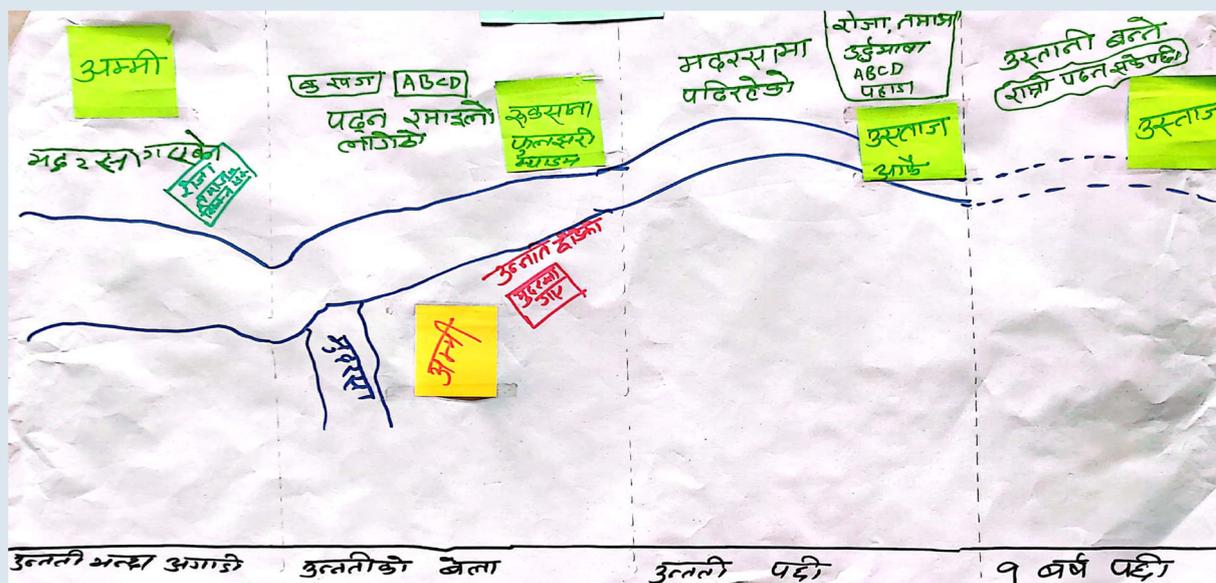
⁴⁰ This was mentioned by seven implementing partners: BtA (Ethiopia), EFL (Kenya), MnM (Nepal), Aarambha (Nepal), ENGAGE (Nepal), Closing the Gap (Pakistan) and SAGE (Zimbabwe).

⁴¹ SAGE (Zimbabwe), STAGES+ (Afghanistan), Aarambha (Nepal) and ENGAGE (Nepal).

Box 9: Due to the distance Jarina had to travel to attend the Aarambha learning centre in Nepal, her mother made her drop out of the project mid-way through

Jarina is 12 years old and lives in Rautahat district of Nepal. She attended the Madrassa (Islamic School) prior to joining the Aarambha project. Her family gave Jarina permission to attend the learning centre, where she learnt the English and Nepali alphabet and multiplication tables. Jarina attended the Aarambha learning centre, and at the same time she also continued to attend the Madrassa. After seven months of attending the Aarambha learning centre, Jarina's mother forced her leave the centre and instead only attend the Madrassa even though Jarina wanted to continue with the project. She tells us that the reason her mother and other family members wanted her to leave the Aarambha learning centre was because the distance between her home and the learning centre was far, meaning that by the time she returned home it was already later than when Jarina was expected to start household chores. Jarina says that when she left the learning centre, no one from the Aarambha project – as far as she is aware – contacted her or her family to ask why she was no longer coming to the centre to learn. She wished that somebody from the centre had come to talk to her parents to allow her to continue attending the centre.

(Jarina, 12-year-old drop-out from the Aarambha project, Rautahat district, Nepal)



Negative community or family attitudes were often demoralising for older adolescent girls who were attending the learning centre:⁴² In the case studies, several of the educators at the EFL learning centre in Kilifi corroborated that community attitudes towards the project were negative but more so for older girls: “People were saying they [the girls] were grown-ups learning things that only kids should be learning instead of staying home to take care of their kids.” (EFL Educator, Kilifi region, Kenya). This is further supported by the EFL endline evaluation which reports older adolescent girls being insulted, made fun of and discouraged from joining the project with this being particularly severe for girls with children (UKAID, 2022c). Similar to Kenya, several older adolescent girls in Nepal (Bara) reported negative community reactions to them attending the Aarambha learning centre: “They [girl’s neighbours] said ‘that when you were the right age, you did not study, but you are studying now.’” (18-year-old on vocational training track, Aarambha project, Bara district, Nepal). This was supported by one downstream partner who reported that “the community members would tease them [older girls] saying, ‘when there was time, you did not study and now you are studying to become a boss or a politician.’” (Downstream partner, Bara district, Nepal). Similarly, for married girls, or girls with children, attitudes to their participation were less positive than the overall picture. The EFL endline report concludes that while caregiver/ husband/ community perceptions around girls’ education had improved, social stigma relating to early pregnancy or marriage continued to negatively affect girls’ participation (UKAID, 2022c). This stigma extends to general distrust of older adolescent girls participating in education, given communities’ wider expectations of their responsibilities.

Adolescent girls with children faced barriers related to childcare: The IP for the EFL project identified challenges facing young mothers enrolled in the project. This was both in terms of childcare but also the opportunity cost of attending the centre versus earning an income to provide food for their children. As noted by Lucy (see Box 19), who

⁴² Across the portfolio, this was noted for STAGES LNGB+ (Afghanistan), CHANGE (Ethiopia), Aarambha (Nepal), EFL (Kenya), MnM (Nepal), ENGAGE (Nepal) and Closing the Gap (Pakistan).

was enrolled in the *EfL* project in Kilifi (Kenya), *“The society already thought this was a devilish organisation and we were wasting our time [and] told [me] to look for work instead of going to school so as to provide for my child.”* (21-year-old Lucy on entrepreneurship track, *EfL* project, Kilifi County, Kenya). The *EfL* project did later incorporate childcare facilities into its design at many of its centres and the provision of milk for the infants of girls attending the centre.

Girls with disabilities faced challenges with respect to the extent to which projects were able to support their learning needs:⁴³ The IP for the *SAGE* project identified that, while the project enrolled girls with disabilities, the project did not have the resources or the capacity to meet their specific learning needs. Similarly in Ghana, for girls with disabilities, the IP for *STAGE* pointed out that one of the shortcomings of the project was the shortage of teachers with skills needed to teach girls with disabilities.

A shortage of teachers and teacher absenteeism was identified as a challenge by a small number⁴⁴ of girls to their effective participation and learning in the project, primarily in Kenya, followed by Ghana: One girl noted teacher shortages particularly affected girls with greater learning requirements, as they could not receive individual attention: *“Teachers were few and the pupils were many.... we only had one teacher, and there was no other teacher who could help the slow learner girls in class.”* (Girl on entrepreneurship track, *EfL* project, Kilifi County, Kenya). LNGB educators' absence was also identified by a girl from the *STAGE* project: *“What I didn't like was that sometimes the facilitator was absent because she had emergency issues to attend to.”* (24-year-old dropout, *STAGE* project, Upper East region, Ghana). Teacher shortages or absenteeism were not identified in interviews with stakeholders or in the evaluation reports as a challenge in relation to the *Aarambha* project.

In Kilifi, Kenya, infrastructural issues at the learning centres posed a challenge to a small number of girls' ability to concentrate on their lessons: Lucy ([Box 19](#)) discussed how the cramped conditions inside the *EfL* learning centre in Kilifi made it difficult for her to concentrate and were also unsuitable for her young baby whom she brought with her to the centre. The educators who taught at the same learning centre in Kenya (Kilifi) corroborated this expressing the need for the learning centre to be more spacious and have ventilation to create a more conducive learning environment: *“The class size was very big....and the environment wasn't conducive for learning because of the small size of the hall.”* (*EfL* Educator, Kilifi County, Kenya). This is similar to the challenges discussed in [Section 4.3.1](#) which found that the infrastructure for learning centres were sometimes substandard due to insufficient public funding. *EfL* learning centres were community structures (e.g., churches or individual houses). While the project did adapt these structures where possible, the IP indicated that this was not always feasible if the owner of the spaces did not agree. In addition, together with the cramped condition of *EfL* learning spaces, the infrastructure did not always meet the needs of girls with disabilities. For example, just 4% of all *EfL* learning centres had facilities to accommodate girls with disabilities ([UKAID, 2022c](#)).

⁴³ See the [Independent Evaluation Study on Educating Girls with Disabilities](#) for additional information on how projects within the GEC II have supported girls with disabilities.

⁴⁴ This was reported by six girls in total from Kenya and Ghana.

7. How have LNGB projects influenced girls' transitions to formal schooling and/or work opportunities, and agency to make decisions?

This section addresses the third research question, starting by looking at the extent to which girls have had a choice in the transition pathway – whether transitioning into formal school, or employment or skills training, using data from across the portfolio, as well as more detailed insights from the three case studies. It then examines the activities all 14 projects included in the design of the transition pathways, and how these helped support girls during the transition, based on the portfolio-wide documentary analysis. For girls transitioning to employment or skills training, the section identifies which vocational specialisations girls selected and why, drawing on data from the three case study projects. The section concludes with a discussion of the effects that the projects had on girls' agency with regard to decision-making, based on insights from the girls' Rivers of Life and interviews in the three case study projects.

7.1. Summary of key findings

- **Most of the 14 LNGB projects only offered younger adolescents the choice of joining formal school pathways, whereas older adolescents were only offered skills or employment opportunities:** National child labour laws meant that many projects only offered younger adolescent girls the option of transitioning to formal schooling after graduating from the learning centre. Due to the age of older adolescent girls, interviews with project IPs suggested that most of the 14 LNGB projects either did not offer, or actively discouraged, older adolescent girls from joining formal schooling - instead offering them employment or skills related opportunities.
- **With girls' transition pathways often being pre-determined by most of the LNGB projects, there was sometimes a mismatch between the transition pathways girls selected compared with their preferences:** The evaluation data at the beginning of the project, for five LNGB projects with relevant data found that 23% of girls assigned to the work opportunities pathway indicated they would have liked to transition to formal schooling. Conversely, for girls assigned to formal schooling pathways, 22% signalled wanting to transition into a work opportunities pathway. Qualitative data from the three LNGB case study projects found that, while most girls transitioned into their preferred pathway, a few older adolescent girls identified their wish to return to formal schooling but were instead encouraged by projects to pursue work-related opportunities.
- **Continued support from LNGB projects after girls graduated from the LNGB learning centre was identified as integral to girls' success in their transitions to education and work-related opportunities:** While a majority of girls successfully transitioned into their pathways, some did not. Across all three case studies, material and financial support, training in specific skills and continued involvement by LNGB project staff in supporting girls, their caregivers and school-level actors of support were identified as critical to enable girls to succeed in their formal schooling and work-related transitions.
- **Girls transitioning into formal schooling identified ongoing barriers** which included school-related costs, changes to the learning environment (compared with what they had experienced at the learning centre), distance to travel to school and household chores as the main challenges in their participation and learning.
- **For girls transitioning to work-related opportunities (either skills-related or employment-related), barriers included** the capital needed to viably run their businesses, the shortage of master artisans, and the gap in entrepreneurship and technical skills that girls needed to run their businesses. In addition, saturation of the market spaces in the vocations selected and 'cultural taboos' towards girls entering the labour market were identified as key challenges.
- **Across the three case study LNGB projects, girls on the skills and work-related training pathways specialised in sectors traditionally associated with women (e.g., hairdressing and tailoring):** Only in the case of *EfL* (Kenya) did a small percentage of girls (less than 5%) select vocations traditionally associated with men (e.g., plumbing and carpentry). The low uptake of these vocations was partly due to their availability, but

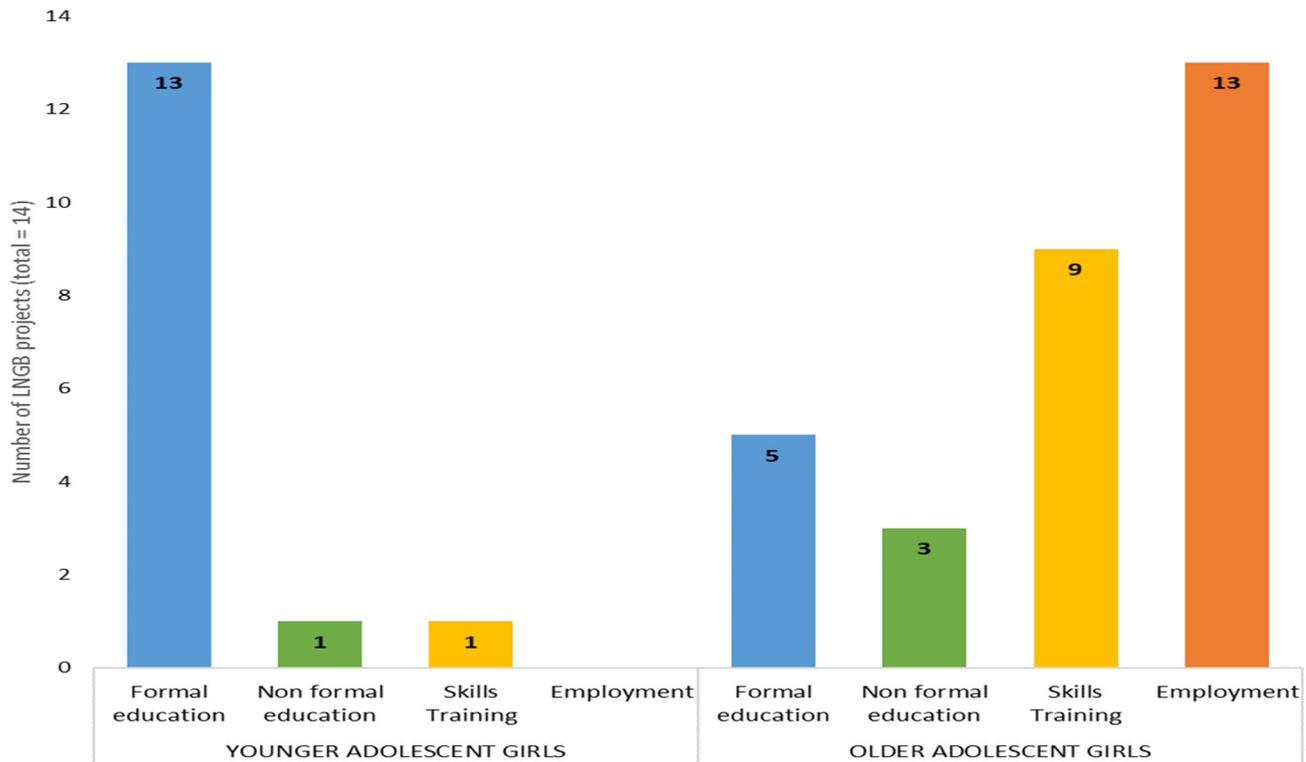
also due to embedded gender social norms which discouraged or else prevented girls from pursuing these vocations.

- **For the three case study LNGB projects, the vocations that girls specialised in were highly concentrated:** This was partly due to the economic conditions characterising the remote contexts within which LNGB projects operated – factors which were outside of the project’s control. These conditions created challenges relating to the supply of materials and master artisans needed to support girls’ training, resulting in girls’ businesses operating in an already saturated market. Reasons why girls specialised in the vocations varied. Some selected these vocations because they perceived them to be profitable, while others expressed an interest in the vocation or because they were encouraged to select it by the LNGB project facilitators.
- **Girls identified that their engagement in decision-making had enhanced due to greater confidence related to improvements in literacy, numeracy and life skills:** However, there appears to be variation in the types of decisions they were now able to make themselves. A larger proportion of girls reported being able to make decisions over their day-to-day lives, such as household expenditure, or to visit the market/ health clinic/ friends. A smaller proportion were able to make decisions over their education, marriage, and income-generating activities with husbands or other family members retaining decision-making powers, particularly for younger girls.
- **Girls who were unmarried, without children, or did not self-report a disability were more likely to feel that their decision-making capabilities had increased:** When looking at older and younger adolescent girls, many decisions continued to be taken by external stakeholders in girls’ lives, particularly for younger adolescent girls. However, across all case study contexts, girls stated that after joining the LNGB project, they had the increased confidence needed to express their opinions in front of their families, even if they did not consider themselves to be the sole decision-maker.
- **There is evidence to support how participating in the LNGB projects made girls want to aspire to “do better” compared to if they had not taken part in the project:** Over half of girls who transitioned into formal schooling reported that had they not chosen to attend school, they would have either been doing household chores, or would have pursued tailoring. They reported choosing the path they did to become more responsible or prominent. For those on work-related pathways, a smaller number of girls indicated that they would instead have got married.

7.2. Formal schooling, skills or work-related transition pathways pursued by adolescent girls

Transition pathways can be broadly grouped as those falling under education programmes (primarily formal schooling), skills training, or work-related activities: *Figure 11* identifies the pathways that the LNGB projects across the portfolio offer according to their evaluation reports. This is delineated by younger and older adolescent girls and shows that the transition pathways available for younger adolescents was, in most cases, limited to formal schooling. Older adolescents were more often offered a skills or work-related pathway.

Figure 11: Breakdown of transition pathways available for younger and older adolescents



Source: GEC II project external evaluation reports (baseline, midline and endline, depending on availability).

In 10⁴⁵ out of 13 LRGB projects,⁴⁶ younger adolescents were only offered the option of transitioning into formal schooling due to national laws and regulations: Three projects⁴⁷ offered younger adolescents other transition pathway options. For *TEACH*, younger adolescent girls aged 10 to 14 years old could transition to non-formal education as an alternative pathway to formal schooling. Younger adolescent girls on *TEAM Girl* were offered the choice of transitioning to either formal schooling or skills training. Several of the interviews held with IPs indicated that formal schooling was the only pathway younger girls could transition into because of compulsory education and child labour laws: “According to the labour laws as well as Ministry of Youth that was supporting the Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOP) component, we could not take anyone below the age of 16 to actually join the ISOP transition pathway because it told me deemed child labour.” (IP, *SAGE* project, Zimbabwe). Across the three case study LRGB projects, younger adolescents across all three projects could only transition to formal schooling. This was largely due to child labour laws.

Most projects encouraged older adolescent girls to transition into skills and work-related pathways with few projects offering them the option of transitioning into formal schooling: Apart from the *Aarambha* project,⁴⁸ all 13 other LRGB projects offered older adolescent girls the opportunity to transition directly to paid or self-employment pathways. A further nine projects offered older adolescents the choice to transition to skills training pathways (either through vocational centres or apprenticeships or both). There were five projects offering older girls the opportunity to transition to formal schooling.⁴⁹ Of the three case study projects, only the *Aarambha* project offered this opportunity. However, in three of the five projects, girls were actively discouraged from choosing this pathway. Several of the IP interviews confirm this was because over-age older adolescent girls who transition back to formal schooling were more likely to be teased by their peers, school teachers, or community members, and therefore were at higher risk of dropping out. Projects advised older adolescent girls who might have otherwise had a preference to transition to formal schooling to transition to skills or work-related pathways instead.

⁴⁵ *Closing the Gap* (Pakistan), *EfL* (Kenya), *STAGES LRGB+* (Afghanistan), *AGES* (Somalia), *CHANGE* (Ethiopia), *SAGE* (Zimbabwe), *BtA* (Ethiopia), *MnM* (Nepal), *ENGAGE* (Nepal) and *STAGE* (Ghana).

⁴⁶ This does not include *EAGER* which only focuses on older adolescent girls.

⁴⁷ *TEACH* (Pakistan), *TEAM Girl* (Malawi), *Aarambha* (Nepal).

⁴⁸ The *Aarambha* project helps girls transition to employment after they have completed three months of vocational training as part of their post-transition pathway.

⁴⁹ *TEAM Girl* (Malawi), *Aarambha* (Nepal), *BtA* (Ethiopia), *ENGAGE* (Nepal), *MnM* (Nepal).

With girls' transition pathways often being pre-determined by most of the LNGB projects, there was sometimes a mismatch between the transition pathways girls were on compared with their preferences:

Evaluation data from five LNGB projects with relevant data at the beginning of the project found that 23% of girls assigned to the skills and work-related pathways indicated they would have liked to transition to formal schooling. For girls assigned to transition into formal schooling, 48% mentioned this as their preference, while almost a quarter (22%) signalled wanting to transition into a work-related pathway. Approximately 5% of girls overall (irrespective of their transition pathway) mentioned wanting to be involved in domestic activities which included household chores, getting married, and/or taking care of their families. Around 3% of girls mentioned other activities, none of which were related to either formal school or employment, such as going abroad (see [Table 5](#)).

Table 5: Mismatch between assigned transition pathway and adolescent girl's desired activity (% of total girls)

What would the girl prefer to do at the course completion? [%]	Transition pathway assigned (10 cohorts with baseline)		Transition pathway assigned (4 cohorts with recontacted girls)			
	Baseline level		Baseline level		Follow-up level	
	Work opportunities pathway	Formal schooling pathway	Work opportunities pathway	Formal schooling pathway	Work opportunities pathway	Formal schooling pathway
Formal schooling	23%	48%	22%	52%	31%	71%
Non formal schooling	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
Vocational training / obtain a new job	37%	27%	27%	14%	30%	12%
In paid employment	15%	10%	14%	14%	22%	10%
Self-employment	16%	8%	27%	15%	12%	4%
Domestic activity	4%	5%	3%	3%	2%	1%
Other	4%	3%	7%	3%	1%	2%
Total	1,595	1,626	458	467	458	467

Note: The table includes information for: (1) five projects (10 cohorts) which have baseline data on transition pathway, and girls' desired activity after the project ends; and (2) three projects (four cohorts) which have these data at both baseline and follow-up. Proportion is calculated for recontacted girls only. The projects include TEACH (Pakistan), TEAM Girl (Malawi), Aarambha (Nepal), SAGE (Zimbabwe), and ENGAGE (Ethiopia). Aarambha and SAGE are not included in (2) due to not having data in the follow-up. For ENGAGE, data from baseline-midline are used. Statistically significant differences between groups are in a darker shade of orange (negative difference) and green (positive difference).

While most adolescent girls in the three case study projects were happy with their pathway, in a few cases girls identified that it was different to their preferred choice: Of the three case study projects, *Aarambha* is the only one to capture girls' preferences in their monitoring data at the beginning of the project that could be compared with what they actually transitioned into. Among those in Cohort 3, 63% of adolescent girls signalled a preference to transition to formal schooling, while the equivalent for vocational training was 47%.⁵⁰ Of the girls who had signalled a preference to transition into formal schooling, 77% did so, with 13% transitioning to vocational training, and 10% dropping out. Of the 13% of girls who went into vocational training (but who would have preferred to transition into formal schooling), 73% were older adolescent girls. Of the girls who had indicated a preference to transition into vocational training, only 36% did so. Of the remainder, 44% transitioned to formal schooling (88% of whom were younger adolescent girls), and the remaining 20% dropped out. During the qualitative research, some older adolescent girls in Kenya and in Nepal signalled that their preference would have been to return to formal school, but due to their age this was not possible, and they were instead encouraged to follow the skills or work-related track (see *Ayaan's story – Box 10*). Lucy, a 21-year-old adolescent mother from Kenya (see *Box 19*), indicated her preference would have been to select the skills pathway but this was difficult because of her childcare responsibilities. Instead, she selected the work-related track. This was corroborated by the educator who taught at the same learning centre who indicated that some young mothers had initially selected the skills pathway as their preferred choice but were

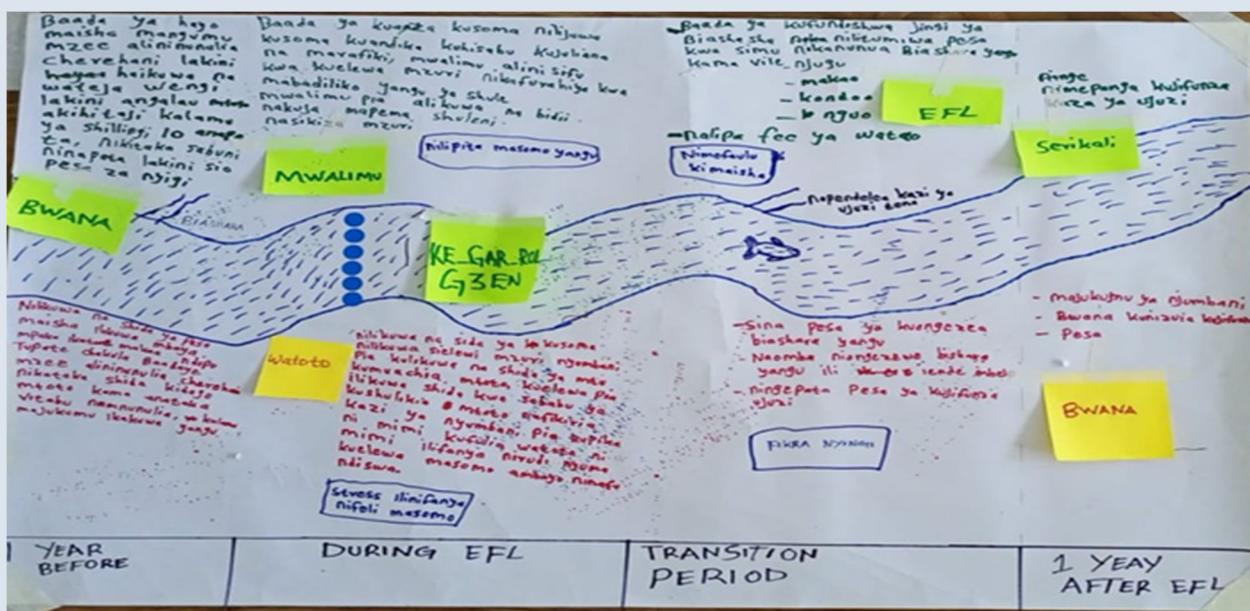
⁵⁰ The number does not add up to 100% as girls were allowed to select multiple answers.

unable to proceed with this option because of a lack of childcare facilities. The *EfL* project did later try to rectify this by adapting the design to provide childcare support to girls with children (see project activities in *Annex B, Table 15*).

Box 10: 20-year-old Ayaan would have liked to have continued with her education after completing the *EfL* project in Kenya, but was told formal schooling was only for younger girls

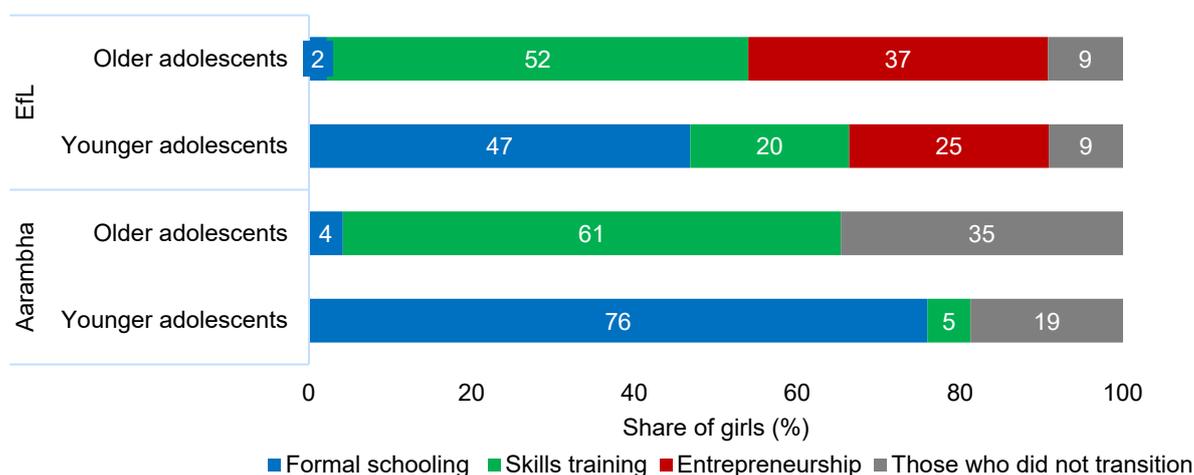
Ayaan is a 20-year-old adolescent who lives in Garissa County in Kenya with her husband and children. Prior to joining the *EfL* project, Ayaan had been in primary school. She dropped out after failing her end of primary exams at the end of Grade 8, which determines eligibility to attend secondary school. Ayaan joined the *EfL* project and, after successfully completing, expressed a wish to continue her secondary education so she could achieve her goal of becoming a chemist. However, she was told by the project facilitator that only the younger girls had the option of returning to school, and that she was too old to be considered. Her second preference would have been to pursue an apprenticeship as an electrician, but her husband forbade her, telling her this was a man's vocation. The other option available to her was to pursue a tailoring business. However, Ayaan indicated that there were already many people in her village doing this, meaning she would have had few customers. Ayaan decided to choose the work-related track, and opened up a business selling nuts, charcoal, and clothes.

(Ayaan, 20-year-old on entrepreneurship track, *EfL* project, Garissa County, Kenya)



Across two of the case study projects that had data, some girls did not make a transition beyond the learning centre. Transition rates were high in *EfL*, while a sizeable proportion did not make the transition in *Aarambha*. This was particularly the case for older adolescent girls (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Percentage of girls on each transition pathway



Source: Calculated using information from project monitoring data.

The evaluation reports from the three case study LNGB projects find that, while the majority of girls' progress in their education and livelihood journeys beyond the learning centres, some do not: The *EfL* project reports that approximately one-fifth of those who transitioned into the skills training track completed and graduated from the course but remained unemployed. For those girls on the work-related track, around 8% did not start a business, and a further 39% started a business which ended up being unsuccessful (UKAID, 2022c). For the *STAGE* project, a tracer study found that 84.4% of girls who had graduated from the non-formal education track were working in a safe and fair work environment, evaluated as a success by the project. For those negatively affected by gender social norms (76%) and those from poor households (78%) the graduation to safe work environments was slightly lower (UKAID, 2022a). The transition rates for girls on the formal track reported that almost all girls were still enrolled in either formal or non-formal education (UKAID, 2022b). The *Aarambha* project reports the least success according to the external endline evaluation. This identified that 22.3% of girls at the time of leaving the learning centre were neither in education nor in skills training. This was much worse for older adolescent girls, with 36.5% estimated to not be in education or skills training. The report notes, however, that this included girls waiting to transition⁵¹ (UKAID, 2022e).

Cultural taboos in some cases acted as an impediment to girls transitioning to work-related pathways: In the context of the three LNGB projects which are the focus of this study, several stakeholders in Nepal mentioned this: *"They think that the honour of the house will diminish, and there will be complaints saying, 'So and so's daughter is working [in] so and so place.'" (Formal school teacher, Bara district, Nepal).* This could partly explain the endline evaluation data, which pointed to the particularly high numbers of older adolescent girls who had not transitioned to employment opportunities (*Aarambha* endline report – C2, 2022). In Kenya, several girls who were married identified their husbands as the main obstacle to success in their transition and post-transition journeys: *"He [husband] has a lot of restrictions. He wants me to do what he says. He doesn't want me to continue because he says no one will take care of the children."* (20-year-old girl on entrepreneurship track, Garissa County, Kenya). A male community FGD appears to corroborate this with one example highlighting the risk of violence girls may experience because of their new-found financial independence from their husbands: *"She [EfL girl] says that's her money and nobody should touch it. There was conflict in some families because of that money. Some husbands broke the sewing machines because the wives were uncontrollable."* (Male community FGD, Garissa County, Kenya).

7.3. Vocations that girls on work-related pathways transition into

For the three case study projects, the vocations that girls could specialise in were limited due to the wider economic environment: Market assessment surveys were carried out by all three LNGB projects to help determine what vocations each of the projects could offer to girls. For example, the *STAGE* project conducted a market assessment report in 2021 which provided information on the market conditions for specific income-generating activities, and the profitability of these sectors taking account of start-up costs. In the case of *EfL*, the report provided an overview of the current labour market trends as well as an overall assessment of the economic, social and technical drivers of market growth in the counties that the project worked in. As expressed by the IP for the *EfL* project, the wider economic environment meant that factors outside the control of the project meant girls were not always able to select a vocation of their choosing. This is supported by the *EfL* endline evaluation which concluded that certain vocations – including many non-traditional vocations – were not available to girls even when in some cases girls wished to pursue these opportunities. Catering, mechanics, driving, and carpentry were all identified in the evaluation endline report as being short in supply for girls. Furthermore, for certain vocations (such as welding) girls had to reside in an area which had access to electricity (UKAID, 2022c). One community discussion also indicated the lack of electricity was a constraint for girls who had opened their own salons, meaning girls were forced to move to the next town (Male Community FGD, Kilifi County, Kenya). The IPs for the *EfL* and *STAGE* projects pointed to how the remoteness of the communities in which the projects were operating limited the vocations they could offer to the girls. In the case of *STAGE*, for example, master artisans were unwilling to travel to these communities to train girls meaning the project had to rely on artisans from the local area.⁵² Similarly, supply chains for the materials needed to pursue certain vocations were identified by *STAGE* and *Aarambha* as affecting what vocations could be offered in remote areas. In Nepal, one downstream partner indicated that due to the unavailability of some materials, the

⁵¹ These figures are from the external evaluation report and refer to only Cohort 2. These differ from the figures presented in Figure 12 which summarises the monitoring data retrieved from IPs directly. The monitoring data relate to Cohorts 1, 2 and 3.

⁵² The shortage in master trainers may have been exacerbated by low reimbursement for their time training by Ghanaian standards. The downstream partner in the Upper West indicated that they were paid Ghs. 135 (equivalent to GBP 9).

Aarambha project could not offer training in certain vocations which girls were interested in pursuing, such as bangle-making.

As a result, there were limited vocations that girls engaged in: As *Table 6* illustrates, the vocations were particularly limited for both districts that the *Aarambha* project operated in (83% in tailoring), and for *EfL* for Kilifi (71% in tailoring). This led to a very saturated market environment from which girls operated their businesses: “*And we had majority of the girls doing hair dressing in that community because there is nobody doing beading who can teach them and they are far away....so, when we finished, we had about 23 of the girls doing hair braiding in that community....the market will be saturated.... so we had some of them after they completed...went to learn other vocations.*” (Downstream partner, Upper East region, Ghana). A government official interviewed from the Upper East region of Ghana said that the sectors within which girls became skilled for the *STAGE* project were not necessarily always the ones that led to sustainable employment.

The saturation of the market was identified by some girls as the reason why they did not choose – or were not encouraged to choose – certain vocations. Ayaan (see *Box 10*) signalled that the saturation of the tailoring market was why she chose not to pursue this as a vocation: “*Tailoring business has many people, and the village is too small.... so, there are no customers.*” (20-year-old Ayaan on the entrepreneurship track, *EfL* project, Garissa County, Kenya). IPs for *ENGAGE* in Nepal and *SAGE* in Zimbabwe identified how girls were competing in markets that already had several businesses operating in the vicinity selling the same products. In the case of the *ENGAGE* project, the IP said girls faced further challenges because their businesses were uncompetitive in price compared with imported Chinese goods. For *SAGE*, the IP indicated that “*the market was challenging because there were already a lot of competitors.... every house was doing pottery.... the market was small.*” With the aim of addressing this, several projects undertook a labour market survey to map the types of vocations and markets relevant to the context.

Table 6: Specialisation areas for girls on work-related pathways

STAGE (Ghana)			EfL (Kenya)			Aarambha (Nepal)		
All regions	Upper East	Upper West	All counties	Kilifi	Garissa	All districts	Bara	Rautahat
Pastry making (27%)	Weaving (38%)	Weaving (45%)	Tailoring (45%)	Tailoring (71%)	Tailoring (54%)	Tailoring (83%)	Tailoring (88%)	Tailoring (76%)
Soap-making (26%)	Soap-making (21%)	Hairdressing (26%)	Shopkeeping and grocery vending (19%)	Shopkeeping and grocery vending (14%)	Shopkeeping and grocery vending (22%)	Opening a boutique (8%)	Opening a boutique (3%)	Opening a boutique (15%)
Hairdressing (20%)	Bead-making (15%)	Soap-making (14%)	Hairdressing (15%)	Hairdressing (15%)	Livestock rearing (15%)	Others (8%)	Others (9%)	Bangal (bracelet) production (3%)
Bead-making (13%)	Hairdressing (13%)	Pastry making (8%)	Livestock rearing and farming (13%)	Others (15%)	Others (9%)			Others (6%)
Weaving (9%)	Pastry making (13%)	Bead-making (7%)	Beauty therapy (3%)					
Decoration (4%)			Others (6%)					
Make-up (1%)								
5,391 girls	845 girls	323 girls	4,218 girls	805 girls	837 girls	1,268 girls	735 girls	533 girls

Source: Calculated using information from IP monitoring data.

Note: (1) The data for the specific regions, counties, or districts are ones where primary data were collected from. This is for the whole sub-region and not specific to the Cohort or learning centre from which the qualitative data were collected, (2) “Other” for *EfL* and *Aarambha* refers to individual specialisations that less than 3% of girls selected. In most cases, these were non-traditional roles such as electrician, mechanics, buildings and carpentry for *EfL*; and for *Aarambha*, farming (such as buffalo, goat, livestock, and vegetables).

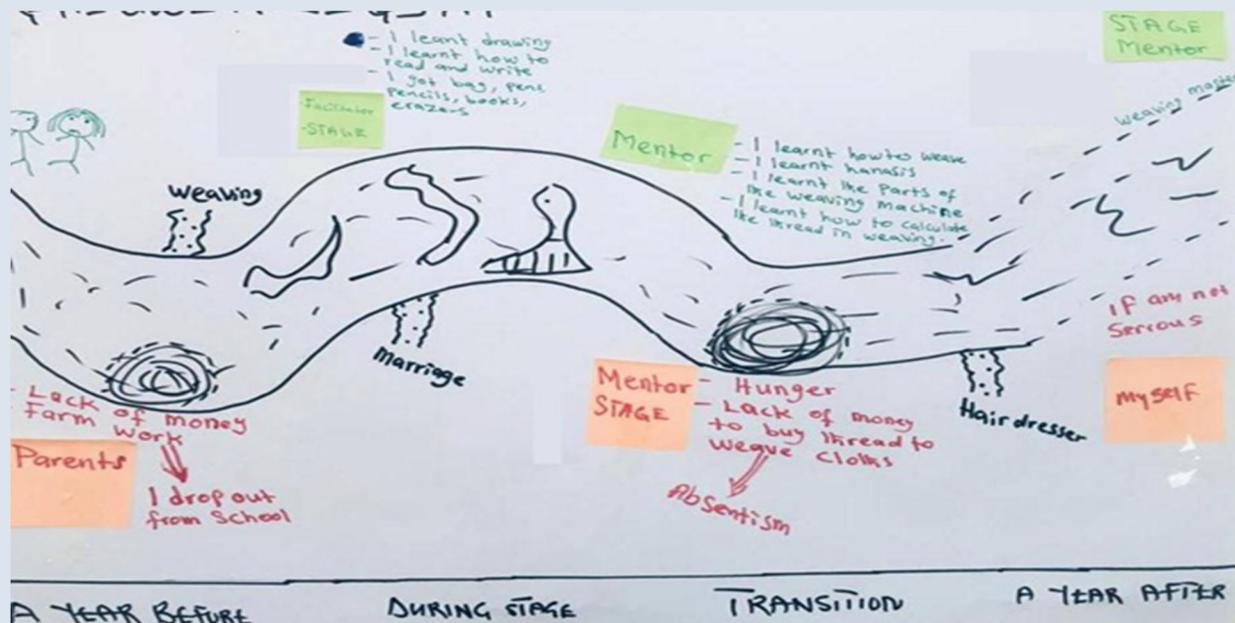
Of the three projects, *EfL* is the only one where older girls had a choice of more than one work-related pathway, namely apprenticeship, entrepreneurship, or skills training. Girls on the apprenticeship and skills track were overwhelmingly engaged in tailoring (58% and 73%, respectively) and hairdressing (34% and 10% respectively). Girls on the entrepreneurship track were engaged in shopkeeping, and grocery vending (42%) or livestock rearing and farming (30%) (*EfL* monitoring data).

Some girls were able to pursue vocations of their choice: Several girls expressed that they had a prior interest in the vocation they chose, around which the project helped harness their skills: *“Weaving was what I was doing before I gave birth and stopped, so I just wanted to continue and polish up.”* (18-year-old on entrepreneurship track, STAGE project, Upper West region, Ghana). Others indicated their choice was influenced by the belief it was a profitable venture: *“I wanted to get money to do business and improve my life... business has money.”* (20-year-old on entrepreneurship track, EfL project, Garissa County, Kenya). In Ghana, Akwete (see Box 11) chose weaving because she perceived this to be more profitable in the long-run. This is supported by data from STAGE’s Labour Market Assessment, which identified that weaving can be a profitable venture in the long-run, but also noted the initial start-up costs for machinery are high and beyond the scope of most girls. Another girl said she chose bread-making because it was the only vocation she felt she could gain the skills within the 6 months of training offered by the STAGE project: *“And because the [training] period was just six months, I will be able to learn the baking before the six months lapses.”* (17-year-old on entrepreneurship track, STAGE project, Upper East region, Ghana).

Box 11: In Ghana, Akwete chose weaving as she considered it more lucrative than hairdressing

18-year-old Akwete is from the Upper West region of Ghana where she enrolled in the non-formal track of the STAGE project. The project offered Akwete the choice of specialising either in hairdressing or weaving. She says that the reason the project only offered two options was because there needed to be a minimum number of girls attached to a single master artisan. Eight of the girls in Akwete’s community went on to choose hairdressing, while 12 – including Akwete – chose weaving. Akwete selected weaving because she believes that in the future it will make her more money than if she had focused on hairdressing. Akwete wishes to open a weaving business in the future and train several girls under her who will also then know how to weave. Akwete says that the main challenge she currently faces is that the STAGE project has not been able to provide her with a weaving machine which impedes her progress.

(Akwete, 18-year-old on entrepreneurship track, STAGE project, Upper West region, Ghana)



This challenge identified by Akwete is not dissimilar to what several girls identified across the three projects. While many had expectations that the LNGB projects should be supporting them in their business ventures with equipment or buildings out of which they could operate, this was not something projects had committed to doing. In the example of the weaving machine, the STAGE project gave each girl a start-up grant. For weaving this would have been insufficient for each girl to purchase an individual weaving machine. STAGE, therefore, encouraged girls who pursued weaving to pool their grants together to buy one machine.

In some cases, girls were encouraged to pursue vocations that were different from their peers: In Nepal, for example, several girls expressed that, because many other girls had selected tailoring, the Aarambha project was unable to offer training in other areas as a teacher was not available: *“I would like to work making bangles. But they [teachers] told me there were classes only for tailoring; bangle making class cannot happen.”* (18-year-old on vocational training track, Aarambha project, Bara district, Nepal). Conversely, in Kenya some girls were encouraged

not to choose the same vocation as their peers: *“They [EFL] told us to choose what we want to do. But [they] say [it should not be] the same thing, it should be different. So, I wanted to choose salon business, but another [girl] had [chosen] that so I just chose business.”* (20-year-old on entrepreneurship track, EFL project, Garissa County, Kenya).

For girls on skills or work-related tracks, vocations that they eventually selected were overwhelmingly those traditionally associated with women:⁵³ In Kenya, the EFL project offered girls the choice of pursuing non-traditional specialisations. However, less than 5% of girls overall pursued these (1% pursued a specialisation in electricals; 2% in mechanics/ buildings/ carpentry; and 1% in plumbing).⁵⁴ Of the 119 girls who pursued these specialisations, 70% were girls who were married. The overwhelming majority (91%) were also mothers. Many girls selecting these non-traditional specialisations were from Kilifi County (41%), followed by Migori (34%), Kisumu (24%), and Isiolo (1%). No girls in Garissa County selected these vocations. In Kilifi County, 1% of girls specialised in electricals, 3% in mechanics/ buildings/ carpentry; and 2% in plumbing (EFL monitoring data). However, none of the girls from the learning centre in Kilifi selected for this study chose a non-traditional specialisation. The project IP for the EFL project discussed how for girls choosing these specialisations it was normally the case that they had prior knowledge of the sector: *“Most of these girls either had someone in their family or someone in their circle of friends who also went through those courses, so it was not just by coincidence.”* (IP, EFL project, Kenya).

The EFL project was the only project where girls selected vocations traditionally associated with boys: Few girls interviewed identified wanting to pursue careers in non-traditional sectors. Ayaan (Box 10) discusses how she was forbidden from selecting a non-traditional vocation: *“My husband refused me to do electrician because he said that is for men.”* (20-year-old Ayaan in entrepreneurship track, EFL project, Garissa County, Kenya). Negative perceptions toward non-traditional vocations were primarily identified by stakeholders in Kenya (Garissa), Nepal (Rautahat) and both regions in Ghana. Formal school teachers from Garissa stated that in Somali culture, which constitutes a large ethnic population in Garissa, if a girl were to choose to drive a boda-boda (motorcycle) *“somehow it is [an] embarrassment to them.... [because] in the Muslim community...we believe that women cannot travel or cannot be with men, who are not their maybe close relative.”* The IP for Aarambha discussed the challenges in changing community mindsets: *“We are having challenges to convince them to choose the non-traditional [jobs].... parents are like highly demanding for tailoring.... they are not willing for their girls to participate [in non-traditional jobs] and they were like threatening the project staff.”* (IP, Aarambha project, Nepal). Beyond jobs in non-traditional sectors, one educator in Nepal went further in pointing out how girls receive little support in working at all: *“Due to gender biasness, they are not well supported in outside jobs except for household jobs.”* (Aarambha educator, Rautahat district, Nepal). In Ghana, three educators discussed that while it was possible for females to learn non-traditional jobs, they may face challenges in doing so because of negative community perceptions.

While negative perceptions towards girls taking up non-traditional vocations in Kilifi, Kenya were identified, where girls did follow these vocations, stakeholders pointed to positive changes in attitude: Of the six locations from which the study collected data, the monitoring data found that only in Kilifi County girls engaged in non-traditional specialisations. The EFL project's rollout of community sensitisation campaigns relating to what girls can go on to do (including specialising in non-traditional vocations) achieved, according to some stakeholders interviewed, limited success in helping to increase the numbers of girls who took up non-traditional vocations in Kilifi: *“The first group that came, most of the girls joined fashion and design but after doing some campaigns and marketing in the villages, the second group split, others went to mechanic, others joined welding, others plumbing.”* (Vocational trainer, Kilifi County, Kenya). The same stakeholder discussed how previously community perceptions would have perceived girls doing non-traditional jobs as being disrespectful but *“their perception has changed because they can see the girls doing their work well.”* (Vocational trainer, Kilifi County, Kenya). This was supported by one community discussion which pointed to how construction and plumbing were previously jobs that would have been unacceptable for girls to do, but *“this has changed since girls have undergone construction and plumbing as girls.... lift the families' standard of living.”* (Female community FGD, Kilifi County, Kenya).

7.4. Support offered to girls on their transition pathways

“So [we] were given Ksh. 12,000 (GBP 68) [by EFL]. I used some of the money to buy two she-goats and all of them have now given birth. The remaining amount, I invested in my tailoring shop. Money will get finished but animals will multiply.”

⁵³ This is based on the monitoring data provided to the study team by the project IPs. While the primary qualitative data are from a sub-set of locations in which the project operates, the reader should note the figures present aggregate for all locations the project is working in.

⁵⁴ This is across all three cohorts and all five counties.

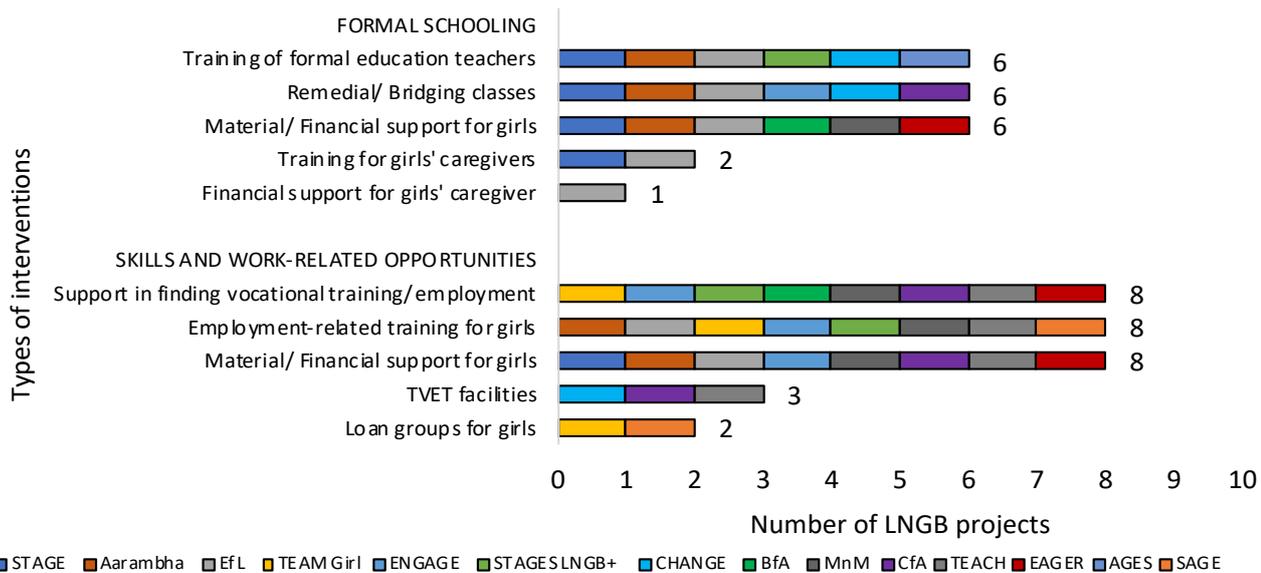
(21-year-old girl on Entrepreneurship track, *EfL* project, Garissa County, Kenya)

“The school bag and uniforms, all that my parents could not provide for me to go to school, the STAGE project has provided them for me now.”

(14-year-old on formal school track, *STAGE* project, Upper East region, Ghana)

This section focuses on the support marginalised girls were given once they had joined one of the transition pathways to help reduce the challenges they might face. It discusses these interventions compared with some of the key barriers that girls face during their transitions, as identified by IPs as well as other key stakeholders (including girls) from the three case study countries.

Figure 13: Main activities to support the most marginalised adolescent girls on their transition pathways



Source: GEC II project external evaluation reports (baseline, midline or endline, depending on availability).

1.2.1. Support provided to girls on the formal schooling pathway

A looming threat to girls' continued participation in school was households being unable to pay for school fees or supplementary school materials. Several project IPs identified a concern that household poverty could be reintroduced as a barrier for girls transitioning back to formal school. The lack of financial resources *“was the main reason why they are not sending their girls to school and [instead] are sending them for labour work to bring income for the families.”* (IP, *CHANGE* project, Ethiopia). This was identified as a concern by 43% of the girls who had transitioned into formal schooling and overwhelmingly by girls in Ghana and Kenya: *“They [STAGE] brought us books when we were in the previous class. But now, I have moved to a new class, but I do not have the books for the new class.”* (14-year-old on formal school track, *STAGE* project, Upper East region, Ghana). One parent of a girl in the *STAGE* project enrolled in Grade 3, noted *“She [the girl] mentioned needing a school bag, books, pens, pencils, and uniforms.... I said if she can't go to school without them then she should sit in the house.”* (Female community member, Upper West region, Ghana). Another community member indicated that *“Parents do not have the financial muscle to push these children up again once you [the STAGE project] leaves them.”* (Male community member, Upper East region, Ghana). This concern is supported by the *STAGE* endline evaluation which identifies the inability of caregivers to support costs associated with education once *STAGE* support is withdrawn as a potential risk ([UKAID, 2022b](#)).

To address this threat, girls transitioning to formal schooling continued to be supported by LNGB projects through direct monetary or in-kind support: Six⁵⁵ of the 14 LNGB projects provided in-kind or financial support. In-kind support was typically the purchase of scholastic materials, schoolbooks, and school uniforms (see [Figure 13](#)). This was a continuation of the type of support LNGB projects offered to girls while they were enrolled at the LNGB learning centre (see [Section 5.4](#)). Financial support included the payment of girls' school fees or for caregivers to

⁵⁵ These six projects were *STAGE* (Ghana), *Aarambha* (Nepal), *BtA* (Ethiopia), *EfL* (Kenya), *MnM* (Nepal) and *EAGER* (Sierra Leone).

purchase materials girls needed to attend school. For example, the *BtA* project in Ethiopia provided support towards stationery costs and the payment of school fees for girls who transitioned into formal schooling. The support that the project provided to these girls was expected to be enough for one to two school terms (IP, *BtA* project, Ethiopia).

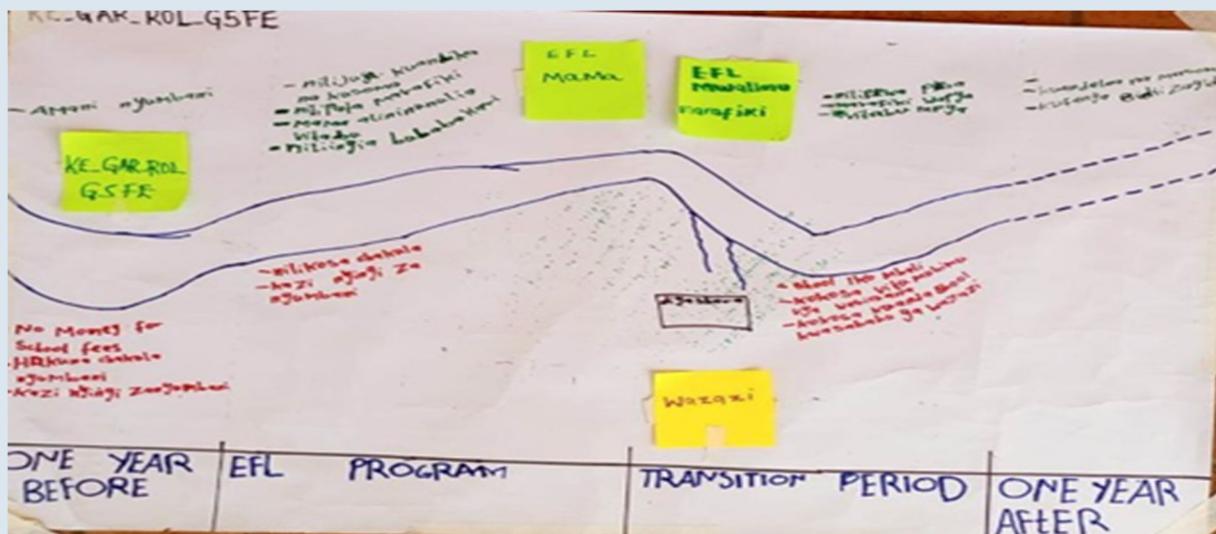
All three LNGB case study projects provided adolescent girls with school materials as they had done while girls were attending the LNGB learning centre (see [Section 5.4](#)). In their River of Life drawing, eight of the 35 girls on this track identified how the material or financial support helped them to participate in school: *“I bought school-uniform, books and a backpack with the money ActionAid sent me.”* (13-year-old Barkhado on formal schooling track, *EfL* project, Kilifi County, Kenya – see [Box 12](#)). The assistance provided to girls through material or financial support was similarly discussed by the parents present in the community FGDs in all three countries. For example: *“I am very poor and couldn’t afford to take care of my child, but STAGE stepped in and even provided bicycles for those who journey to school. My girl is now very comfortable in her school.”* (Community members, female community FGD, Upper East region, Ghana).

Box 12: The money that the *EfL* project in Kenya provided to Barkhado enabled her to transition into formal schooling

Barkhado is a 13-year-old girl who lives in Garissa County in Kenya with her mother and father, who are both very poor. Items like school uniform, schoolbooks, and a school bag are beyond the reach of what they can afford to buy. This prevented Barkhado from attending school before she joined the *EfL* project. Barkhado’s parents struggled with buying food because of their dire financial situation. Barkhado helped her mother with household chores and would go in search of left-over charcoal which her family could use to cook food. However, Barkhado’s dream was always to be able to attend school.

After completing the *EfL* project, Barkhado started attending primary school. With the money given to her by ActionAid, she was able to buy books, a school uniform, and a school bag. Barkhado still faces challenges including the distance that she must travel to get to school, with the journey taking her more than one hour each way. She also continues to go hungry and, when she is menstruating, Barkhado does not go to school because she does not have sanitary pads. Barkhado has indicated that the facilitator on the *EfL* project, with whom she is still in touch, and a teacher at her current school have given her and her family money to help ease these barriers.

(Barkhado, 13-year-old on formal school track, *EfL* project, Garissa County, Kenya)



There is some evidence that the support provided helped to address barriers that adolescent girls otherwise might have faced. Data from the *STAGE* endline evaluation show that 95% of the girls who transitioned to formal schooling are still in school two years after transitioning – the maximum timeframe for which the project continues to offer girls support once they leave the LNGB learning centres. Formal school teachers in Ghana, Kenya and Nepal signalled how the financial and material support girls received from the LNGB project supported girls’ participation. For example: *“They were always in school because they could get [sanitary] pads compared to their peers who were not having access to [sanitary pads]. On the part of the learning materials, they were not having any challenge with that.”* (Formal school teacher, Upper East region, Ghana). The *STAGE* endline evaluation illustrates how beyond the economic, the transition kits (which included a school uniform, school-bag, stationery and textbooks) provided to girls

gave them back their dignity when attending school as it made them just like the other pupils ([UKAID, 2022b](#)). This is supported by the community FGDs where community members noted how girls on the *STAGE* project came from very poor families. Seeing other pupils with possessions that were expensive was a reason for their drop out of school previously, as their caregivers could not afford to them (Male Community FGD, Upper East region, Ghana).

While distance to school continued to be identified as a barrier for adolescent girls on some LNGB projects, few projects addressed this in their activities designed for the transition phase: The IPs for the *STAGE* and *TEACH* projects both identified distance as a major barrier preventing girls from being able to successfully transition into formal schooling. In the case of the *TEACH* project in Pakistan, girls had to travel vast distances to reach school in Balochistan province (IP, *TEACH* project, Pakistan). Amongst the 98 girls interviewed across the three case study LNGB projects, distance to the primary school was identified as a barrier by 23% of girls who transitioned into formal schooling. Most of the girls who reported this as a challenge resided in Kenya (Garissa). Barkhado ([Box 12](#)) indicated that it would take her one hour to journey from her home to school (13-year-old Barkhado, formal school track, Garissa County, Kenya). Barkhado's school teacher at the primary school she attends corroborated this, indicating that the experience of many of the *EfL* and non-*EfL* girls are comparable with Barkhado. Coupled with this are the security concerns girls face when they travel far to attend school, which further impedes their attendance ([UKAID, 2022c](#)). In the case of *STAGE*, "bicycle banks" were set up in the communities that the project worked in to provide girls with transportation to help reduce the distances between girls' homes and schools ([UKAID, 2022b](#)). However, the high cost of maintaining and replacing these "bicycle banks" were concerns raised by the IP and the *STAGE* endline evaluation with respect to long-term sustainability. In addition, several girls interviewed also identified a shortage of bicycles: "Bicycles were limited, they were not up to our number so the facilitators shared them to us in pairs. So, I think that these bicycles should have been enough to reach everyone so that each person will have one that would have helped more." (17-year-old girl on formal school track, *STAGE* project, Upper East region, Ghana).

The *EfL* and *STAGE* projects aimed to support caregivers to withstand negative economic shocks: In Kenya, the *EfL* project offered caregivers of girls who transitioned into formal school the same training, start-up kits and capital that the project offered to girls who had transitioned into vocational skills training, entrepreneurship and apprenticeship tracks once they had completed at the learning centre ([UKAID, 2022c](#)). For two *EfL* girls interviewed for this study who were on the formal school track in Kilifi in Kenya, this start-up capital helped support their parents' livelihoods: "They gave money to my mother who used the money to buy goats, shoes and the remainder of money to buy food." (Girl on formal school track, *EfL* project, Kilifi County, Kenya). The *STAGE* project included an Economic Empowerment Programme, which aimed to provide links between the families of girls with farming support options through its collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture. This was intended to provide caregivers with context-relevant information to withstand negative external economic shocks. In discussions with community members, however, this information does not seem to have been forthcoming, making it difficult to judge its success: "They [*STAGE*] revealed that they were going to support us in our farming so that we can take care of our children ourselves. It's been over a year now and we have not heard from them again." (Female community FGD, Upper East region, Ghana). This was corroborated by the IP who indicated that the Economic Empowerment Programme "lacked the real enablers to push on it" meaning that "in subsequent years they [the caregivers] may not be able to afford the scholarship for the girls that help them to be in school." (IP, *STAGE* project, Ghana).

Several LNGB projects engaged with school level actors to try and address the challenges marginalised girls typically face in formal school environments: IPs from three projects (*SAGE*, *Closing the Gap* and *EfL*) discussed the challenges of the formal school environment. The IP for the *SAGE* project (Zimbabwe) identified how stigma and discrimination against girls transitioning to formal school settings was a barrier, as they were considered by their peers as students coming directly from adult learning centres (IP, *SAGE* project, Zimbabwe). In the case of *Closing the Gap* project in Pakistan, the IP indicated that "there are environment differences in our centre and the formal school system. Like we [learning centre] have no tolerance on corporal punishment unlike government schools." (IP, *Closing the Gap* project, Pakistan). Six projects⁵⁶ worked with school level actors to try to reduce these barriers (see [Figure 13](#)). Typically, the types of interventions in place included training teachers or headteachers in formal schools in gender-responsive pedagogy. The *AGES* project in Somalia, for example, trained formal school teachers and headteachers in inclusive and gender-sensitive pedagogical training in the schools that *AGES* girls had transitioned into after leaving the learning centre ([AGES baseline report, 2020](#)).

Across the three case studies, the training and support that the LNGB projects provided to school level actors was identified as beneficial by the girls: Almost two-thirds (63%) of girls on the formal school track

⁵⁶ These projects were *STAGE* (Ghana), *Aarambha* (Nepal), *EfL* (Kenya), *STAGES LNGB+* (Afghanistan), *CHANGE* (Ethiopia) and *AGES* (Somalia).

identified their school teacher as supporting them in the transition phase of their education journey. Some girls pinpointed how the close coordination with LNGB project facilitators helped: *“When she [EfL coordinator] comes to school she used to meet with the head teacher and speak with him and after that we were called and provided with [sanitary] pads.”* (17-year-old on formal school track, EfL project, Kilifi County, Kenya). Teachers also discussed the value of engaging with the projects. In Kenya, one teacher discussed that through engaging with the EfL project, her knowledge of teaching girls with specific vulnerabilities improved: *“I did not know how to handle those with disabilities [and] I did not know how to educate young mothers. I was used to just teaching the young girls. Now I can relate well with them and that has helped me a lot.”* (Formal school teacher, Kilifi County, Kenya). In Nepal, the training given to teachers on teaching practices by the *Aarambha* project helped ease girls in their transition back into the classroom: *“We taught them slowly.... And we made a group specially for them, where the children who know, taught them by teaching them...if students cooperate with each other then they can learn fast because with teachers they might have some fear but with students they get along.”* (Formal school teacher, Bara district, Nepal).

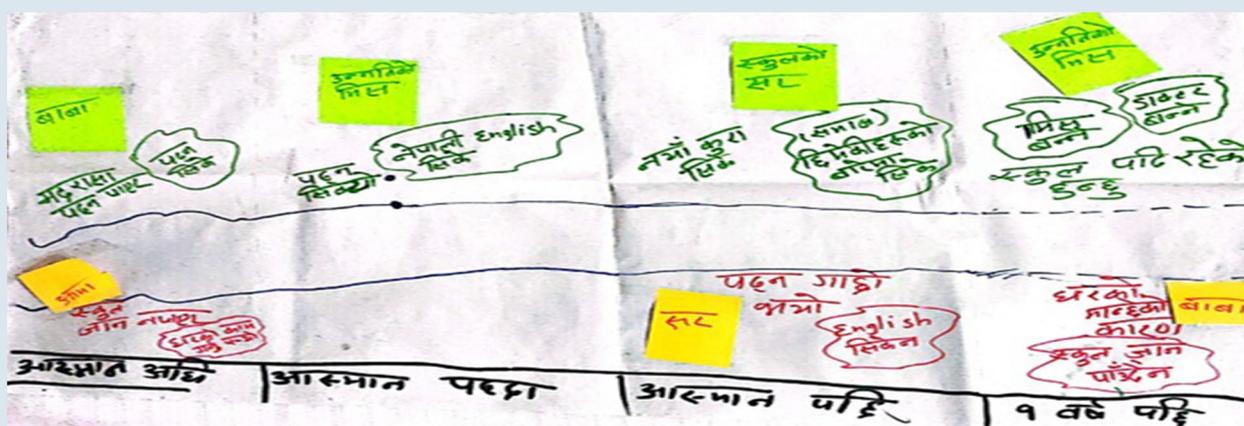
Home visits by projects helped to address negative family attitudes in some cases, although these did persist for some girls. Negative family attitudes were identified as less of a barrier compared with the pre-LNGB period for girls who transitioned to formal schooling, although they did continue to be an obstacle. In girls' individual Rivers of Life, 40% of girls who transitioned to formal schooling across all three contexts identified parents and caregivers as a barrier to succeeding in their transition pathways or in achieving their aspirations, due to reasons such as lack of support (including financial) or negative attitudes. The *STAGE* project integrated into its design continued home visits to caregivers to continue engaging with them about the importance of education once girls had transitioned to formal schooling. For girls who had been enrolled in the learning centres in *Aarambha* in Nepal, they identified that, as they were now older, their caregivers were less supportive of them attending school: *“I am at the suitable age to get married. So, I think my mother and father won't allow me to read [continue going to school].”* (15-year-old on formal school track, *Aarambha* project, Rautahat, Nepal). Noor discusses how her father's attitude to education was now less positive compared with when she was enrolled in the *Aarambha* project: *“My father says I grew up so..., he thinks one [girls] should not go when they grow up.”* (15-year-old Noor on formal school track, Rautahat district, Nepal). Noor's story also reflects the implied threat of violence should she openly defy her father by attending school, which had not been the case previously ([Box 13](#)).

Box 13: In Nepal, Noor has to keep her attendance at primary school a secret from her father, as he does not approve of older girls attending school

Noor is a 15-year-old girl who lives in the Rautahat district of Nepal who attended the *Aarambha* learning centre. Since leaving the *Aarambha* learning centre, Noor has started attending primary school. However, Noor indicates that as she is now older her father is not as supportive of her attending school compared with when she enrolled in the *Aarambha* project. He has forbidden her from attending school. Noor signals that despite her father not supporting her decision to continue with her education, she still attends school unbeknownst to him. This is made possible only because Noor's father works and resides in Kathmandu, and so is not aware that she attends school. While Noor's mother supports her decision to attend school, she does not directly appeal to Noor's father to allow Noor to attend school as this leaves her at risk of being physically beaten. Noor has not communicated any of this to the *Aarambha* facilitators or to her teachers at school.

The days when Noor's father does come back from Kathmandu to the village where she resides, Noor does not attend school. No one from the *Aarambha* project nor the school comes to visit her home when she does not attend school.⁵⁷ Having to skip school for two to three days at a time while her father is around ends up having a negative effect on her learning. Noor indicates that while her father does not let her attend school, she has repeatedly expressed her desire to attend school to him. Prior to being enrolled in the *Aarambha* project, she indicates she would not have been able to do this. Noor would like to continue to secondary school in the future as she aspires to be a doctor. However, she fears this will be difficult because of her father's current attitude to girls' education.

(Noor, 15-year-old on formal school track, *Aarambha* project, Rautahat district, Nepal)



7.4.1. Support provided to girls on the work-related pathway

Financial capital was provided to girls to help set up and start their own businesses: Eight out of 14 LNGB projects, including the three case study projects, provided girls transitioning to skills and work-related pathways with start-up kits and financial capital to facilitate a smoother transition (see *Figure 13*). Ten of the 15 girls interviewed for this study who transitioned into the entrepreneurship track identified how the project's financial support helped them with their transition journeys. Nine of these girls were from Kenya. Girls on the *EfL* project in Kenya were given a capital start-up fund of Ksh. 12,000 (equivalent to GBP 68). This was identified as a particularly important form of support to cushion girls' businesses from challenging market conditions during periods of sustained drought, increased cost of commodities and the Covid-19 pandemic ([UKAID, 2022c](#)). Three of the girls in Garissa, which is a largely pastoralist area, discussed how they used the cash grant to diversify their business portfolio to protect themselves from economic downturns. This often involved opening a business alongside breeding livestock: "I split the money that Action Aid gave me, some I bought 2 goats and some I started my own business with it. I sell miraa/khat and sweets and I save the profit." (21-year-old on entrepreneurship track, *EfL* project, Garissa County, Kenya).

For the three case study projects, the money given to girls on the work-related track to start up their businesses was identified as helping to positively change perceptions of family members towards girls:

⁵⁷ Follow-up correspondence with the *Aarambha* IP suggests that the project is preparing to adopt an approach to follow up on girls' transitions as well as a 'parenting education' from August 2023 in efforts to mitigate the types of barriers faced by girls like Noor.

Community members in Ghana and Kenya discussed how the income that married girls were getting from their businesses had given them new-found respect from their husbands: *“This is because they don’t totally rely on their husbands for financial support... the little income they raise goes a long way to support[ing] their husbands.”* (Female community FGD, Upper East region, Ghana). In Kenya a husband of one of the girls on the entrepreneurship track discussed the positive effects: *“We still provide for the family but before we used to worry a lot if I don’t have money because the whole family depends on me. But now if I don’t have money that particular day, at least my wife can help provide for the family that day.”* (Male community FGD, Garissa County, Kenya). Similarly, Dhitya’s in-laws became more supportive of her joining the *Aarambha* learning centre after learning she would be supported by the project in setting up her own tailoring business (see [Box 15](#)).

Despite girls being provided with support by the projects for their businesses, economic constraints were identified as still being a major barrier for them to successfully run their businesses by four out of the 14 IPs interviewed: In the case of the *Aarambha* project, opening and sustaining a viable business was challenging due to the poor households these girls came from: *“Since our girls are from severely marginalised communities so they are very poor and marginalised, so they don’t have enough money to enlarge their business.”* (IP, *Aarambha* project, Nepal). Across the three case study projects, 59% of girls interviewed who transitioned into skills or work-related pathways identified the barrier to be due to the lack of capital needed to purchase equipment, either while they are on the transition pathway, or as an anticipated challenge in the future. This is supported by the *EfL* endline evaluation, which reports that of those girls who had failed in their transitions into the entrepreneurship and apprenticeship tracks, one of the main reasons was because of the lack of sufficient capital ([UKAID, 2022c](#)). The challenge was greater for some specialisations. The IP for the *SAGE* project in Zimbabwe, for example, identified how girls pursuing carpentry required significantly more start-up capital compared with girls who opened up a business in hairdressing (IP, *SAGE* project, Zimbabwe). Similarly: *“The tools and equipment needed in soap making are expensive so most of the girls who chose soap making pathway have stopped.”* (Female community FGD, Upper East Region, Ghana). This is supported by a market survey and assessment study which identified that the start-up capital for girls varied considerably by vocation. For those pursuing weaving, for example, a minimum of Ghs. 900 (equivalent to GBP 73) was required to procure capital equipment, which was far lower than the start-up capital provided to the girls by the *STAGE* project to support girls in starting up their own businesses.

For some projects, girls were supported to join village savings and loan association schemes for better access to loans to help them support their income generating activities: *TEAM Girl* in Malawi and *SAGE* in Zimbabwe provided this support (see [Figure 13](#)). For example, the *SAGE* project helped to facilitate girls’ access to the Women’s Empowerment Bank to offer them resources to independently support their ventures (Interview with *SAGE* IP; [Box 14](#)).

Box 14: Supporting girls through loans from the Zimbabwe Women Microfinance Bank

Through the Integrated Skills Outreach Programme and Village Savings and Loans Associations training that girls received, the SAGE project in Zimbabwe linked girls to the Zimbabwe Women Microfinance Bank. This gives out loans of up to US\$1,000 to those living in the most vulnerable communities. The project was able to advise and train older girls aged 15-to-19 years of age to, in groups of ten, apply for these low-interest loans which required no collateral given their association with the SAGE project. As of March 2023, the SAGE project had assisted 934 girls from the project to open a bank accounts. A further 12 girls had been able to take out loans.

Interview with SAGE implementing partner.

Girls on skills or work-related pathways were provided with skills training to support them in running their businesses: Eight of 14 LNGB projects offered employment related training to girls to support them in their transition journeys, including the three LNGB projects on which this study focuses (see [Figure 13](#)). From the three case study projects, 29 out of 44 girls interviewed who transitioned to skills or work-related pathways highlighted this training as being beneficial. Several girls in both Garissa and Kilifi in Kenya who progressed on to the entrepreneurship track discussed how the training gave them the financial skills needed to operate their businesses. Lucy (see [Box 19](#)) discussed how the training provided by the *EfL* project equipped her with the skills to successfully operate her textile business: *“If we had received the money without going to the seminar, we could have wasted it. I would not have known the importance of having a business and how start or run it. If I did have a business, I would have run it at a loss because I would be giving back incorrect change and constantly selling on credit.”* (Lucy, 21-year-old on entrepreneurship track, *EfL* project, Kilifi County, Kenya). In Ghana, the 6-month vocational skills training that girls on the non-formal track of the STAGE project received⁵⁸ was identified by girls as the most useful intervention they received, together with the numeracy classes, according to the endline evaluation ([UKAID, 2022a](#)).

The duration of vocational skills training was identified as insufficient for girls to master skills in their specific vocations: The *MnM* and *ENGAGE* projects in Nepal, which both offered girls training in entrepreneurship skills, indicate that there was a need for more time for them to build their proficiency for successfully running a business. For example: *“They needed some improved level of training like cutting and sewing training, doll making training.”* (IP, *ENGAGE* project, Nepal). For the three case study projects, the six-month vocational skills training programme⁵⁹ offered under STAGE was found to be too short in the endline evaluation, with approximately one-fifth⁶⁰ of all girls on the non-formal track reporting needing more time to master a skill beyond what they were offered during the project ([UKAID, 2022a](#)): *“It was not enough for them to be able to learn all the things they needed to know....there are simple things that some of them cannot even do in weaving like fixing a warp.”* (Female community FGD, Upper West region, Ghana). In Nepal, the *Aarambha* downstream partner in Bara signalled that the training time girls on the vocational track should receive to become more proficient in skills training needed to increase (see Dhitya’s story – [Box 15](#)). The *EfL* endline evaluation similarly found that the three months offered to girls on the apprenticeship or vocational training tracks was insufficient for them to specialise in their vocations ([UKAID, 2022c](#)).

Box 15: The 3-month vocational skills training that Dhitya attended as part of the Aarambha project in Nepal was not enough to master skills in tailoring

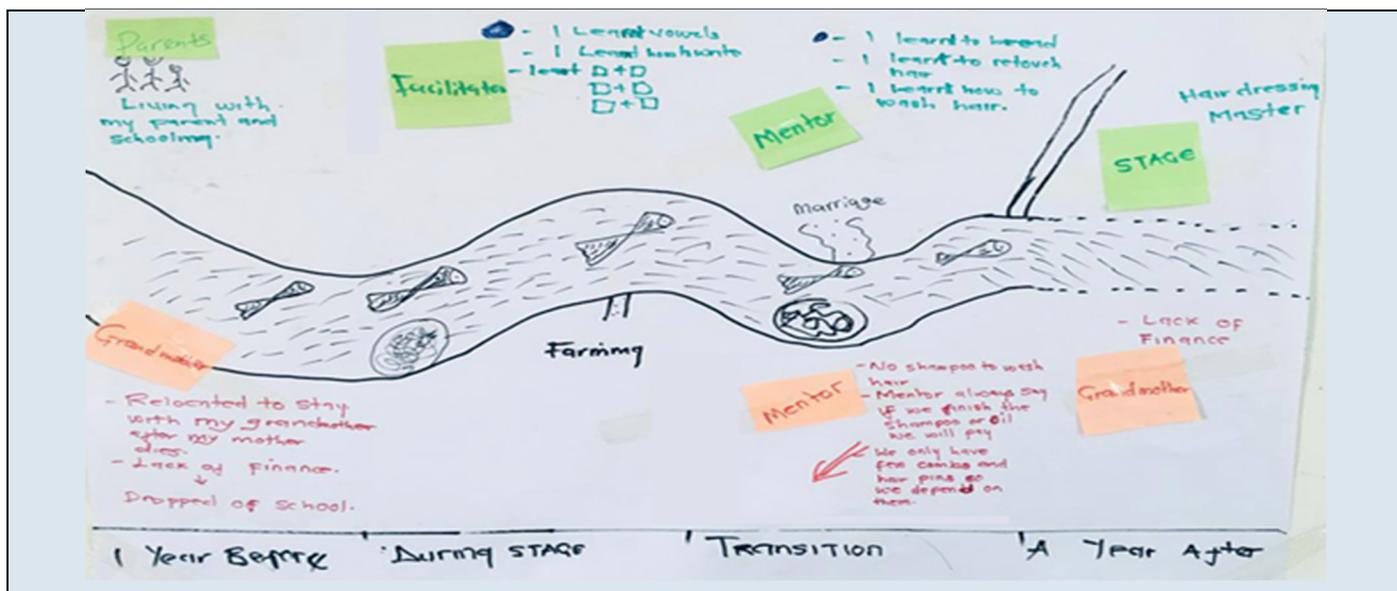
Dhitya is a 17-year-old married adolescent mother who lives in the Bara district of Nepal. Before joining the *Aarambha* project, Dhitya had never been to school and was pregnant with her first child. She had come under intense pressure from her mother-in-law not to attend the learning centre and despite being at risk of physical harm from her mother-in-law, she continued to attend the learning centre. Her in-laws did become more positive about Dhitya attending the learning centre once they learnt that she would have the opportunity to acquire skills in tailoring which would allow Dhitya to bring an income into the household. Dhitya transitioned to a 3-month vocational course to specialise in tailoring. There she learnt how to make *kurtis* (a common garment worn by women in Nepal) and baby clothes. However, she struggled to make *kurtis* properly and indicates that this was because the training time offered by the project was too short to learn all the necessary skills required to make this item of clothing. She reports that more teaching time and time to put these skills into practice was needed for her to perfect her tailoring skills.

(Dhitya, 17-year-old on vocational training track, Aarambha project, Bara district, Nepal)

⁵⁸ This is a period on the programme before they transition to the entrepreneurship pathway.

⁵⁹ This three-month training technically falls under the period that girls are at the catch-up centre.

⁶⁰ The endline evaluation reports that 53.2% strongly agreed that the duration of the vocational skills training was sufficient, while 28.6% agreed with this statement a little ([UKAID, 2022a](#)). In our correspondence with the IP for STAGE, it was noted that one-fifth of girls who indicated that the training length was too short all pursued weaving.



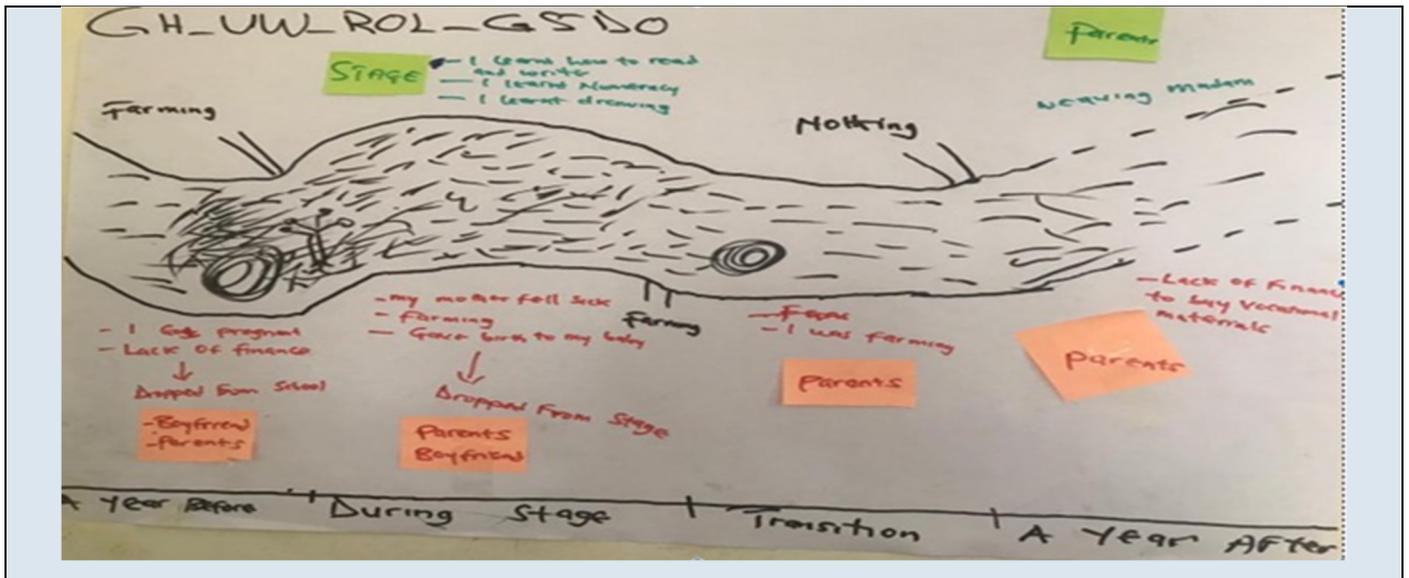
The shortage, delay or non-provision of tools or equipment that girls needed was identified as limiting the benefits of their training: 19 out of 44 girls who transitioned into vocational training identified the shortages or delays in the equipment and other resources as a challenge. These were mainly girls amongst those interviewed in Ghana and Kenya: “Our madam [master artisan].... didn’t have money to buy the weaving thread for us to use for the weaving.” (18-year-old on entrepreneurship track, STAGE project, Upper West region, Ghana). 18-year-old Violet identifies how this shortage limited the usefulness of the training (see [Box 17](#)). Several other stakeholders corroborated this. The IP for STAGE discussed the shortages in equipment for training being partly because of the remoteness of the areas that the project operates in, with “suppliers along the value chain not [being] interested in coming as far as the hard-to-reach areas to supply them.” (IP, STAGE project, Ghana). One master artisan in soap-making indicated that the effectiveness of the training they gave to girls on the STAGE project was hindered by the lack of equipment caused by the rising price of materials over the duration of the project: “The oil was so expensive at that time. All the items were just expensive, soda, caustic soda. So, as a madam [trainer], the challenge was where to get the money to buy the items for training.” (Master artisan, Upper East region, Ghana). In Garissa, Kenya, a master artisan in tailoring indicated that the shortage of sewing machines made the training less useful. The *EfL* endline evaluation supports this, and concludes that one of the major challenges faced by girls transitioning into the apprenticeship track was related to the delays in sourcing equipment needed for skills training ([UKAID, 2022c](#)).

Box 17: In Ghana, Violet chose to opt for skills training in weaving but indicates that the shortage of weaving machines limited the usefulness of the training

Violet is an 18-year-old adolescent girl from the Upper West region of Ghana who was enrolled in the non-formal track of the STAGE project. As part of the skills training that the STAGE project offered, she had the option of choosing weaving, soap-making or hairdressing. Violet chose weaving mainly because she believed she would be most likely to make the money she needed to support herself and her family through this, compared with other options on offer.⁶¹ However, the number of machines at the centre was inadequate compared with the number of girls who were being taught the skills to weave. Violet indicates that there were sometimes as many as five girls to one machine. The shortage of equipment meant that Violet would often go to the learning centre but not get the opportunity to practice weaving. Eventually Violet dropped out of the project indicating that the household chores she was required to complete made it difficult for her to continue attending the STAGE learning centre. Despite dropping out, Violet wants to pursue weaving as a future career.

(Violet, 18-year-old dropout from STAGE project, Upper West region, Ghana)

⁶¹ STAGE officials indicated that the Market Survey findings concluded how selling pastries or soap-making was more profitable compared to weaving. The machinery for the weaving was very expensive. This illustrates a need for more work that projects should do to educate girls and community members about the profitability and viability of different specialisations.



The provision of childcare facilities for young adolescent mothers on the vocational pathway of the EfL project was praised as enabling their participation in TVET classes: Of the 14 LNGB projects reviewed for this study, EfL was the only project identified as offering childcare facilities for girls who are mothers. This was only offered to girls who transitioned to TVET centres.⁶² According to the IP for the EfL project, this was incorporated into the design of the project much later, meaning that not all girls who were young mothers had access to these facilities to begin with. To rectify this, child-care support was integrated in the design of the EfL project as it was clearly valued by girls who were young mothers. One young mother from Kilifi who transitioned into vocational training track indicated how the childcare support provided helped with her learning: *“I used to bring my child with me [and] when we had classes there were babysitters who used to sit with them outside and it meant I could learn.”* (20-year-old on vocational training track, EfL project, Kilifi County, Kenya). Vocational trainers in Kilifi, who trained EfL girls once they had transitioned into TVET centres corroborated this saying that the support helped ensure girls attended classes and concentrate without worrying about their childcare responsibilities.

The mentorship offered by the projects to girls after they had left the transition centre was mentioned by some girls as useful: Two girls from Ghana and Nepal were motivated to attend their respective pathways (formal school and vocational training) due to the mentor from the LNGB project checking in with them regularly. In Kenya, one girl discussed the importance of the mentor pivoting her business model: *“When the vegetable business was not doing well...she advised me to change the business and that’s how I bought goats and hens.”* (19-year-old on entrepreneurship track, EfL project, Kilifi County, Kenya).

Not all employers recognise the certificates issued to girls by the IPs once they complete the education programme in the learning centre: The SAGE project in Zimbabwe indicated that one of the challenges faced by some girls progressing to the paid entrepreneurship track as an employee was that the employer did not recognise the academic certificate that they were given after successfully completing the SAGE project. This was made girls *“feel rejected and unappreciated and stuck with [a] useless certificate.”* (IP, SAGE project, Zimbabwe).

Girls expressed a need for LNGB projects to continue supporting them in their post-transition journeys: Several girls under the EfL and STAGE projects identified the lack of premises through which to operate their businesses being a major challenge and looked to the LNGB projects for support. Others mentioned the challenges relating to material procurement. One apprenticeship trainer who teaches tailoring and hairdressing in Garissa indicated that the lack of premises for girls to operate out of was the major challenge affecting girls’ livelihoods once they completed their apprenticeships. Several girls discussed their expectations regarding continued support once their transition pathways come to an end. Salemah (see [Box 18](#)) expects the EfL project to provide her with a premises from which she can operate her salon which she hopes to open once she has completed her apprenticeship in hair and beauty. Other girls (see also [Lucy – Box 19](#)) had expectations that the EfL and STAGE projects would continue to support and fund them in their desire to switch transition pathways or vocation specialisations. The expectation by girls and their communities of project support continuing in the post-transition phase was the main concern of community discussions in Ghana: *“They don’t give the girls books: they don’t give them sandals and*

⁶² For this study, only the learning centre in Kilifi offered girls the option of transitioning to a vocational training centre.

bags.... they [the girls] feel that STAGE has deceived them.” (Female community FGD, Upper East region, Ghana).⁶³ This supports one of the conclusions noted in the *EfL* endline report that the majority of girls require continued support from the project post-transition which makes it difficult to achieve the threshold where they can independently run their own business (UKAID, 2022c).

7.5. Influence of girls' transitions on their wider decision-making and aspirations

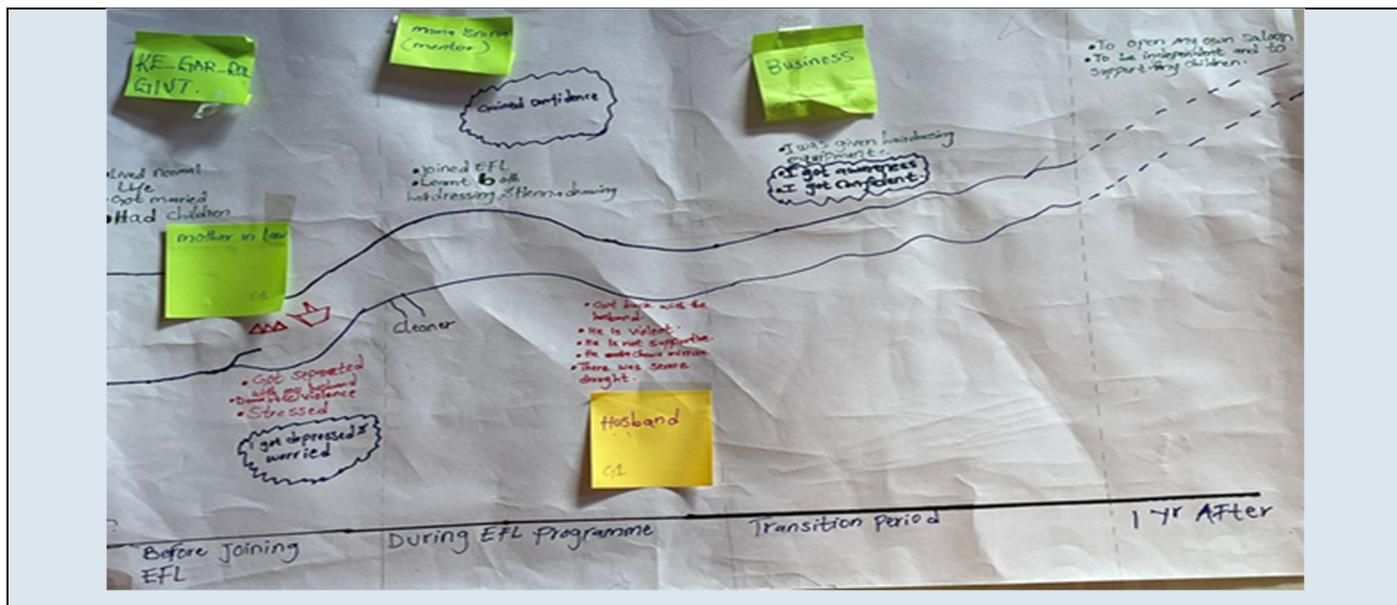
Adolescent girls frequently mentioned how their improved literacy skills and life skills had contributed to them displaying more confidence in decision-making: Improved literacy skills was reported to increase girls' confidence: *“After coming to CLC I can tell [my husband] without being scared.... Before reading at CLC, I used to be scared. And, now after reading at CLC, I don't want my daughter to be the same as us and live in poverty, so I tell him without being scared.”* (17-year-old on Vocational training track, *Aarambha* project, Bara district, Nepal). Increased literacy skills gave one girl the confidence to resist pressures relating to marriage: *“Because I have gone to STAGE and can read and write, I think I am enlightened so if my parent want[s] [me] to marry and I am not ready, I can tell them that I am not.”* (17-year-old on entrepreneurship track, *STAGE* project, Upper East region, Ghana). Another girl indicated that *“after joining the project and we were given counselling and guidance [and] my decision making has improved.”* (20-year-old on entrepreneurship track, *EfL* project, Garissa County, Kenya). Another example was of a girl expressing that the mentorship given to her during the *EfL* project had helped express her life plans: *“I faced my mother and told her that the trainings which am receiving from the catch-up centre will help me to understand mathematics and one day I will be able to teach others so that they wouldn't fail in school.”* (18-year-old who dropped out of *EfL* project, Kilifi County, Kenya). 20-year-old Salemah discussed how the *EfL* project equipped her with skills to make decisions independent of her abusive husband (see *Box 18*). A formal school teacher from Ghana spoke about the benefits of participating in the project as they gained skills and obtained a certificate, which was viewed to be *“changing the lives of young girls in this community.”* (Formal school teacher, Upper West region, Ghana).

Box 18: Salemah reported that the *EfL* project in Kenya gave her confidence to make decisions independent of her husband

Salemah is a young women aged 20 who lives in Garissa County in Kenya. She is married and has children. Prior to joining the *EfL* project, Salemah had separated from her husband who was physically violent towards her. However, she later reconciled with him while enrolled on the *EfL* project. Together with domestic physical abuse, Salemah faced many other challenges while enrolled at the learning centre. These included losing her new-born baby due to birth complications and being affected by drought. However, Salemah did not confide in her mentors at the *EfL* project about the personal problems she was experiencing fearing that if she did, she would have been removed from the project by the facilitators. Salemah persevered to the end of the *EfL* project and was able to attain much-valued skills which allowed her to regain some of her confidence. Salemah aspires to open a salon in a year from now, with the hope that this will give her more independence and allow her to provide for her children. While Salemah points to the lack of support from her husband as being one of the barriers to achieving her aspirations, she feels that the confidence she has gained through participating in the *EfL* project has made her less reliant on him for day-to-day matters. As well as providing her with the necessary skills to manage her own hair and beauty business, Salemah believes that the *EfL* project has spurred her to act upon her goal of opening a salon and offered her more choices to pursue than she had prior to joining the project. Salemah identifies a major challenge of achieving her aspirations as the lack of a business premises out of which to operate. Her expectation was that the project would provide this. However, Salemah indicates that the only support she has received from the project is the provision of one box of henna.

(Salemah, 20-year-old on apprenticeship track, EfL project, Garissa County, Kenya)

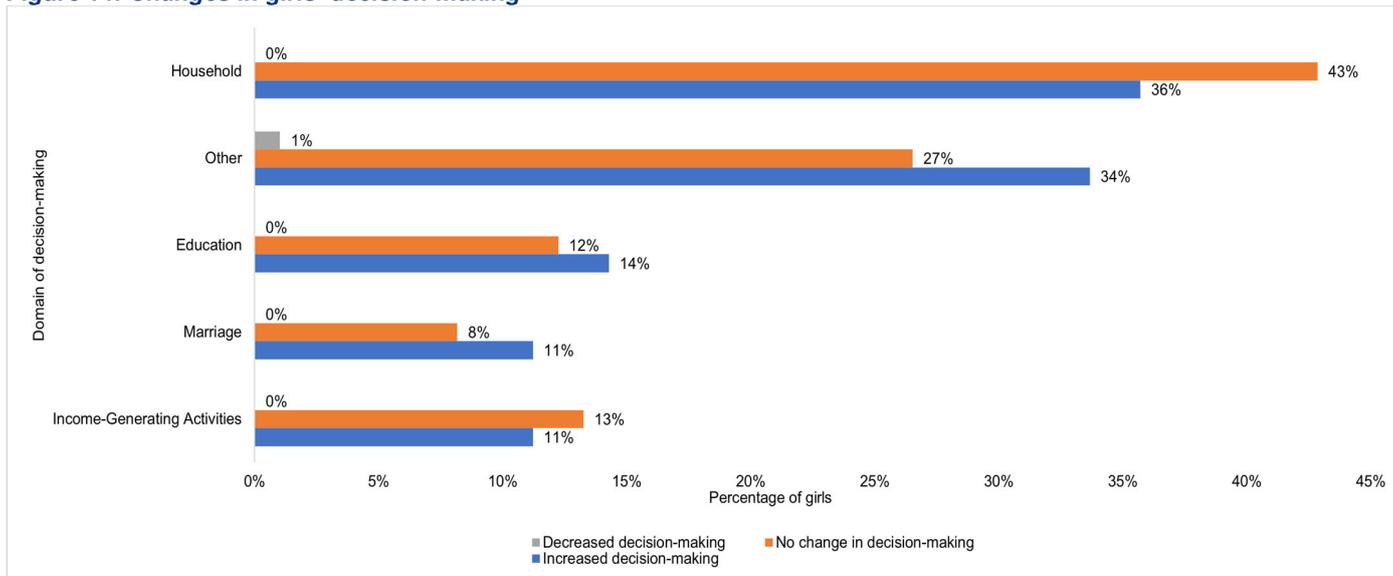
⁶³ As *Table 15* in *Annex B* (Research Design and Methodology) shows, the *STAGE* project does continue to support girls with “transition kits” after they transition onto formal education. However, this is time-limited and during the interviews held with girls and community members an underlying concern expressed was what would happen when *STAGE* withdrew its support.



The income opportunities available to girls from their vocational skills or entrepreneurship activities have helped some girls become financially independent: This has helped reduce some of the previous challenges girls faced particularly in relation to their own expenditures, or with respect to their children’s needs (e.g., paying their children’s school fees, or purchasing learning materials for their children): “I keep my profit to myself. Sometimes I tell him that I am not buying anything for this house today then my husband gives me money to buy the needs of the house. I don’t spend my profit money to buy the needs of the house.” (21-year-old on entrepreneurship track, EFL project, Garissa County, Kenya). As another girl described, “Now, I can buy something for myself and I can help my mother too for me that is a big change. Before I could not do anything but now after selling my items I can spare some cash and do something for myself and my younger siblings.” (20-year-old girl, entrepreneurship track, Kilifi County, Kenya). However, as identified in [Section 7.2](#) this financial independence has come with a risk of harm from family members.

Participating in LNGB projects has helped improve girls’ decision-making capabilities: As shown in [Figure 14](#), girls reported improvements in decision-making predominantly in relation to day-to-day household decisions (34 of 98 girls) and decisions relating to other settings such as going to the market or visiting a health clinic (33 of 98 girls). Fewer girls reported an improvement in being able to make decisions by themselves with respect to their education (14 of 98 girls), income-generating activities (11 of 98 girls), and marriage (11 of 98 girls). As one 21-year-old girl recounted: “I was told that I will be married to a husband, but I declined. I told them that I want to work for myself and I am not ready for marriage. My family sent the man to talk to me and I told him the truth that I am not ready for marriage and that I just started my business, so I told him to leave me alone.” (21-year-old girl, Entrepreneurship track, Garissa County, Kenya). Findings in the *Aarambha* endline report noted that girls developed the confidence to share their opinions with elder household members about adolescent sexual and reproductive health ([Aarambha endline report – C2, 2022](#)).

Figure 14: Changes in girls' decision-making



Source: River of Life/ interviews with girls during primary qualitative data collection

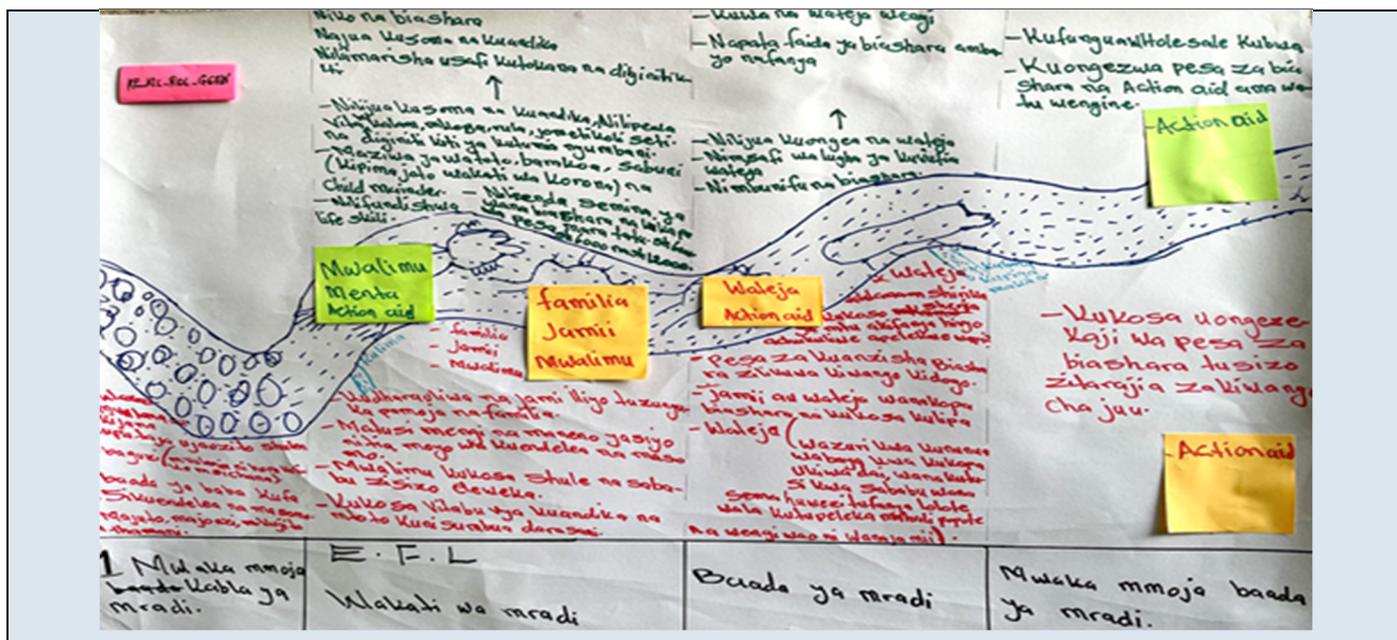
Increases in decision-making vary by country, as well as by girls' individual characteristics: Of the 34 girls (across both younger and adolescent age brackets) who reported improvements in being able to take decisions within the household, the highest number were girls from Ghana (20 out of 31), followed by Kenya (12 out of 36). By contrast, this was only reported by a very small number of girls in Nepal (2 out of 31). A possible reason was a greater proportion of girls in the 10-14 years age bracket were from Nepal (14, compared to 6 each from Kenya and Ghana). There were larger number of girls from Ghana who improved decision-making in the domains of education (7 of 14), income-generating activities (9 of 11), marriage (8 of 11) and in other environments (18 of 32). In addition, girls from all three contexts who are unmarried, do not have children or do not have a disability represented a higher proportion of girls who reported improvements in being able to make decisions.

Several adolescent girls who reported being able to make their own decisions noted that this improved how those in their communities viewed them, positively affecting their feeling of self-worth. One girl from Ghana mentioned, “[My family] feel I am matured now for being able to take such decisions on my own.” (18-year-old dropout, STAGE project, Upper East region, Ghana). Girls in Ghana and Kenya describe the increased reliance those around them have on them which increased their feelings of self-worth: “Now my parents see me as literate. If they are going to make a phone call, they called upon me to come and assist them in identifying the contact number of the person they want to call since they are unable to do that themselves” (15-year-old on formal school track, STAGE project, Upper East region, Ghana). Similarly, Lucy (Box 19) talked about how she felt more valued by her family and friends as a result being able to impart some of the skills which she learnt on the Efl project.

Box 19: The textile business which Lucy opened after leaving the Efl project in Kenya has been negatively affected by customers taking items on credit without paying for them

Lucy is a 21-year-old mother from Kilifi County in Kenya, who joined the Efl project when she was 19 years old and decided to transition into the entrepreneurship track. Although Lucy would have preferred to specialise in gaining skills in plumbing and pipefitting, as a young mother she was constrained by the fact that this option required her to have access to childcare facilities which she did not have. She opened a business selling textiles as this didn't require her to organise childcare support. To help her get started, the Efl project gave her an initial start-up capital of Ksh. 12,000 (equivalent to GBP 68). The entrepreneurial skills training the Efl facilitators provided gave Lucy the confidence to give her family and friends advice on matters relating to business – something she would have been unable to do before. This made her feel valued. However, Lucy indicates that one of the problems which negatively affected the growth of her business was customers from her community refusing to pay for items they would take on credit. Lucy is currently owed Ksh. 7,000 (equivalent to GBP 39) by customers who are refusing to pay. According to Lucy, these community members say the money does not belong to Lucy but rather to ActionAid, as it was them who had given Lucy the money to start her business. Lucy wished she had received more training from the Efl project to deal with these challenges.

(Lucy, 21-year-old on entrepreneurship track, Efl project, Kilifi County, Kenya)



Although adolescent girls now have input into decision-making, many decisions continue to be taken primarily by their husbands or family members, especially for younger adolescent girls: Some girls reported participation in the project as giving them confidence in decision-making independent of their spouses (See [Box 18](#)). However, in other contexts, many key critical decisions continue to be made primarily by husbands or other family members. For example, in Nepal, the *Aarambha* endline evaluation report concludes that many decisions continue to be taken by the eldest male member of the household, and as this is considered the norm, many female household members accept it. ([Aarambha endline report – C2, 2022](#)). The story of 14-year-old Noor demonstrates how she was unable to join formal school as her father forbade it, and so she was forced to attend in secret (see [Box 13](#)). Additionally, as one girl from Bara mentioned, “The [*Aarambha* project] had taught us [what types of decisions to make] but I couldn’t and haven’t made the decision for myself... because I don’t have confidence and I can’t think that much so I ask my father before making a decision.” (13-year-old on formal school track, *Aarambha* project, Bara district, Nepal).

However, girls did not always have control over the financial support intended for them from the projects or of their earnings from their businesses: Several girls on the entrepreneurship track of the *EfL* project in Kenya, in particular in Garissa, indicated that financial capital that they had received from the project (Ksh. 12,000, equivalent to GBP 68) as well as money from their business earnings was taken away by family members.⁶⁴ In other cases, items from their businesses were taken by community members on credit and never paid for (see [Box 19](#)). One girl identified that “I had a business which mostly operates on borrowing. So, people come borrow from me what they want and pay it later. Now there are those who borrow but disappear. That leads to business collapsing.” (Girl on entrepreneurship track, *EfL* project, Garissa County, Kenya). A headteacher who taught *EfL* girls after they transitioned into formal school discussed how parents “did not use the money as planned” and in some cases used the money “to start a project at home that will sustain that child be it food or [other] needs.” (Formal school teacher, Kilifi County, Kenya). A similar situation was identified by a community member in Nepal. For the *Aarambha* project which provides girls with Npr.10,000 (equivalent to GBP 60) to aid them in their transition pathways: “Some of the parents became greedy and the money which was given for girls’ education they use for the household.” (Female community FGD, Rautahat district, Nepal).

Many girls reported that their aspirations had changed: The majority of the girls reported that through the skills in their respective vocations, or having the opportunity to go to school, the experience had helped them nurture aspirations for themselves which they previously didn’t have: “Before joining the Education for life project, I didn’t have any dreams or plans about the future but now I have dreams of what I want to achieve in the future.” (20-year-old on Vocational Training track, *EfL* project, Garissa County, Kenya). The importance of the life skills training that girls were offered was also discussed by girls as giving them the type of knowledge to be able to create the pathways to achieve their aspirations: “The guidance and counselling that I got from STAGE empowered me because they told us that if

⁶⁴ In several of these cases in Garissa where girls (mainly on the entrepreneurship track) had indicated this, their husbands spent this money on *khat* (a drug commonly used in the Garissa region of Kenya).

you are pursuing a skill, you should be serious about and learn hard. This has remained in me ever since." (17-year-old on entrepreneurship track, STAGE project, Upper East region, Ghana). In addition, a 14-year-old girl on the STAGE project had wanted to become a dressmaker prior to joining, but since returning to mainstream education, now aspires to be a nurse. Another girl from Nepal spoke about wishing to apply the learning she gained from the Aarambha project: *"I have thought of studying before coming to the learning centre. But after coming to the learning centre, I have thought of doing something utilising my learning."* (12-year-old on formal school track, Aarambha project, Bara district, Nepal). When asked why their aspirations had changed, girls reported that they aspired to become 'responsible' or 'prominent' – which was influenced by their participation in LNGB projects. As one girl from Ghana mentioned: *"The STAGE project made me believe I can do better."* (14-year-old on formal school track, Upper West region, Ghana).

8. Conclusions

These conclusions are based on the findings from analysis across the entire LNGB portfolio together with those from the three case study projects as identified in sections 5, 6 and 7. They are also informed by the existing literature (as reviewed in [Section 2](#)), as well as the documentation and interviews with IPs that informed the wider context in which the projects operated (in [Section 4](#)).

An important aspect of this report has been the focus on girls' perspectives gained through participatory research activities. As identified in the findings, a particularly important feature of the LNGB projects is the support provided to the most marginalised adolescent girls beyond education into their livelihood journeys, including specific skills- and work-related training, as well as giving them greater confidence and agency over decision-making in their day-to-day lives. The main challenge is sustaining the benefits beyond the lifecycle of the project, given that gender social norms, which continue to limit their opportunities to make bigger decisions about their lives, take a longer time to shift.

To what extent did LNGB projects target the most marginalised adolescent girls?

Across the portfolio, the LNGB projects were successful in targeting the most marginalised adolescent girls. In total, the 14 LNGB projects aimed to reach around 230,000 of the most marginalised adolescent girls. In general, projects succeeded in reaching the most marginalised girls, identified according to context-specific criteria. This was achieved through consultation with national, sub-national and local stakeholders. National government stakeholders were important for identifying locations in which the projects would be implemented. Community members were especially important in helping identify specific girls within the locality. However, there were some challenges faced by the projects in identifying the most vulnerable groups of adolescent girls due to insufficient and inaccurate national and sub-national data.

The LNGB projects successfully targeted marginalised girls who had either never enrolled in school or had dropped out. Amongst these, each LNGB project adopted a set of marginalisation criteria specific to the context they worked in, with a majority of the projects targeting married girls, girls with disabilities, and many focusing on young mothers and pregnant girls.

However, projects did not always meet their intended enrolment targets for particular groups. The findings from our three case study projects indicate that IPs faced challenges in reaching the planned numbers of certain girls they had originally set out to enrol. These were attributed to girls or their families' unwillingness to enrol in the project (e.g., for married girls).

To what extent did LNGB projects mitigate barriers that the most marginalised adolescent girls face in education?

Systemic barriers keep marginalised girls out of school or contribute to them dropping out of school prior to achieving basic literacy and numeracy. In the majority of the LNGB contexts, these ranged from financial barriers (e.g., girls could not afford schooling or had to work to earn an income), travel-related barriers (e.g., long distances to schools or safety/ security concerns) and harmful gender-social norms.

The challenges the girls face vary by individual characteristics. While economic constraints negatively affected all girls, barriers relating to travel to school (transport and distance) are more likely to negatively affect younger adolescents, while gender social norms (e.g., related to early marriage and motherhood) are more likely to adversely affect older adolescents.

All LNGB projects implemented a range of activities to improve girls' academic and non-academic outcomes and support their transition from learning spaces into an education, skills, or work-related pathway. This was done, for example, through the provision of basic literacy and numeracy sessions and life skills sessions.

LNGB projects also engaged closely with governments and communities to address wider structural barriers, such as through community engagement and government outreach. This helped to ensure that projects were aligned with national policies and initiatives. However, low levels of budgetary support were a concern for their sustainability.

Projects provided material and financial support to help reduce barriers. This form of support encompassed cash grants to support girls' education, in-kind support (including through food supplies), hygiene and dignity kits to support girls during puberty.

Projects also engaged with parents and community members to sensitise them on the importance of girls' education including through shifting gender social norms. These activities primarily included face-to-face and radio campaigns and included working with specific community members such as religious leaders, mother groups, school management committees and parent-teacher associations. They provided them with training related to gender sensitisation on issues relating to early marriage and early pregnancy.

[To what extent, and how, did LNGB projects influence the most marginalised adolescent girls' academic and non-academic outcomes?](#)

Across the portfolio, girls' literacy and numeracy improved considerably, more so for girls who had never attended school prior to participating in the LNGB project. In addition, the literacy and numeracy of girls who initially could not answer a single question correctly improved, suggesting that the projects were successfully supporting the most marginalised.

The provision of literacy and numeracy sessions were viewed by the vast majority of adolescent girls in the three case studies as the most positive aspect of enrolling in LNGB.

Although their learning improved, some girls still faced challenges when they transitioned to formal school. Interviews with teachers in formal schools in the three case study contexts suggested that not all girls were able to keep up with the curriculum as easily as their peers who had been in formal school for a longer period.

Ongoing challenges related to the wider context continued to adversely affect girls' retention, attendance, and learning. The portfolio-wide analysis and girls' responses across the three case study LNGB projects identify persistent challenges including household chores, long distances to travel to the learning centres, and negative community attitudes towards their education. Shortages of educators in LNGB project centres was also a constraint. Limitations of learning centre infrastructure were also a challenge, particularly for children with disabilities. Many of these barriers are similar to those girls faced before joining the LNGB projects, albeit the proportion of girls who reported them reduced.

Girls reported that their self-confidence and self-esteem increased and that the projects equipped them with practical skills for their daily lives. According to girls interviewed for the three case study contexts, their confidence improved, in part, due to their improved literacy and numeracy skills. In addition, the life skills sessions provided them with the communication skills they needed to express their opinions, imparted knowledge about sexual and reproductive health and rights (e.g., menstrual hygiene management, delaying pregnancy), as well as financial literacy skills related to saving money.

[How have LNGB projects influenced the most marginalised adolescent girls' transitions to formal schooling or work opportunities?](#)

Girls' transition pathways were often pre-determined by the LNGB projects, which led to a mismatch in some cases between girls' preferred and actual transition pathways. Almost all younger adolescent girls transitioned to formal schooling due to national legislation on compulsory education and adherence to national child labour laws. By contrast, almost all older adolescent girls transitioned to work-related pathways due to encouragement by the IPs to pursue this pathway. Some older adolescent girls identified their preference to return to formal schooling in order to access work opportunities requiring higher levels of education but were encouraged by projects to pursue immediate work-related opportunities instead. This was in part due to concerns about the social stigma overage girls face when returning to formal schools.

For girls who transitioned into education pathways, the projects provided them with material and financial support and training in specific skills. The continued involvement by project staff in supporting girls after the project ended, their caregivers and school-level actors were all identified as important to girls' success in following these pathways. However, barriers remained: for example, school-related costs, adapting to the new learning environment, distance to school and household chores.

Girls transitioning to skills and work-related opportunities were also provided with financial support to set up and run businesses. This included supporting girls in providing financial capital to set up and run businesses. The financial capital was accompanied by training to help them use it effectively. In a few cases, projects connected

adolescent girls with micro-credit institutions, and gave them skills to fill in applications to be considered for loans. They also supported them in working with other women in the community in similar vocations for group loans. However, the girls sometimes faced constraints due to insufficient funds to viably run their businesses.

Vocations were highly concentrated in sectors more traditionally associated with women's work e.g. hairdressing and tailoring. This was due to gender social norms and also partly due to the labour market conditions in the remote locations within which the projects operated. These challenges included the limited supply of materials and master artisans needed to support girls' training.

The businesses girls worked in were often in an already saturated market. This was partly due to the economic conditions characterising the remote rural contexts within which LNGB projects operated. These conditions created challenges due to limited supply of materials and master artisans needed to support adolescent girls' training. In addition, it meant that girls sometimes set up businesses in a climate where there were already several other competitors.

The focus on vocations traditionally associated with women's work was in part due to embedded gender social norms which discourage or prevent girls from pursuing these vocations. Even so, according to the projects, these adolescent girls were often the first in their communities to have access to any kind of paid work.

Overall, the length of the LNGB projects was identified as being too short to master basic literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills, according to some girls and other stakeholders interviewed in the three case studies. This was seen to negatively affect their success once they had transitioned to formal schooling or work-related opportunities.

In what ways did LNGB projects influence the most marginalised adolescent girls' agency in making decisions?

The positive effects on adolescent girls' literacy, numeracy and communication skills together with improvements in their self-confidence have translated into having a greater voice in decisions affecting their day-to-day lives: Girls who were unmarried, or without children or did not self-report a disability were more likely to feel that their decision-making capabilities had increased. This was also particularly the case for older adolescent girls who reported having a greater voice on issues related to household expenditure, or visiting the market, health clinic, or friends, for example. For younger adolescent girls, day-to-day decisions continued to be taken by their guardians. Even so, across all case study contexts, younger adolescent girls stated that after joining the LNGB project, they had increased confidence in expressing their opinions in front of their families, even if they did not consider themselves to be the sole decision-maker.

Adolescent girls were often still constrained in making longer-term, fundamental decisions about their lives. Only a small proportion of girls in the three case studies identified that they were now able to make decisions related to their education, marriage, and livelihood activities, due to continued gender social norms in their communities.

Participating in the projects often led to girls wanting to be more ambitious in their aspirations, compared to if they had not taken part in the project: Some girls in the three case study projects identified that they would have either been doing household chores, been married or would have pursued a traditional vocation, but that they were able to choose a more prominent pathway.

Community perceptions of adolescent girls improved. According to some stakeholders, the skills that the adolescent girls acquired, and the income they earned subsequently, helped elevate their standing in the community due to changing community perceptions of their capability.

9. Recommendations

These recommendations are based on learning from analysis of the 14 LNGB projects, with a particular focus on the three case study projects. Given many LNGB projects have come to an end or are due to end soon, the proposed recommendations are for FCDO and implementing partners to consider when designing future education and work-related programmes for the most marginalised adolescent girls. They can also inform other stakeholders involved in the design of such programmes. The recommendations relate to positive lessons from the LNGB projects as well as the challenges they faced during implementation.

Targeting the most marginalised adolescent girls

- **In order to identify the most marginalised girls for specific contexts, there is a need for accurate data on different population subgroups.** Certain groups, such as children with disabilities, children who have never enrolled in school, and pregnant girls, can be more difficult to identify and it is important that they do not fall through the gaps due to inaccurate or unavailable data.
- **Engaging with national and local stakeholders is important for effective targeting.** Engagement with national government stakeholders is needed to identify locations where the most marginalised girls reside. Collaboration with sub-national and community stakeholders is needed to effectively target marginalised girls given their in-depth knowledge of the locality. Engaging with national and local stakeholders is also important to know areas where other similar programmes are operating to avoid duplication.

Designing projects to support the most marginalised adolescent girls

- **Projects should design activities tailored to meet the specific needs and characteristics of marginalised adolescent girls,** such as their age, disability status, whether they are married/ have children and whether they are first-generation learners. For example, this could involve designing activities that differ for younger and older adolescents; providing child-care facilities for girls with children; and providing psycho-social support to girls who may have faced trauma.
- **Financial support is needed to address economic barriers girls face in participating in education.** Financial support can help overcome direct costs and opportunity costs (e.g. caring for siblings, household chores, participation in family businesses) faced by adolescent girls in attending education.
- **The provision of material support, such as hygiene and dignity kits, together with training on hygiene,** is important for helping adolescent girls navigate challenges associated with puberty.
- **Longer-term material and financial support is also needed for adolescent girls to set up businesses and meet ongoing work-related costs.** For example, adolescent girls can be linked to micro finance institutions, community savings and loan facilities, and avenues to access low-interest loans in order to help them set up businesses and meet the ongoing running costs.
- **Successful design of programmes requires a cross-sectoral approach.** This includes across Ministries of Education and Labour as well as joining up with other livelihoods, employment, and economic growth initiatives to ensure girls continue to receive support (including after the project concludes).
- **The length of projects should be sufficient to allow girls to adequately master literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills.** Recognising the low levels of literacy and numeracy of the most marginalised adolescent girls, the length of projects needs to be sufficient to allow them to gain these skills and not fall behind once project support ends. They also need sufficient time to gain vocational skills to enable them to access productive work.

Promoting adolescent girls' agency

- **Co-designing programme activities with adolescent girls themselves helps to ensure their needs are being met.** Participatory data collection approaches such as those used in this report can support this co-design, by capturing marginalised girls' needs, voices, and experiences both in education as well as in skills and work-related training.
- **Teaching life skills to girls, which encompasses training on communication skills and financial literacy, is important for their empowerment:** These skills can vastly improve girls' self-confidence, ability to express

their opinions, input into decisions, and be more aware of issues relating to delaying pregnancy and marriage. Providing girls with the tools and knowledge to recognise, know what to do and who to contact if they witness or experience gender-based violence is important.

Facilitating adolescent girls' transitions

- **Older adolescent girls should be offered the choice and further support to transition into continued education opportunities.** For those returning to formal schooling, this may require addressing social stigma that over-age adolescent girls can face when entering formal education.
- **The provision of bridging or after-school classes to girls transitioning to formal school can better prepare them for the formal school environment.** These classes can help to mitigate the challenges girls face when adjusting to the formal schooling curriculum.
- **Providing girls with career guidance is needed to help them make viable choices about work-related pathways.** Providing detailed information based on market assessments of work opportunities including market demand, start-up costs and profitability of businesses can help girls decide on their training and avoid local job market saturation.
- **Community sensitisation campaigns and girls acting as role models can help encourage girls to engage in work, including in vocations which are not traditionally available to women.** These can help change attitudes of girls, their families, and communities to take up different opportunities.
- **Once girls have started on their transition pathway, home visits and ongoing engagement by programme educators and mentors is important to encourage and motivate girls and their families.** This will help to maintain attendance and retention.

Sustaining projects into the future

- The policy and regulatory environment needs to demonstrate a political commitment to programmes supporting out of school adolescent girls back into education and their transition into work. This requires an explicit budgetary allocation from governments to such programmes. Projects need to engage with governments throughout their lifecycle to help foster such political commitment.
- The projects need to be designed to ensure the sustainability of community engagement to shift gender social norms. Embedding 'change champions' such as religious leaders and village heads within communities and providing training to groups such as school management committees and mothers' groups can ensure the benefits of projects in changing harmful practices (e.g. those associated with early marriage, early pregnancy, and gender-based violence) are sustained. In addition, this will help counter gender social norms and facilitate girls' choices to engage in non-traditional work.

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