

# Inclusive approaches to drop out and retention in low-resource settings

Based on lessons from DFID's Girls' Education Challenge

Guidance note

Girls'  
Education  
Challenge



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## Guidance Note

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July 2020

## Foreword

Children from marginalised backgrounds, those living in extreme poverty, migrants, ethnic minorities, and those impacted by conflict or those with disabilities, face the greatest difficulties in accessing and staying in education.<sup>1</sup> DFID's UK Aid strategy states, "*the government will lead the world in implementing the Leave No One Behind Promise*".<sup>2</sup>

Putting this global commitment into practice through fractured or strained local-level education systems can be a challenge. This guidance note shares lessons learned from DFID's Girls' Education Challenge (GEC)<sup>3</sup> programme on retention systems that work to provide visibility and support to marginalised girls in challenging contexts who are at risk of drop out from education.

Definitions of 'drop out' vary and parameters are usually set locally. Within this guidance note, 'drop out' refers to withdrawal from education, learning or regular extracurricular activities. Patchy attendance at any of these spaces would indicate someone "at risk of drop out". Permanent drop out should refer to national definitions, but is usually indicated by several months of disengagement.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 130 million girls were out of school. Studies have shown that COVID-19 may increase exclusions by a further 10 million secondary school age girls.<sup>4</sup> Nearly all of these girls live in low-income countries, where girls are still one and a half times more likely than boys to be excluded from primary school. Intersecting inequalities, challenging environments and inadequate policy delivery created a complex backdrop for poor attendance and drop out even before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The local-level student retention system model illustrated in this guidance note is centred around school-based attendance systems in low-resource settings. However, it can also be applied to informal or community education settings. Although these systems are built around data, they rely on a well-defined network of people who are clear on their roles. Many practitioners have introduced digital solutions to help capture and analyse data. While digital solutions can help, they should not be the primary consideration. A strong human ecosystem is the most important part of the system.

Due to school shutdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen these systems temporarily shift to be centred around households instead of schools, as education networks attempt to maintain support and continue education remotely. As countries consider how to safely re-build and re-start education systems in these altered learning environments, they are considering how best to support marginalised girls back to school.<sup>5</sup> The local networks highlighted in this paper are a vital lifeline in maintaining contact with girls while schools are shut. They are also a crucial support system that can be activated to ensure girls return to schools when they reopen.

As the source of data for this note is the GEC, the focus is on girls in particular with an intentional intersectional approach to ensure that systems and adaptations reflect the varied experiences of marginalised girls. However, this system can be applied in any education programme in a low-resource setting and could be used to support all children.

## Who is this guidance note for?

The key audience is education actors working in low-resource settings. These include ministries of education, schools and externally funded education actors such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The nature of partnerships with externally funded bodies is usually one of short-term investment to build capacity of the system to be sustainable in the long term. Lessons learned in this guidance note are drawn from the perspective of education-focused NGOs funded through the GEC. However, this guidance note is positioned to acknowledge that the responsibility for these systems is with local ministries, community committees and schools, with support from NGOs.

## Local-level student retention system

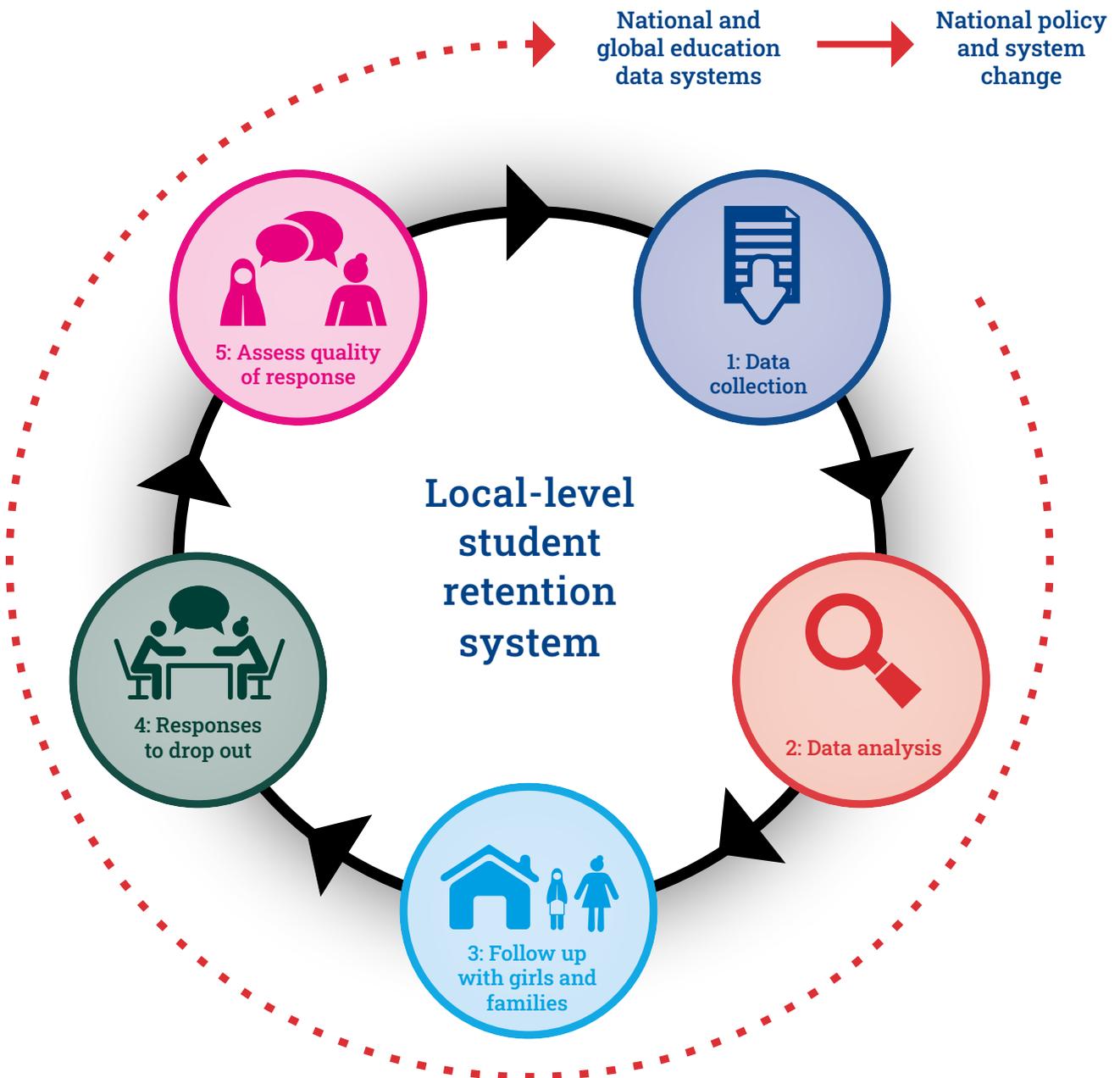


Figure 1: Local-level student retention system model

## Overarching lessons learned from the GEC on designing retention models

- Any proposed activity to strengthen student retention systems should complement existing local ministry data collection and response systems that address attendance and drop out from formal schools or other education provisions. Data flows to and from other relevant ministries that provide health or social support create a stronger referral and response system.
- Retention systems take several months to be designed and set up. Stakeholders need to be engaged for each phase of the cycle, people need to be trained in how to use the new systems, and testing and system adjustment will be required. However, for rapid-onset emergencies there are aspects of this system which can be set up quickly to create a support network while school-based systems are not operating fully.
- Successful systems rely on a strong human ecosystem, with one group having oversight and responsibility of the whole model that draws in stakeholders at different phases. Experience from the GEC points to the benefit of this group being positioned within the community, with male and female representatives of diverse groups from the local community working closely with the school, local ministries and supported by project staff. Clear descriptions of roles and responsibilities are needed for each role in the system.
- In environments of widespread deprivation or poverty, systems that only provide individual responses may not address the systemic issues that affect the attendance of many educationally marginalised children. Lighter touch, but reliable data systems can be used for group or universal responses to address issues that affect many children. If positioned carefully within a strong human ecosystem, these data sets are incredibly valuable to trigger appropriate follow up.
- The timeframe within which responses are triggered is significant. Embedding data review and response processes into fortnightly or monthly cycles allows issues to be addressed before poor attendance patterns become entrenched and irreversible.
- Systemic response to poor attendance will require multiple activities at different levels with varied audiences. Creating enabling environments for girls to attend school will involve addressing norm change around gender roles, challenging attitudes towards violence and championing the rights of children with disabilities to education. These will need to complement more practical solutions to addressing barriers such as support to address fees, transport and appropriate language materials.
- Data on marginalised groups is often missing in large data sets at national level as marginalised populations may not have access to the devices that are used in large-scale data collection initiatives or are missed in other survey systems. Data collected through local-level retention systems is therefore valuable for addressing gaps on information about marginalised girls and communities. Ensuring that data content and analysis can feed into existing education or health system data-capture systems is a key advocacy entry point with local ministries.
- Local retention networks are a vital resource for wellbeing and learning support while schools are shut. They will continue to perform a significant role once schools reopen to support the reintegration to school for many marginalised girls.

## Retention system steps



### Step 1: Data collection



**Who is responsible?** Teachers and school administrators are responsible for maintaining accurate attendance registers and databases.

### What data should be included in retention systems?

**Considerable research has explored what issues can affect attendance**, the impact this has for learning and which groups of girls are more likely to drop out of school. However, as much of this analysis was completed as part of large-scale evaluations at the end of education programmes it is not always helpful in predicting who is likely to drop out.

There is rarely a single reason that leads to drop out. Poor attendance that eventually leads to drop out is a more dynamic process. It involves a mix of:

- **Geographic and individual characteristics** including distance to school, ethnicity, disability status and language variations for teachers and children.

- **Social norms** and expectations around girls' education held by all actors in girls' environments from families and communities to teachers and policy makers.
- **Family circumstances** such as poverty, orphanhood, numbers within one household, parental levels of education, burden of care during crises and seasonal migration.
- **School environment** including safety on the way to school and in school, gender responsiveness of teaching, welfare or learning support offered, training and provision of inclusive education.
- **Policy and external environment** including varied strength of policy implementation to support marginalised girls, physical access restrictions for girls with impairments, seasonal variations, conflict and health crises.<sup>6</sup>

Hence, it is important not to put too much emphasis on a child's characteristics as predictors of drop out.<sup>7</sup> A comprehensive approach to analysing and responding to what might be influencing poor attendance in real time is required.

**The most relevant data to collect to indicate which children are 'at risk of drop out' are those which highlight current experience**, such as attendance, academic performance or classroom engagement. Using identity characteristics as proxy indicators for children being 'at risk of drop out' risks making broad reaching assumptions that all children with the same characteristics will have the same barriers to education.

**Attendance data records need to differentiate between authorised and non-authorised absences.** It is important to specify how this information should be recorded in registers or school management systems. Clarity on what qualifies as an 'authorised absence' (for example, a short-term illness) should be included in the attendance data capture system.

**Experience of early warning systems<sup>8</sup> (EWSs) in low-income settings** suggests approaches that only focus on the individual in countries of widespread deprivation and poverty can reduce absenteeism but not drop out as that requires addressing larger-scale issues.<sup>9</sup> While some of the elements for EWSs may exist in some low-resource settings, it comes with a high demand on resources for follow up and individual case management. In low-resource settings, addressing common issues at a more systemic level will impact many educationally marginalised girls in the short term and will create more sustainable, inclusive environments in the future.

### How different levels of data are used to inform responses

The responsive retention system illustrated below highlights how simpler attendance data-capture systems can be valuable and impactful for broader groups. It shows how responses are designed based on data from registers and consultation.

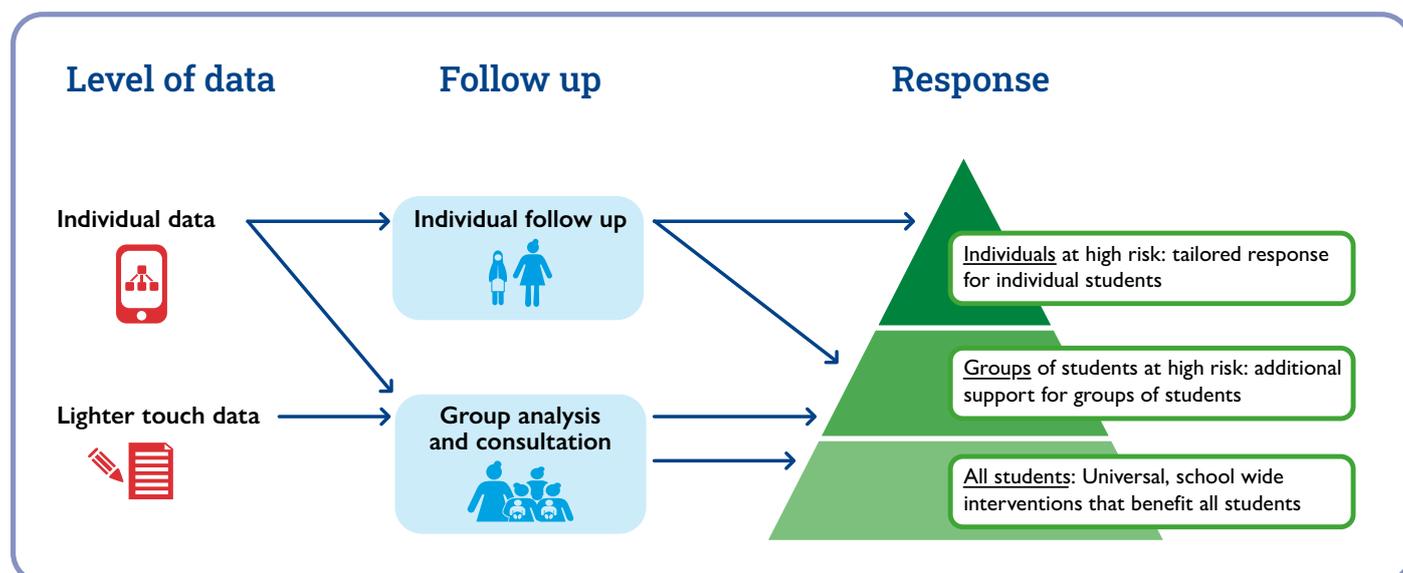


Figure 2: Data-driven retention system (Adapted from Ryan and Brattman (2012), Heppen (2010), National Educational Welfare Board (n.d.) and UNICEF (2017))

### Lessons from the GEC

- **Encouraging and motivating teachers to collect accurate registers** is a particularly important investment. Data from registers is the foundation of any retention system. Spot checks by community committees or project staff can assure quality. Teachers and school administrators must have visibility of the whole retention system so they see the value of their contribution and how this data can be used.

- **Other key data points should supplement attendance data** to enable more detailed analysis of patterns. Simple sex-disaggregated headcounts that can be attributed to age/grade levels and/or more individualised data on absenteeism of children from disadvantaged groups, including those with any special educational needs, are both valid.
- **Data needs to be fit for purpose and matched to available resources.** There is no need to collect extensive individualised data unless the system has the resources to respond to and manage any issues highlighted. Lighter data collection methodologies still have significant value if they are part of a comprehensive system for review and follow up.
- **It is important to collect information on boys' attendance too**, even if the projects are focussing on girls. This data helps to illustrate whether patterns are gender specific or universal to the whole school population.
- **There are many digital solutions that can be used to record attendance data.** The most popular platform used by the GEC is the [KoboToolbox](#),<sup>10</sup> which can be used to enter aggregated headcount data as well as attendance data from surveys with students or caregivers. While surveys are not a substitute for attendance registers, they can be used to validate their results. Surveys with caregivers and students can collect retroactive information on the number of days students were absent during the past week. Class photos can also be used by community monitors to assess attendance through time. Biometric solutions that use facial recognition or fingerprint technology have been used to track attendance in school contexts in Haiti, Kenya and India but they are often controversial in conflict-affected settings due to the sensitive nature of collecting personal data. Relying only on paper registers can be problematic. Clarifying inaccurate entries can be labour intensive for enumerators to check for accuracy.
- **In the absence of school registers** during times of sudden school closure, mobile phone-based surveys or WhatsApp messaging can be used to maintain contact and assess continued engagement. Non tech-based solutions should also be considered for girls in settings with no access to mobile phones or other technology, or who have a disability that means access to or use of standard technology is difficult.
- **Attendance records for study groups or after school clubs** can also be used as a measure for engagement by girls, but these do not give visibility of engagement in mainstream education and what might be happening at school which would ideally be used to supplement this picture.

### Case studies: Data collection methods

**Kenya Equity in Education Project (KEEP).** World University Service of Canada used a unique identifier to track individual girls, with information on their home and parents' contact details. Due to the potentially mobile nature of beneficiaries in the refugee camp setting, this is necessary for tracking girls if they move from one location to another. Monthly or termly cash transfers are then linked to attendance data, with bonuses given on top of standard cash transfers if girls have high attendance in the previous term.

**REALISE, DRC.** Save the Children records data by scanning project-developed absence registers with optical mark recognition software. This data includes a unique student identifier, sex, class, date and school alongside the absence pattern. This is analysed by project staff every two weeks and given back to the school management and parent support group for review and follow up.

**GEARR-ing Up for Success After School, Uganda.** Promoting Equality in African Schools (PEAS) has introduced a new SchoolTool+ digital platform to collect individual student data. This includes information about distance travelled to school, special educational needs (including using the [Washington Group short set of questions](#)),<sup>11</sup> numbers in the household and indicators of economic status alongside students' attendance and academic performance. To ensure this data is maintained, PEAS has shared the responsibility with each class teacher rather than it being the responsibility of one data-entry person.

### Case studies: Motivating teachers and schools to maintain accurate registers

**GEARR-ing Up for Success After School, Uganda.** PEAS displays attendance reports analysed by various dates or characteristics in common places such as staff rooms to help teachers see trends in attendance and showcase the value of attendance tracking and analysis.

**Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali, Nepal.** Mercy Corps is encouraging accurate administration and registers through a cash grant scheme that is given to schools to invest in infrastructure. Accuracy is assessed through periodic spot checks conducted by the project.



## Step 2: Data analysis



**Who is responsible?** Community education committees (CECs) that connect schools with families have proven to be the most sustainable and effective model for owning analysis of attendance data and follow up actions. These groups need to work closely with local education authorities, school administrators or school management committees to agree how data is collected and responded to. Education NGOs may give support.

### Lessons from the GEC

- **Positioning responsibility within community structures creates a group of locally based champions** working towards the aim of ensuring girls' continued access and engagement in education. This collective community-based body can contribute to significant norm change around prioritising education for girls as it addresses the practical and strategic barriers to girls' education.
- **Clarity on what triggers a response** needs to be agreed as well as the timing of the next phase of action. The threshold will vary when looking at individual data versus broader data across classes or whole schools. It may also vary across formal or informal education settings.
  - **Review of individual patterns of attendance** should be completed on a weekly or monthly basis may flag, for example, when there are three days of unaccounted absence in one week, or eight days over a month.
  - **Analysis of class or school attendance patterns** will require a longer timeframe, for example by month or term. Patterns may emerge such as: Does attendance drop on market days? During the dry/wet season? At harvest time? Are particular classes revealing low attendance? Is this due to regular teacher absence or use of corporal punishment? Are age/grade or gender-related patterns emerging? Engaging school management committees in this discussion is important. They need to be involved in potential solutions.

### Case studies: Who should own analysis of attendance data?

**Improving Girls' Access through Transforming Education (IGATE), Zimbabwe.** World Vision has trialed both school and community-owned systems and found that analysis and follow up was much better positioned within the communities where children live. Overloaded teachers struggled with the additional responsibility of individual follow up, support and referral. World Vision developed a [training manual](#) to train mothers' groups to fulfill this crucial support role.

**Adolescent Girls' Education, Somalia,** has evolved its model of data analysis from project-owned to community structures. Project investments have been made to support community-driven monitoring systems and district education officials through training and coaching on record keeping and attendance tracking. CECs are elected at community level and aim to represent the diversity of the community which they support. AGES developed a [training manual](#) for these groups in collaboration with the government, which has been scaled up for national use.

### Case studies: When and how are responses triggered?

**Let our Girls Succeed (Wasichana Wetu Wafaulu), Kenya.** Education Development Trust (EDT) has a system which sends an SMS alert to community health volunteers (CHVs) if there are more than three days of unexplained absence. Currently, data is being uploaded by a teacher coach but ultimately teachers will be uploading data into the system. CHVs visit the families to talk through issues and record the reason for absence which may range from needing to support a family business at the market, to long-term illness or pregnancy. Each CHV is connected to an average of 20 households.

**Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali, Nepal.** Mercy Corps has a sliding scale for what triggers a response with different target groups. 'In school' girls are flagged after one week of absence from girls' clubs against school registers. The 'out of school' cohort are reviewed over a two-week period of engagement with project activities. Mobilisers then follow up with girls and families to discuss reasons for absence.



## Step 3: Follow up with girls and families



**Who is responsible?** Community support workers (CSWs) (also known as community health volunteers, community mobilisers, mentors), teachers and community committees.

### Lessons from the GEC

- **Initial contact should be made through parents/ caregivers to gain consent, but contact should also be made with the girl directly** to understand the circumstances that have led to unexplained absence. Whoever is following up with girls and families around absenteeism should be sensitive to the potential for negative parental backlash directed at the girls. Mitigation measures should be taken to reduce these risks. In environments where schools are shut and follow up needs to be done remotely, it is important to adjust outreach activities that overcome digital limitations. Many girls and families may not have access to mobile phones or other technology so alternative methods to connect with these families should be explored.
- **Girl-led action** should be included in tracking attendance as well as follow up support. Girls' groups are often among the first to notice that a peer is struggling to attend or about to drop out and outreach can be helpful, particularly if supported by mentors or a community group. Involving girls in exercises to review and interpret data can also provide valuable analysis and engagement, empowering them to be part of appropriate responses. Peer support can be particularly effective for girls facing mental health issues, such as anxiety or depression.
- **CSWs often function as counsellors** for families to address practical challenges, as well as to also discuss cultural norms and elevate the value of education. These discussions require a high level of negotiation and diplomacy skills, as well as clear and culturally sensitive messaging to discuss the role of education, the risks of early marriage and the pressure for girls to contribute to household income. Parents/caregivers are the gatekeepers of the girls' time and highly influence their future aspirations, so they must be involved in discussions about supporting their daughters' education. Norm change relies on personalised and more broadly socialised messages, so these conversations with parents/ caregivers must be recognised as a significant opportunity to challenge and start to shift attitudes and behaviours.
- **Training influential members of the community – such as religious leaders and older women – as CSWs** is particularly effective in addressing negative social norms contributing to drop out. These individuals have the social capital to address sensitive subjects such as early marriage or girls' mobility and are seen as legitimate, valid voices from within the community.
- **For lighter touch data-collection systems that do not have individualised data sets**, follow up can be done through broader conversations with groups within the community. These focus groups or community conversations should be divided by recognised 'subgroups' to allow for nuanced analysis of issues being highlighted, for example different age groups of girls and boys, girls from particular ethnic groups, young mothers and girls with disabilities.
- **CSWs must be familiar with the packages of support** and resources available to address issues as soon as possible, such as grants to support costs for materials, transport provision or childcare facilities for young mothers.
- **CSWs must be well trained in identifying safeguarding issues and be familiar with other services** to which girls and families can be signposted as issues are discussed.
- **Information collected from these meetings must be collated systematically and shared** with the community committee who will be able to carry out broader data and pattern analysis of reasons for poor attendance.



© Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailash, Nepal, Mercy Corps.

## Case studies: Engaging communities, families and girls in identifying reasons for poor attendance and drop out

**REALISE, DRC.** Save the Children hosts focus group discussions with stakeholders to discuss drop out. Community members highlighted socioeconomic and cultural reasons for drop out, for example, girls are expected to support small family businesses, do agricultural work or household chores. There is also pressure from families around early marriage. The role of parents not following up on poor attendance was a key cause identified by the group as the ultimate reason for drop out. Girls and parents reported that absences were due to hunger and fatigue caused by household chores.

**Adolescent Girls' Education, Somalia,** uses a girls' empowerment forum made up of local girls who encourage their peers to remain in school. Girls are encouraged to follow up with each other if their attendance starts to decline and flag cases where additional support is needed to prevent drop out, such as planned marriages or girls who are struggling with mental health issues. Girls' empowerment forums are supported by mentors on case management. They also provide input to the CEC on issues affecting girls' attendance and retention.

**Girls' Access to Education (GATE-GEC), Sierra Leone.** Plan International has been working very closely with the parents of children with disabilities to raise the profile of the importance of education. Culturally, girls with disabilities have not always been encouraged to gain an education, so these attitudes are deeply rooted and require targeted messages by the project for families and communities to gain their support.



## Step 4: Responses to drop out

**?** **Who is responsible?** Community committees and schools, who are informed by CSWs. They, in turn, are supported by education NGOs.

### Lessons from the GEC

- **Step 4 requires analysis of quantitative data from attendance (Step 1) and the detailed information from follow up with girls or families (Step 3)** to reveal common issues that are emerging across the cohort. CSWs are encouraged to meet community committees regularly to discuss emerging issues to feed into decision making around suitable responses or advocacy at a community or regional level.
- **Responses should not just be positioned at one level but should include a blend of approaches to address universal and more nuanced responses.** Clarity on what level of support is offered through existing local systems or through the project informs the level of data that is collected at the start of the cycle and how to structure interviews in the follow up meetings with girls and families.
- **Responses to shift gender norms may target families, communities and religious or community leaders with awareness raising activities** to create a more enabling environment for girls to be supported to continue with their education.
- **In contexts where widespread school closure has occurred,** most children will miss the connection and provision offered by schools, so universal support for wellbeing, access to psychosocial support hotlines and learning could be made available. However, needs and access issues of different households should be considered. Previously held data systems can inform the adaptation of responses for families at particular risk of economic strain or girls with audio or visual impairments who may struggle to access widespread digital messages, for example.



© Let Our Girls Succeed, Kenya, EDT

## Case studies: Responses to data on barriers to attendance

These case studies show how GEC projects respond to data from their cohort on barriers to their attendance at the three different levels of the responsive retention system on page 4.

<b>Individuals</b> at high risk	<p><b>Expanding Inclusive Education Strategies for Girls with Disabilities Kenya.</b> Data generated through household surveys indicates whether a girl may have an impairment which could affect her engagement with education. Leonard Cheshire then addresses issues at multiple levels, referring girls to the local health department to have a full diagnosis and response plan to address some of their medical or physical needs on an individual basis. Leonard Cheshire is then able to support practical aspects of inclusion for children with disabilities at a group level as well as addressing broader attitude change towards disability inclusion at a universal level.</p> <p><b>iMlango, Kenya.</b> Avanti responds to a pregnancy through individual discussions with the girl's parents and headteacher to negotiate her return to school after she has given birth. Parents are requested to support childcare and the girl is given individual counselling to manage the process of reintegrating with education.</p> <p><b>Let our Girls Succeed (Wasichana Wetu Wafaulu), Kenya.</b> EDT offers psychosocial counselling and mentorship services for girls who have dropped out of school, with an individualised education programme and support through catch up centres, bursary provision or education materials. This individualised support aims to reintegrate girls into mainstream education or help them transition to vocational training centres as appropriate.</p>
<b>Groups</b> of students at high risk	<p><b>Expanding Inclusive Education Strategies for Girls with Disabilities Kenya.</b> Leonard Cheshire became aware that several of the girls with disabilities that it was supporting had long and complicated journeys to school which were impacting on their attendance and learning. It established a bus system to make these journeys much easier.</p> <p><b>Adolescent Girls' Education, Somalia's</b> CECs realised that girls from pastoralist communities struggled with seasonal absenteeism due to their livelihood. They have now been given partial grants to support continued engagement. The criteria for partial grants was agreed by community committees, prioritising girls whose families experienced multiple forms of exclusion. CECs follow up with families of recipients to sensitise them on the prioritisation of education for girls and teachers provide remedial support to girls.</p> <p><b>Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali, Nepal.</b> Mercy Corps collated information from home visits that highlighted early marriage as a reason many of its girls were dropping out of school. It launched a community campaign which included street theatre focusing on the benefits of delaying marriage, as well as creating safe spaces through life skills classes for girls to explore the issues around early marriage in a more personalised way.</p>
<b>All</b> students	<p><b>Let our Girls Succeed (Wasichana Wetu Wafaulu), Kenya.</b> EDT noticed significant patterns of absence caused by two localised issues that needed to be addressed on a broad scale. Firstly, children being expected to help their parents at the bi-weekly market that fell during the school week. Secondly, attendance at burial ceremonies, which often involved two weeks of events. Negotiation with community leaders on both these issues has meant that one of the two market days has been moved to the weekend and children are now encouraged by community leaders to attend school rather than burial ceremonies.</p> <p><b>Educating Nigerian Girls in New Enterprises (ENGINE), Nigeria.</b> Mercy Corps is adapting its support during COVID-19 to promote basic hygiene education through social media and the provision of handwashing facilities in all communities where the programme is being implemented. It is also shifting learning onto radio, TV and social media platforms to address the lack of access to schools during this period.</p>



## Step 5: Assess quality of response



**Who is responsible?** Local education officers, CSWs and mentors supported by education NGOs to assess the effectiveness of support provided.

### Lessons from the GEC

- **Feedback loops** are vital to ensure that girls who have received support, either as a group or individually, are able to report if it has helped to improve their attendance. These can be channelled through CSWs on an individual basis or through focus groups within broader monitoring activities. Digital platforms can be used for this feedback, through mobile phone surveys for example, in circumstances where face-to-face communication is limited.
- **Analysis of individual and subgroup feedback should be done on a regular basis** to measure whether initiatives are having the intended impact leading to improved patterns of attendance and learning. Further iteration and adaptation of support options for individual or group responses needs to be made as feedback loops provide analysis of the effectiveness of interventions or support.
- **Allowing students a voice** in how system or group level initiatives are implemented encourages much greater engagement with initiatives. Creation of a student representative body can act as liaison between students and education support actors.
- **Acknowledging that power and unconscious bias** occur in any system, and considering how these may influence analysis and response, is important. Ensuring that decision making is transparent and that decision-making bodies are truly representative of the communities that are being worked with, helps to elevate issues that may be dismissed by actors who may have been working on the model and responses for some time. Gender and social inclusion training for all actors is helpful to recognise any power dynamics and unconscious bias that may exist with stakeholders in the system.

## Links to local ministries of education and broader information systems

**Consideration should be given to how this retention system could be co-created with local ministries** to feed into regional or national level education management information systems (EMIS), and decision-making forums. Information collected through these local-level systems is incredibly valuable for higher-level education ministry systems on the experience and support required to maintain marginalised girls in education.

**Co-development or refining of monitoring tools** applied by education officials with ministries of education is valuable to ensure their systems also track numbers of drop outs and the main reasons for drop out between, as well as within, academic years. Some countries may have limited resources to monitor schools regularly or may lack training for local officials to be able to apply tools and reflect on the data collected, so support for these systems may be well received and will make a significant contribution to the sustainability of systems beyond the life of externally funded activities.

**Using this body of evidence and data can be valuable for influencing and advocacy** of ministries to create a better enabling policy environment for specific groups of girls who may face systemic challenges to access education such as refugees, pastoralist communities or girls with disabilities.

### Case studies: Using data to influence and inform ministries of education

**Expanding Inclusive Education Strategies for Girls with Disabilities Kenya.** Leonard Cheshire has used its data on disability prevalence and experience working with girls with disability to work with the local and national offices of the Kenyan Ministry of Education to develop its inclusive education strategy. This strategy has included better coordination with other health services, a programme of inclusive teacher coaching and training and the use of individualised learning plans to support girls with disabilities in mainstream schools.

**Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali, Nepal.** Mercy Corps has used its data to inform the local Ministry of Education's education development plan. Its data highlighted which geographic areas and which girls have been struggling with attendance and learning. This has resulted in a 300 to 400 % increase in budget in allocated areas that contributed to school meals, set up of libraries, laboratories and WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) infrastructure.

# Adaptation of retention systems during COVID-19

An investment made in school retention systems creates a solid foundation upon which projects can maintain support in the circumstances with schools shut. School-centred retention and drop out ecosystems can shift to be centred around individual households and communities with the aim of maintaining contact and supporting continued learning for girls until schools or learning centres reopen. Previously held data from attendance or individualised records can be used to assist targeting particular girls at risk of disengaging from learning activities in these circumstances.

Ensuring marginalised girls return to school once they reopen will require a revised set of initiatives to support re-enrolment, including addressing new financial circumstances for many families whose livelihoods have been affected by lockdown, or identifying where issues such as domestic violence may have occurred while girls have had restricted access to other services and support. Considerable emphasis will be placed on community networks to support this transition back to school once schools reopen.<sup>12</sup> We must also continue to celebrate the voices of marginalised girls to be the agents for change as we invite them to mould how they would like to engage with education in the future.

## Case studies: Adapting retention systems during COVID-19

**Let our Girls Succeed (Wasichana Wetu Wafaulu), Kenya.** EDT is staying in touch through its existing CHV network who are now delivering physical tutorial materials to households, returning these to teachers for marking and redelivering teacher-marked work for students to see their progress. These community volunteers also act as wellbeing support, pass on health messages and information, and capture appropriate data for continued adaptation and support.

**Adolescent Girls' Education, Somalia,** is continuing to build on the effectiveness of the Girls Empowerment Forums that demonstrated a significant reduction in anxiety and depression in girls at extreme risk. The broader network of mentors, teachers and CECs from the previous retention system continue to be mobilised to provide ongoing wellbeing check-ins with girls and families at risk, and offer remote learning and financial support.

## Endnotes

- 1 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Statistics Division (2016). United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016 Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2016>;
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- 3 <https://girlseducationchallenge.org>;
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- 5 Jenkins, R. and Winthrop, R. (2020). 5 ways to help bring the most marginalized girls back to school after COVID-19. Brookings. Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/05/15/5-actions-to-help-bring-the-most-marginalized-girls-back-to-school-after-covid-19>;
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The author would like to thank all the projects that have shared their experiences and lessons learnt on setting up retention systems with the GEC since 2017. Particular thanks goes to: EDT, Kenya; AGES project, Somalia; Mercy Corps, Nepal; I Choose Life, Kenya; Plan International, Sierra Leone; Save the Children, DRC; PEAS, Uganda; Crane Viva, Uganda; World Vision, Zimbabwe; Mercy Corps, Nigeria; Avanti, Kenya.

The Girls' Education Challenge is a project funded by the UK's Department for International Development and is led and administered by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, working with organisations including FHI 360, Nathan Associates London Ltd. and Social Development Direct Ltd. This publication has been prepared for general guidance on matters of interest only, and does not constitute professional advice. You should not act upon the information contained in this publication without obtaining specific professional advice. No representation or warranty (express or implied) is given as to the accuracy or completeness of the information contained in this publication, and, to the extent permitted by law, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP and the other entities managing the Girls' Education Challenge (as listed above) do not accept or assume any liability, responsibility or duty of care for any consequences of you or anyone else acting, or refraining to act, in reliance on the information contained in this publication or for any decision based on it. More information on the Girls' Education Challenge can be found at [www.girlseducationchallenge.org](http://www.girlseducationchallenge.org)

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