

Final reflections

Achievements and lessons learned

Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education, Cheshire Services Uganda (CSU)

UGANDA

APRIL 2017 – MARCH 2024



Girls' Education Challenge



Cheshire Services Uganda

“My mother could not afford to pay for my fees, and I could not stay in school before I joined the project. I remember how they were used to chase me out of school for fees. I would spend almost the entire term out of school. Now, I can stay in school and concentrate on my studies without any worries of being sent home for not paying school fees.”

Girl



● Uganda

What did the project do?

The Empowering girls with disabilities through education in Uganda project was implemented under the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) by Cheshire Services Uganda (CSU) for a seven-year period (2017-2024). The project focused on supporting girls with disabilities with transitioning to/progress through primary, lower and upper secondary education, technical and vocational skills education and training (TVET), and employment.

The project supported girls with disabilities in four out of the five divisions in Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) of Nakawa, Kawempe, Rubaga, and Central and in the surrounding districts of Wakiso and Mukono.

The project worked on improving the life chances of girls with disabilities by improving their learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy. To achieve this, CSU focused on improving school attendance of girls with disabilities, teaching quality, girls' self-esteem and life skills, and making schools and communities safer and more inclusive for girls with disabilities.

The following activities were implemented:

- Trained teachers on literacy, numeracy and inclusive education methods.
- Built ramps and walkways to improve the accessibility of toilets and washing facilities.
- Provided free accessible transport to and from schools.
- Provided girls with disabilities with life skills, guidance and counselling.
- Supported adolescent girls with menstrual cycle management.
- Supported parents to access rehabilitation services.
- Covered the costs for therapies and assistive devices needed by the girls.
- Raised awareness of the rights of girls with disabilities at school and community level.
- Paid tuition costs for girls and boys.
- Procured and distributed scholastic materials.
- Built parents' capacity on gender and disability management.

“I have learnt how to read and write. Now I can read very well. I have also learnt how to socialise and share snacks with others. I acquired some crafts-making skills in making bags, table clothes, all at school.”

Girl



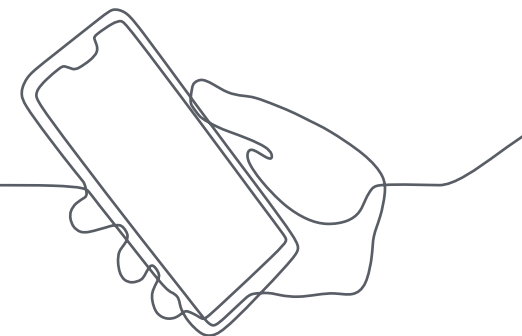
How did the project adapt during COVID-19?

Following up the announcement of the lockdown by the Government of Uganda in late March 2020, the project adapted its activities and worked on ensuring girls were safe and kept learning at home.

The project followed up with girls and parents daily to discuss their progress in literacy and numeracy and encourage girls to watch TV lessons. The project also developed and distributed learning materials in accessible formats and identified teachers that would support girls individually or in groups. The project also reached out to girls and families via phone calls to share information about how to prevent COVID-19, distributed sanitary kits and arranged transport to ensure girls with disabilities could continue their therapies and treatments, especially those with epilepsy and HIV, during the pandemic.

“In these camps and workshops, we used to interact with different people whose forms of disabilities at times are of high severity than ours. They always told us that despite our forms of disabilities, we can do any work and achieve much by learning and being creative.”

Girl





“When a lesson is like a role play, children enjoy it and learn a lot. Encouraging learner-centred methodologies like discussions and presentations help the learners stay engaged in class.”

Teacher

What did the project achieve?

Provided direct support to girls with disabilities to stay in education.

The Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education project supported girls with disabilities by covering school fees and other school related costs, such as provision of scholastic materials and sanitary pads, transportation through accessibility buses and medical treatment, including functional assessment, rehabilitation, therapy and assistive devices, such as metallic and durable clutches, wheelchairs and eyeglasses. The project also worked on improving access and attendance and overcoming the barrier of mobility by making the school environment more accessible to girls with disabilities, including constructing ramps and walkways to ease accessibility to classrooms and building accessible washrooms that would increase girls' willingness to keep going to school. The project also worked closely with parents to provide them with guidance on how to support their girls with disabilities.

Built girls' confidence through social and emotional learning.

According to the End of Project Review learning about academic and life skills was key to the girls. Interviews with the girls suggested that learning about social and emotional learning was particularly important. This is because the social and emotional skills are a major springboard to achieving both the academic and technical/vocational training types of learning opportunities, and thus improving one's life chances (i.e. a key foundational building block at individual girl level in enabling long-lasting girl empowerment). According to the End of Project Review girls with disabilities and parents viewed transitioning into/progressing through grades as meaningful in terms of enabling the girls learn to associate and socialise with the other learners without disabilities, which in turn built their confidence and self-esteem.

Improved parents' attitudes and behaviours towards girls with disabilities.

According to the End of Project Review, parents' attitudes and behaviours were found to have improved, with many parents interviewed believing in girls' capacities and abilities to succeed in school and in life. Some parents reported that the project's counselling sessions had helped them understand how they could support their girls. Parents who could afford to financially support their girls' education were found to cost-share either by topping-up the school fees that the project was paying at secondary level or by fully supporting girls' tertiary level education costs. However, according to the End of Project Review, poverty still affects parents' abilities to pay for school fees and buy sanitary pads. Project activities that were most meaningful to parents and were contributing to girls' feeling that they were more included in communities and schools as a result of project activities included awareness sessions on disability/gender, which were reported to have greatly impacted parents' (as well as the girls') and changed parents' attitudes and behaviours towards their girls' education.

Built a strong partnership with the government. The project worked closely with local education officers by sharing the project workplans and jointly implementing the project activities. Local education officers were trained by the project on inclusive education. The project worked closely with the local education officers also on improving attitudes of the school administrations and communities towards girls with disabilities. The project also worked with the Ministry of Education and Sports on drafting the national inclusive education policy.

“Initially most parents of girls with disabilities were not coming on school visitation days. Now, many of them have changed and are the first to attend.”

Teacher



Made school environments more inclusive. Schools who worked with the project were reported by the girls interviewed as part of the End of Project Review to be doing things differently after participating in the project. Girls with disabilities reported that they felt safer and more included in schools. They said that being able to build friendships with peers without disabilities made them feel more included in the school environment. The End of Project Review highlighted that the engagement of the school administrators contributed to creating a favourable school environment for girls with disabilities. School administrations were reported to have encouraged girls with disabilities to participate in school activities, such as music, dance and drama. According to the interviews with the girls, this increased their confidence and self-esteem. It should be noted that while teachers were trained in inclusive pedagogy in the schools the project started implementation with, over the course of implementation the girls supported through the project moved and spread across numerous schools, and an extensive teacher training involving all schools was not possible. However, the project continued their efforts to make schools more inclusive mainly by improving physical accessibility and sanitary facilities and equipping teachers with improved knowledge and capacity to deliver lessons using inclusive teaching practices. The Review also highlighted that the project's routine monitoring and tracking of the girls with disabilities through regular school and home visits, made the girls feel valued and motivated them to stay in school.

// MAUVIS' STORY

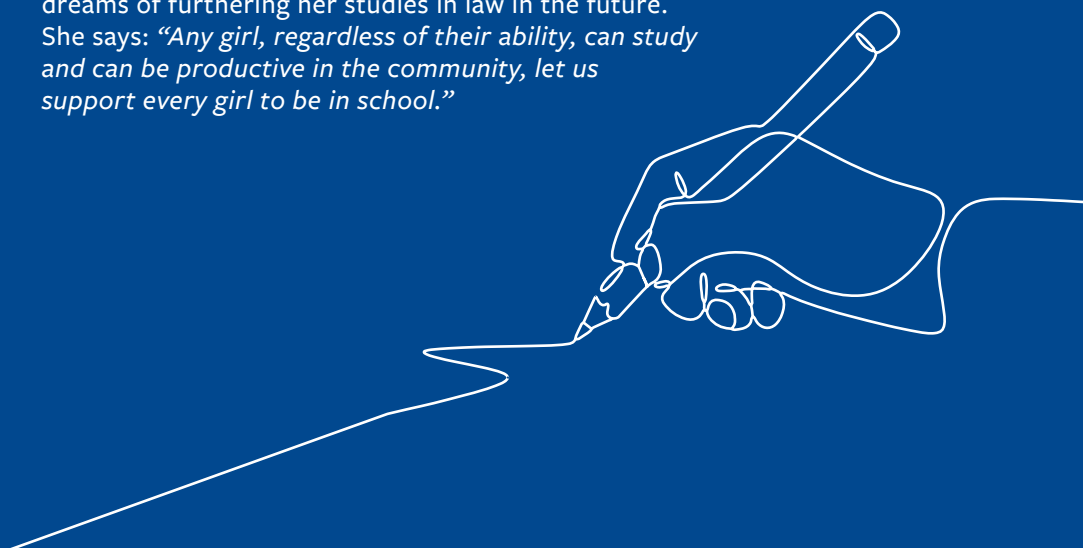


Born with difficult seeing, 24-year-old Mauvis courageously navigates her daily routine with the aid of a cane and the firm support of her younger sister, who doubles as her guide. Hailing from a family of three, Mauvis is currently pursuing her studies at university. Reflecting on her early education, Mauvis vividly recalls one of the most disheartening moments when her late father, influenced by her stepmother's negative attitude towards disability, abruptly halted her schooling. She states that her stepmother was convinced that no employer would accommodate someone with a condition like that of Mauvis. Unfortunately, her father agreed to this decision and Mauvis was taken out of school for three years.

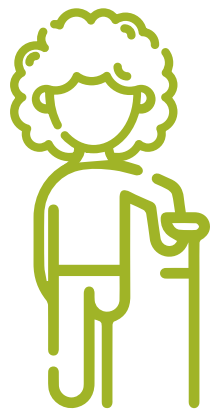
The path of Marvis's life took a positive turn when her aunt learned about the Empowering girls with disabilities through education in Uganda project. With her aunt's support, Mauvis enrolled in the project, allowing her to return to school after an extended absence. The project helped Mauvis address her eye rehabilitation, learning needs and provided financial support to meet personal needs, offering targeted counselling and psychosocial support.

With the help of the project, Mauvis successfully applied for university, earning a three-year scholarship to pursue a degree in Information Management. Today, Mauvis is filled with hope, aspiring to become a trusted and competent office administrator. She also harbors dreams of furthering her studies in law in the future.

She says: "Any girl, regardless of their ability, can study and can be productive in the community, let us support every girl to be in school."



The project in numbers



Number of girls with disabilities reached

2,060

Number of boys reached

581



Student kits distributed

161,886



Number of teachers trained

2,641

Number of girls with disabilities reached: **2,060**

Number of boys reached: **581**

Teachers trained: **2,641**

Textbooks and learning materials distributed: **42,594**

Classrooms and learning spaces constructed or made more accessible: **10**

Student kits distributed: **161,886**

Assistive learning devices provided: **726**

To what extent did the deliver value for money?

According to the assessment done by the GEC Fund Manager, the Empowering girls with disabilities through education in Uganda project offered average value for money.

Many of the activities were relevant but were not supported by enough capacity to implement effectively. In the project's final year, a redesign was undertaken to focus on activities that would yield the best value for money in terms of impact, effectiveness and efficiency. Equity improved over the course of implementation with the project targeting highly marginalised girls.

// VICTORIA'S STORY



Victoria is a 18-year-old girl currently on vacation from her senior six studies, majoring in biology, chemistry, and math. Raised in a family of five, her childhood was marked by adversity, particularly when her biological father left her and her mother. Compounded by severe walking difficulties, she underwent multiple operations to gain the ability to walk independently. Unfortunately, her aunt, who had been a pillar of financial support, passed away before the final operation. Despite these hardships, Victoria completed primary school with distinction, earning a school fees waiver for early secondary education. However, the relief was short-lived as fees were increased in the first year of her secondary studies.

The turning point came when she joined the Empowering girls with disabilities through education in Uganda project in the second term of senior one. The project helped Victoria paying for school fees and medical rehabilitation. *'Timely payment of school fees by the project allowed my mother to breathe, as she concentrated on ensuring that my siblings remained in school since my tuition had been taken up by the project.'* Participating in the project's holiday mentoring camps was transformative for her. *'My self-esteem and confidence soared, enabling me to take on leadership roles at the school, community, and regional levels. Starting as a class counsellor, I became a students' representative at the National Students Association, representing youth with special needs for the Kampala district. My ambition is to become a pharmacist. I am committed to serving my country and individuals with disabilities.'*

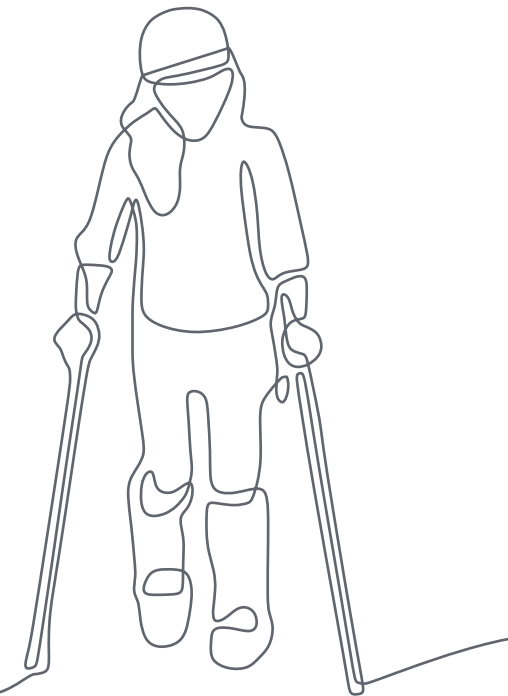
What did the project learn?

Improving attendance and retention. According to the End of Project Review most girls linked improved school attendance and retention to the payment of school fees, provision of school supplies (especially sanitary pads and school uniform) and transport to school provided by the project. Girls also highlighted that the provision of medical treatment and assistive devices improved functionality of girls with disabilities at school and home. Most of the girls with disabilities interviewed who received assistive devices – such as reading eyeglasses, hearing gears, wheelchairs or clutches – reported that this improved their functionality, to the level that some did not require any support or assistance from anyone as they could manage on their own. The headteachers and teachers interviewed reported that if the girls with disabilities under the project were not found in school, the project would visit their homes to find out why they were not attending school. Teachers also reported that project made occasional visits to schools to check on girls with disabilities and interacted with them individually on matters related to their schooling and wellbeing, to ensure they were comfortable. It was reported that such monitoring and tracking helped the girls maintain interest in attending and staying in school.

Making schools safer and more inclusive for girls with disabilities. Teachers and other school support staff need guidance and training on how to effectively support and accommodate girls with disabilities in an inclusive school environment. Qualified trained teachers need to be adaptive and accommodative and generally well inducted into inclusive teaching practice. Non-teaching staff also need to be trained on inclusive teaching practice. According to the End of Project Review, the guidance, counselling and mentoring sessions on child protection, safeguarding and life skills were the activities that most contributed to make schools safer and more inclusive. The sessions focused on rights of children with disabilities and involved teachers, school leaders and managers and students, including girls with disabilities. As much as some schools

had attempted to cascade down the training received by the project, the schools still had limited capacity to effectively orient new teachers on inclusive teaching practices, partly due to the inevitable trained teacher transfers and attrition. Also, according to the End of Project Review persisting factors that hindered access to education for girls with disabilities are the non-inclusive school physical infrastructure and the long distances to school. Some schools are physically inaccessible to some girls with disabilities. Some schools, especially private secondary and tertiary institutions, were housed in multi-storied buildings with narrow and or steep staircases and without ramps or rails.

Improving transition for girls with disabilities. According to the End of Project Review the main factor that enabled transition for girls with disabilities was the provision of life skills training, learning and mentoring camps, and counselling and guidance sessions provided by the project. These activities improved girls' confidence, self-esteem and agency. Girls with disabilities observed that counselling sessions contributed to their resilience, improved confidence, self-esteem, academic performance, and focus on their goals. They also added that these sessions changed their attitudes and taught them to accept their disabilities as different but normal conditions. Through counselling sessions girls with disabilities reported that they developed tolerance and ability to relate with others, which supported their transition through school grades and from one education level to another. The emotional and moral support through counselling encouraged girls with disabilities to be assertive, hardworking, and stay focused on their life goal aspirations. According to the headteachers and teachers interviewed, the project helped girls with disabilities move to the next levels of education, enrolling into secondary and vocational education or other tertiary level institutions for further education.



Girls'
Education
Challenge



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

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

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