Plan International UK

Girl-led monitoring and evaluation: An approach to empowering girls

September 2019

Putting girls at the heart of our programme and research strategies is a priority across Plan International.

This short report shares details of an innovative 'girl-led' approach to qualitative monitoring and evaluation piloted on the Girls' Access to Education-Girls' Education Challenge (GATE-GEC) in Sierra Leone.

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Acknowledgements

Acronyms and abbreviations

|	
DFID	UK Department for International Development
GATE-GEC	Girls' Access to Education – Girls' Education Challenge
JSS	Junior Secondary School
MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
PV	Programme Volunteer (GATE-GEC teacher)
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UKNO	Plan International UK National Organisation
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Introduction

Taking a girl-centred approach to monitoring and evaluation is about positioning girls as being active partners in the process. This way of working amplifies girls' voices and power by giving them control to determine the agenda and methodology, subverts normative power structures and creates a space in which girls feel empowered as directors and decision-makers to reflect on their views and experiences.

Through this process girls are encouraged to communicate their needs and ideas directly, and to be part of producing locally-owned solutions.

Since we piloted this way of working on the GATE-GEC, there has been considerable interest from across Plan International, our Consortium partners and more widely with key education stakeholders such as the Department for International Development (DFID).
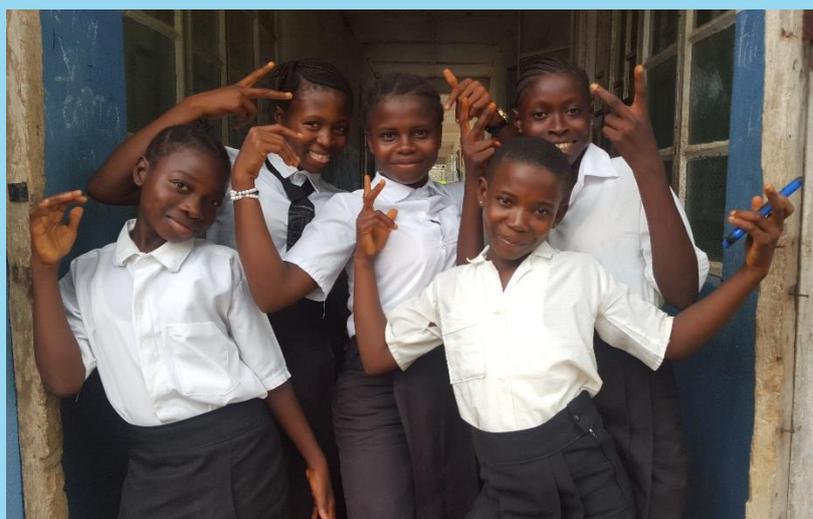
This interest sits within a growing call from across the international development sector to move away from extractive monitoring and evaluation processes – only taking information out of communities – and instead embrace more gender-sensitive and equitable approaches that help contribute to transformational change in participants' lives.[1] In this way, monitoring can both open up new, exciting insights for programmes and be a positive intervention for girls who take part.

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[1] *Transformational change challenges structures, culture and institutions that preserve inequality and injustice in the status quo.* Source: Applying Feminist Principles to Program MEAL. Oxfam. https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620318/dp-feminist-principles-meal-260717-en.pdf;jsessionid=AD9F90CB5252C5CF6972015B914DAAFF?sequence=4

Our hope is that the approach to monitoring and evaluation we've outlined in this paper can continue to be built on, rolled out across other projects and adapted to be used with a wide range of participant groups, including children with disability.

What is GATE-GEC?

The Girls' Access to Education-Girls' Education Challenge project in Sierra Leone (GATE-GEC) is a four-year, £13m DFID-funded project that aims to support approximately 6,500 marginalised girls and children with disabilities to attend school, learn in a safe and inclusive school environment and successfully transition to further education and beyond.

We do this in a number of ways including through delivering after-school study groups in literacy and numeracy and focusing on sustainability by building the capacity of teaching staff to deliver more inclusive education. We also work with a range of stakeholders, including Boards of Governors and School Management Committees, to improve existing school systems around school governance, attendance tracking and safety.

GATE-GEC works with children and their communities across six districts: Port Loko, Karene, Kono, Moyamba, Kenema and Kailahun. By creating an enabling and safe learning environment, including providing extra assistance for children with disability, the programme supports beneficiaries to successfully progress through Primary and Junior Secondary School, helping them transition into further education and beyond. This includes supporting the most vulnerable households to be able to improve their income and keep their children in school through Village Savings and Loans Associations.

GATE-GEC is implemented by a consortium led by Plan International and includes Humanity and Inclusion (previously Handicap International), ActionAid, Forum for African Women Educationalists and The Open University, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE).

What do we mean by 'girl-led' monitoring and evaluation?

Girl-led monitoring is community based, relational and participatory. A girl-led process maximises the use of participatory methods and creates an empowering space that supports girls to create strong peer-to-peer relationships and values their knowledge and skills more deeply.

Participants are supported throughout the process with capacity and skills building to become researchers and decision-makers in their own right. Putting girls in control of the monitoring process – from consulting on an initial idea, determining the scope of inquiry, formulating the methodology to the analysis and dissemination of the results – maximises their agency to explore topics that matter to them in ways that are meaningful to them.

Working in this way helps disrupt traditional power dynamics associated with monitoring and evaluation, moving away from an extractive process and instead empowering girls to define the areas and methods of inquiry.

Objectives of the process:

- **To empower girls to generate honest, in-depth responses that reflect girls' realities;**
- **To access a diverse group of girls directly and include their voices, such as girls with disabilities;**
- **To generate new, relevant insights on a theme of interest (e.g. educational transition; inclusive education) to continuously improve our programming;**
- **To work closely with the MBSSE and DFID to help contribute useful insights on the chosen theme of interest that can feed into education policy, practices and the system;**
- **To champion a transformative monitoring process that can be replicated more widely.**

Methodology

The workshop methodology we piloted takes girls on a journey of self-reflection, building their confidence and skills in leadership and strengthening relationships with their peers. As part of a girl-led process, the girls themselves become co-constructors of the knowledge-generating and analytical process. Together, the girls make decisions about the focus of the project, collect and analyse the data, create new knowledge, and share the findings with others.

| *Girls review their photos* | *Exploring the school environment* | *Learning how to film* |

The monitoring involved ten girls in JSS1 to JSS3 aged 10-15 years old who are beneficiaries of the GATE-GEC project. They were selected from two schools in Port Loko by GATE-GEC project staff who work closely with the schools. The participants in this pilot were largely self-selecting with age and logistical considerations being the principal factors; future processes might consider taking a more purposive approach involving specific selection criteria.

Facilitators met this same group of girls every day over the 5-day period, and workshops took place in the afternoon after school to avoid disrupting girls' learning. The monitoring activities were facilitated by 4 trained and qualified female researchers – two from Plan International UK and two GATE-GEC project staff. A full day of briefing and training on the process was led by UKNO with the in-country researchers in advance of activity beginning.

Photovoice

The monitoring activity incorporated a range of qualitative methods that aimed to allow girls to explore their own value structures and shape their own narratives. The process

centred around the use of photovoice methodology, a qualitative method used in community-based participatory action research, often with marginalised populations. It involves participants selecting and taking photos of anything they choose on a certain theme, and then reflecting on the motivations, emotions and experiences that guided their choice of images. [2]

The full process plan is included in Annex 1.

Why photovoice?

Photovoice was chosen as the principal method for this process for both its practical and conceptual advantages:

- Photovoice is low-resource – all you need is a smartphone.
- It requires minimal training and enables participants to acquire new skills.
- Parameters of the area of inquiry can be very broad and open to interpretation – in this case it was simply defined as reflections on the participants' experience of education.
- It produces tangible outputs (photos) which can then be used for participatory analysis.
- Images are grounded in real experience and discussion of them allows for collaborative construction of their meaning and importance.

How did we use photovoice in the girl-led monitoring process?

The first day of the workshop focused on building relationships and trust amongst participants and facilitators, chiefly through playing games. Facilitators explained to the girls that the next day's activity would involve going out into their schools and communities to take any photographs they chose that spoke to their experience of education.

The area of inquiry was kept deliberately broad to avoid facilitators influencing or imposing their own preconceptions on the girls' interpretation of the theme.

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[2] More resources on photovoice methodology: *Photovoice: A Participatory Action Research Strategy Applied to Women's Health*. Source: Journal of Women's Health, C. Wang (1999) https://bestler.public.iastate.edu/arts_based_articles/1999_wang_women_health_photovoice.pdf; *What is photovoice methodology and why is it important – factsheet*. Source: The Howard League for Penal Reform (2016) https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Photovoice-factsheet.pdf

Girls experiment with the cameraphone

The girls, many of whom had not previously used smartphones, had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the technology, including the photo and video recording functions, before going out to their schools and communities in two groups to take photos that told a story about their experience of education.

Peer-to-peer interviewing

Following the photovoice activity, facilitators printed out the girls' photos using a portable printer, and the photos were revealed to the girls at the workshop the following day. Having tangible products that the girls had created themselves was a powerful aspect of the process that generated excitement and joy.

The girls were encouraged to explore and unpack why they had chosen the images they took and what the photos illustrated about their experiences of education. This exploration took the form of peer-to-peer questioning, with girls interviewing each other about the motivations and meanings behind their images.

Girls used smartphones and lapel microphones to record each other as they spoke about their photos, speaking in Krio, their mother tongue, throughout.

Filming a piece to camera

This method of inquiry builds on the emic approach to qualitative research,[3] which explores cultural phenomena from the perspective of one who participates in the culture being studied. This approach in cultural anthropology centres the lived experience of research participants, giving voice to the reality experienced by individuals within their community.

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[3] *Emic and Etic in Qualitative Research.* Source: The Encyclopaedia of Applied Linguistics, N. Markee (2012) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316093025_Emic_and_Etic_in_Qualitative_Research; *Reflecting on the Tensions between Emic and Etic Perspectives in Life History Research: Lessons Learned.* Source: Qualitative Social Research, J. L. Olive (2014) http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/2072/3656#g3

Girls interview each other about their photos

The peer-to-peer questioning used as part of this process meant that the issues and themes that emerged were explored from the perspective of the individuals who experience them, rather than from an external viewpoint. This added power to the analysis led by the girls because it was unfiltered and unmediated by outsiders; it spoke to a lived experience rather than a constructed narrative.

Minimising the involvement of facilitators was central to ensuring that ownership of this process was firmly in the hands of the girls themselves. This extended to control over the equipment; the facilitators made a conscious choice to step back and avoid handling the phones or microphones, thereby encouraging experiential learning and ensuring that the process was truly girl-led.

Participatory analysis

Building on photovoice and peer interviewing, participatory analysis brought the group together to interpret the stories shared. The girls were invited to draw out and discuss common themes or particular points of interest.

There are no right or wrong answers in this process, which allows participants to explain why they are grouping or coding stories in certain ways. Participatory analysis is a powerful tool for groups to collectively surface and integrate multiple perspectives and co-construct the meaning of the key messages.[4]

Girls crowd around their photos

To facilitate this work, participants were introduced to the concept of thematic analysis. The group practised organising and coding different pieces of data – in this case the photos they had taken – and, most crucially, explaining the reasons for their choices.

The value of this exercise was in the process of matching images to the themes they had identified, which shed light on the girls' criteria for assigning value and their framework for understanding the stories that had been shared. Girls worked together

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[4] http://learningforaction.com/participatory-analysis

to name the themes and explain the rationale for grouping photos and stories together. This analytical process in turn provided insights into how they framed and prioritised issues close to them.

Audience pathways and participatory video

This group method incorporates drawing, story-telling, and sharing to help the participants decide upon the key messages they would like to convey to others and reflect on their own journeys throughout the process.[5]

Girls broadcast their newsflash

Participants start by working in groups pretending they are a 'local news team' with the platform to communicate their insights to a wider audience.

As a group, the girls were encouraged to think about where they started at the beginning of the process and what they had learnt, experienced and discussed in the course of the workshop.

Drawing a path down a large piece of paper, the groups were challenged to think about how they would convey this journey to their audience and which aspects they would want to share. Along the path, they can then note down points of learning, knowledge or issues that will help the audience travel from the starting point to a place of deeper knowledge and understanding.

Girls film a newsflash

During our pilot, the groups interpreted this exercise in a plethora of different ways, with some girls choosing to write more formal scripts and others expressing themselves through drawings to communicate more individual and less structured reflections and stories.

Providing arts and crafts materials such as coloured pens, glitter and stickers added to the ways the girls could express themselves and embellish their narratives.

Rather than being constrained within the limitations of standardised responses or reporting formats, the girls were free to express themselves individually and share

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[5] For more information on Audience Pathways, see *A Rights-based Approach to Participatory Video: toolkit.*
Source: InsightShare (2010) https://insightshare.org/resources/rights-based-approach-to-participatory-video/

their personal experiences in ways that spoke most meaningfully to them. This potential for individual creativity is one of the strengths of this methodology and contributed to the richness and variety of the data.

When groups had completed their pathway, we introduced the concept that each group of girls would film the other group to capture a 'newsflash', broadcasting the story they wanted to tell. Incorporating video into the process generated excitement amongst the girls as well as documenting the work, and provided an opportunity to utilise the skills they had gained using multimedia approaches.

Findings and discussion

Facilitating this type of research process will generate different insights in different contexts precisely because it is tailored for participants to voice their own experiences and priorities. The value of this approach is in gaining an in-depth snapshot of a small group of participants' realities and priorities around an area of interest. These locally-provided personal insights can be triangulated with other evidence to add depth to wider trends.

On GATE-GEC we explored the theme of education and participants identified and prioritised the following themes and experiences that they felt were important throughout the workshops.

The following themes emerged most strongly and each is explored further in the following sections.

- **Early marriage**
- **'Survival tree': poverty and access to school**
- **Disease and other dangers**
- **Straining for resources**
- **Being denied access to decision-making spaces**
- **Gendered teaching methods**

Early marriage and pregnancy

"Schools make us get sense. If they had not put us in school, some of us would have been sent to married houses, so now when schools are in our village, we are happy."

Pregnancy and early marriage emerged as dominant themes within the discussion, which girls see as big risk factors to their education. Conversely school was framed as a protective space which shields girls from the dual risks of pregnancy and early marriage, and without which these pathways would be inevitable. One girl spoke of the school building itself as having *"saved us from early marriage."*

There was often a lack of agency associated with the girls' sexual and reproductive experiences, and many knew friends or classmates who had previously been forced to drop out of school due to pregnancy. Girls also

SRHR information at school

expressed pregnancy as something that happens to you, rather than something you choose.

"Last year there were too many dropouts because of teenage pregnancy but this year there are not so many because there are these contraceptives."

Education and pregnancy were cast as very clear alternatives, with the former providing the only real protection against the latter.

"If there was no school our parents would have given us up for marriage."

'Survival tree': poverty and access to school

"I snapped this mango because when the mangos are ripe we sell the mangos and use the proceeds to pay for our education."

Education was viewed as something to be profoundly thankful for, both because participants saw it as an important right, but also because of a recognition that it is often hard-earned and something to be fought for.

Girls spoke of the coping mechanisms they and their families adopted to ensure that they could access school, and the difficulties they faced in doing so.

Trees in the community

Multiple girls chose to take photographs of fruit trees, explaining that the reason for this was that they or their families would sell the fruit in season to pay for their school fees or learning materials.

During the participatory analysis, these photos were grouped together under a theme the girls named 'survival tree', suggesting the struggles they faced in realising their right to education.

"I decided to group these photos because they are plants and people harvest them and sell them to pay their school fees."

The language of 'struggle' was used repeatedly throughout the discussions. The girls named one of the groups of photographs 'Academic strikers' suggesting a need to unify and mobilise in order to overcome the obstacles blocking their path to education. They spoke of "fighting for their academic study", gesturing to the barriers they need to overcome to secure access to and knowledge in school.

Navigating access to school was also spoken of in practical terms in a discussion about transport and its attendant risks.

Girls were thankful for the existence of motorbikes in the community that they could use to travel to school, expressing gratitude through phrases like "Praise the bike!". However, when this theme was

Transport to school

unpacked more deeply, it became clear that even travelling to school was fraught with spoken and unspoken dangers.

"It is easy to access motorbikes because there are boys hanging around in the community who we can pay, but it is risky – there might be accidents or other things that happen on the way."

This euphemistic turn of phrase was one of many examples of the constant trade-offs the girls were required to negotiate between accessing education and the hazards they face in doing so. Raising risks like this also sits within a wider evidence base which has suggested girls can come under pressure in the school environment to trade sexual favours for transport and grades.[6]

While the methodology piloted through this work cannot address these unspoken hazards, it opens up the space for these tensions to be revealed through what is both said and unsaid.

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[6] *Ending violence against girls in schools in Sierra Leone.* Source: Department for International Development (2013) https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/ending-violence-against-girls-in-schools-in-sierra-leone;
  Too often in Silence, a Report on School Based Violence in West and Central Africa. Source: A joint report from Plan International, Save the Children, ActionAid and Unicef (2010) *https://plan-international.org/publications/too-often-silence-school-based-violence-west-and-central-africa*

Disease and other dangers

"It is because the tap has helped us get pure water. Before this we used to go miles off to fetch water and even then the water was not pure. The water is saving our lives."

Girls frequently commented on the risk of disease and even death presented by a lack of adequate WASH facilities in school. Holding a photo she took, one of the participants shared a story of her classmate who had been prevented from attending her exams because of a snakebite received in the latrine.

"For example, this has disturbed one student in our school because there was an exam and the pupil decided to ease herself, so she went to the bush, and the snake bit her on the foot. Because of that she was unable to take the third term exam."
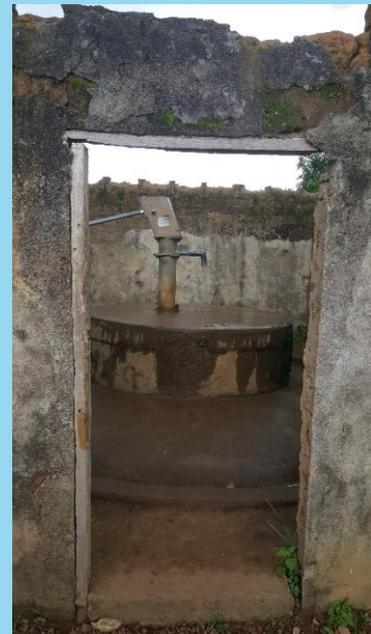
Water tap

School latrines

Where basic water and toilet facilities did exist, they were framed in life-saving terms, indicating the immediacy and severity of the risks posed by their absence.

"Clean water at school saves our lives because it means we don't get diarrhoea or cholera."

These potential health risks are another hazard girls spoke of needing to manage in order to attend school and access the benefits of their education.

"These toilets help us – if we want to go to the toilet we can easily access it, so we don't mess ourselves up. If we have to go far away, you may have an accident."

Straining for resources

"The benches mean we don't have to sit on the floor, we don't have to turn around and say 'give me a bench'."

Girls repeatedly spoke of "straining" for space, hinting at the struggle and discomfort they experienced within the classroom environment. It became clear from the discussions that access to space and resources within the classroom environment was a locus of negotiation and struggle for girls, sometimes on a daily basis.

In particular, several girls photographed the school benches and commented on the impact of their absence: namely, that without them they would have to "sit on the floor."

The girls thought nothing of a class size of 45, implying that classes were often even larger, placing unmanageable demands on school materials and teachers' time.

Classroom benches

Denied access to decision-making spaces

"This is where the teachers sit to make our results and make meetings about our education."

While school itself was a protective space, the girls did not have equal access to all the spaces within it.

Girls spoke of power and information being concentrated in certain areas of the school environment, in particular the Principal's office, where decisions are made, and the stage, where decisions are announced. They did not speak of being involved or consulted in decision-making processes at the school level.

It emerged that information about critical school activities – their exam timetable, for example – was communicated via the noticeboard rather than by their teachers.

Information was framed as something that needed to be sought out, rather than something that was freely given, and the girls were removed from decisions that directly affected them.

Inspecting the noticeboard

Gendered teaching methods

"We can confide in female teachers more than male and they will keep it confidential."

Interactions with teachers emerged as being heavily gendered, with the girls expressing a strong preference for the style of teaching and discipline more often modelled by female teachers.

A discussion of the respective qualities of male and female teachers emerged from a conversation about the playing field, where the girls like to play balanceball and football.

Although this was associated with happiness, it was also not without its risks, as if they played with boys they revealed that the boys would bully them and "might threaten to beat them".

It surfaced that their (male) teachers, far from taking remedial action, would not be interested and might even punish the girls for reporting such behaviour.

They suggested that male teachers in their school exhibited both a lack of interest in their welfare and an inclination to punish the victims.

"We cannot tell male teachers because they don't ask."

The girls revealed that the only teacher they could felt able to confide in in this case would be their female mentor, but that she was not currently in school.

"Male teachers wouldn't do anything and sometimes they flog in their office."

A male teacher at school

According to the girls, the mode of discipline predominant among male teachers was punitive, and male teachers who deviated from this were the exception rather than the rule: they spoke of liking one male teacher specifically "because he does not shout."

"If a child doesn't come to school today, the PV will punish us for being absent. The [female mentor] will beg on our behalf not to punish."

Their relationships with their female teachers were very different. The girls expressed a willingness to confide in female teachers and a trust that their concerns would be taken seriously and kept private.

"If there are problems the teacher will not flog, she will take us to her office and advise."

This discussion suggests a further need to seek a better gender balance around teaching staff in

schools, but to also continue to work with all teaching staff to embed better classroom management and inclusive education methodologies.

Key learnings from the process

Piloting this process created a huge amount of learning around what added most value to the process and where changes could be made to enhance the process in the future. These included:

- The importance of **dedicated staff** who receive training in advance;
- **Local facilitators** leading so that skills remain in context and facilitators become champions of this approach;
- Value of **all-female** space;
- Importance of leading workshops in the children's **mother tongue**;
- This is foremost **a process** not product and it's essential to allow time and space for the process to unfold according to the participants' priorities;
- Facilitators must step back and **hand over control** e.g. we made the conscious choice to not handle any of the phones for camera and video, instead fostering curiosity for the girls to explore the devices and ensuring this power is always in their hands;

Girls broadcasting their newsflash

- Encouraging **freedom of expression**, including through game-playing, is critical to the success of the process;
- **Adapting the process** to the characteristics of participants (e.g. different ages);
- Value of **multimedia methods** in engaging participants in storytelling, including power of integrating photovoice and participatory video techniques;
- Incorporating **celebration** and **recognition** into the process. A final ceremony and 'graduation' was held for the group on the final day. The girls invited friends, family and other local stakeholders to share their work. They also received certificates to recognise their journey and commitment to the process;
- Building in **time in the future to work further** with participants to identify what actions they would like to arise from the issues shared. This would greatly enhance how findings can be taken forward. We would recommend this be done for any future process.

Principles of working in this way

Putting girls in the driver's seat helps ensure their voices are heard and listened to, and working in this way relies on being guided by values that create a safe, open space for participants to express their experiences and views on what matters to

them. The strength of this type of approach is that it is an empowering *process* above all, not a set or pre-defined product.

Here are a number of principles key to setting up the process:

- **Build trust and group dynamics:** this is critical to establish from the beginning and cultivate throughout. Being attentive to group dynamics and revisiting these throughout the process is important to ensure all participants are able to participate equally. Prioritising team building and getting to know each other also helps facilitate strong peer-to-peer relationships in the group, which is an important benefit for girls taking part. Co-creating ground rules together helps participants set their expectations for how they would like to participate, treat each other, and experience the space. All workshops should also have elements of building group dynamics through game-playing and discussion each day to help ensure participants feel comfortable to take part and express themselves with each other.

- **Tailor the process to the needs of the group you're working with:** consider the specific group of participants you'll be working with and adapt the process accordingly to best meet their needs. For example, will you be working with children with disability, or children of different backgrounds and ages? Think about how you can adapt the process, build group cohesion and create a welcoming space for all.

- **Embrace emergent design:** being open to a process that changes in response to participants' choices and ideas is central in a girl-led process. Handing over control and letting the process develop according to participants' choices and desires maximises the power of the group to express their views freely, while also creating opportunities to flex their agency, decision making and critical thinking.

- **Protect the space:** choosing a venue where participants can feel comfortable to play, share and explore is important. This may mean you also need to be aware of protecting the space from outsiders who may naturally be curious and come to have a look. Think carefully beforehand about choosing a space that is private and how you will ask outsiders to leave if necessary. When we piloted this process on the GATE-GEC, we found that a semi-outdoor space worked well offering lots of natural light and room to play and have fun. In a girl-led process, we found it also helps maximise participants' confidence to keep the space as female only, including all facilitators.

- **Keep it authentic:** this type of process is small-scale and in-depth qualitative work. The value comes in girls being able to share their own views directly and speak from their own experiences. There's no need to ask participants to speak on behalf of other children. Findings from this work can be triangulated with other data collection methods and evidence to position findings within larger trends if desired.

Conclusion

By putting girls in the driver's seat, the process was designed to ensure girls' voices were heard and listened to while also generating fresh, relevant insights that complement and enrich our current monitoring. The process was designed to be genuinely transformative by providing an opportunity for girls to occupy a position of leadership and power that is usually closed off to them, thereby equipping them with new skills and building their confidence and self-esteem.

On GATE-GEC, embracing this girl-led way of doing monitoring has provided an opportunity to more deeply unpack certain themes of interest and expose some of the hidden complexities and tensions that form the fabric of girls' lived experience. Wider evidence also suggests that a girl-led monitoring process is uniquely placed to simultaneously amplify girls' voices and ideas while also generating relevant and locally-owned findings.[i]

Our hope is that this way of working continues to resonate with partners and key education stakeholders. On GATE-GEC, we will expand the pilot if possible, rolling it out in our other delivery districts. More widely, we encourage stakeholders and partners to reflect on how this way of working can be used in their work and invite a community of learning to emerge.

Annex 1: Girl led process plan (as piloted on GATE-GEC in Sierra Leone)

GATE-GEC girl-led monitoring activity: detailed process plan

This document provides a detailed outline of a girl-led in-depth qualitative monitoring process. This process was piloted by members of the GATE-GEC team in Port Loko, Sierra Leone from 25th-29th June 2019.

This process plan is based on the specific pilot process undertaken by the GATE-GEC team and therefore refers to 'girls' throughout. However, this approach could be adapted and applied in different contexts with different groups of participants.

For information on these details, please contact Ellie Caine or Maggie Shergill at Plan UK (Eleanor.caine@plan-uk.org; Maggie.shergill@plan-uk.org).

Who did we involve: The monitoring involved ten girls in JSS1 to JSS3 aged 10-15 years who are beneficiaries of the GATE-GEC project. They were selected from two schools in Port Loko. Facilitators met this same group of girls every day over the 5-day period.

Workshop timings: All workshops took place after school to avoid disrupting the girls' learning and classes.

Setting: The daily workshops were based out of the Plan Port Loko office. The workshops were delivered in a covered outdoor space to provide a welcoming environment with plenty of light and fresh air. Always consider the space you will hold the workshop carefully as it may influence how participants feel and helps set the tone for the groups' work together.

Logistics: Girls were selected from schools in close proximity to the office and Plan drivers picked the girls up each day after school. After the workshops, the girls were taken back to their communities everyday so that travel was not a barrier to attending. Lunch, snacks and soft drinks were provided each day. The ritual of eating together was an important part of encouraging positive group dynamics. Providing food also helped as a gesture to value the girls for the time and energy they gave to the process.

Facilitators: The monitoring activities were facilitated by 4 trained and qualified female researchers – two from Plan International UK and two GATE-GEC project staff. A full day of briefing and training on the research process was led by UKNO with the in-country researchers in advance of activity beginning. It's important that all facilitators commit to being part of the process every day for the full workshop as this reflects commitment to the group and their work.

Incorporate celebration: The last day was designed as a celebration of the group's work and the journeys of participants themselves. The girls helped shape the agenda for the ceremony and each chose a role they wished to play from greeting guests to presenting the work or talking about their experiences and learnings during the process. They were presented with certificates to recognize their participation and achievement. Each participant invited along family members and school teachers.

Closing this type of process with a celebration helps value participants and recognise their work. It can also be an important time to involve local stakeholders, family and friends to share the key messages.

Objectives

This approach puts girls at the heart of the process, building their confidence and skills while also generating fresh and rich insights into their lived experience. Through this approach, we create a space where girls lead the agenda and aim to:

- Empower girls through the monitoring process and generate honest, in-depth responses that reflect girls' realities, including complexities and tensions that are rarely revealed through conventional monitoring processes;

- Access hard to reach groups of girls and include their voices;

- Generate new, relevant insights on a theme of interest (e.g. transition; inclusive education) to continuously improve our programming;

- Work closely with the MBSSE and DFID to help contribute useful insights on girls' inclusion and experiences that can feed into education policy;

- Champion a transformative process that can be replicated more widely.

Principles of this approach

- Girl-led monitoring is community based, relational and participatory. It's both a monitoring process and a positive intervention for girls who take part. Creating a warm, inclusive environment is essential. Choose methods and create a space where girls are supported throughout the process with capacity and skills building to become the researchers and decision makers.
- Let go of control over the process. The most value often emerges when girls are able to determine the agenda and be creative within the workshops.
- Set positive ground rules together at the beginning of the process that both participants and facilitators are expected to uphold.
- Train local facilitators so skills for the process remain locally. Ensure to allow adequate time to not only familiarise with the process plan, but also agree the attitudes and behaviours we expect to practice as facilitators in the workshop space.
- Work in the local language to maximise how comfortably participants feel able to express themselves.
- Consider the positionality of facilitators and how best to match this to the work of the group. For example, we worked with an all-female team. Or if working with other groups, such as children with disability, you may consider having members of the facilitation team who themselves have a disability or a high awareness in this area.

Workshop design overview

Each session of the workshop will be designed to achieve specific outcomes for participants.

Day 1: 2-4pm
The first day sets the tone for the rest of the process and provides an opportunity for the participants to build trust and relationships between themselves and with the facilitators. Facilitators should seek to build participants' confidence in their ability to participate in group discussions, share their experiences and engage. The focus will be on:

- Introducing participants to the overall structure and objectives of the process
- Giving participants space to introduce themselves
- Introducing the facilitators
- Getting to know each other, building trust and good group dynamics (game playing)

Day 2: 2-4pm
The second day of the workshop involves introducing the girls to the photovoice method. After welcoming the girls to the session, facilitators introduce them to the cameraphones and give them the opportunity to experiment with taking photos of each other and their surroundings. Facilitators explain that the group will be going out into their community/school to take photos that reflect or illustrate their personal experiences of education, and that the following day we will be exploring the motivations and meanings behind the photographs they have chosen. The girls will be invited to express their initial reactions to this approach, including any questions or concerns.

The participants split into two groups of 5 and head out into the community with one camera per group. Each group should be accompanied by a facilitator. Girls are encouraged to each take 5-10 photographs of places, people (including selfies) or objects that mean something to them and illustrate their personal stories. Facilitators should encourage the girls to think about why they have chosen to take a particular photograph and how it relates to certain aspects of their lives. When all the girls in each group have taken their photos, the groups reconvene at the venue to thank each other and return the cameras. The session closes with a game.

Day 3: 2-4pm
Overnight facilitators print all of the girls' photos and lay them out in the venue. The third day of the workshop encourages the girls to explore and unpack why they have chosen the images they have taken and what the photos tell us about their experiences of education. All the photos are laid out on the floor or a table and the girls circle around to each talk about which photos they took and why (wearing lapel mic to capture the explanation). The facilitators should encourage participants to probe each other's responses to generate deeper insights into the girls' value structures and priorities, and one of the facilitators takes note of the most striking themes and observations. Once everyone has spoken, the girls will be asked to do

some quick participatory analysis by grouping similar images and discussing which themes they see as emerging.

As an add on activity, facilitators may choose to introduce the notion of captioning photos and provide some examples, before asking the girls to select their own photos and devise captions that illuminate some of the meaning behind the images. Working in two groups, give the girls time to write and decorate their captions.

At the end of the group discussions, the two groups will come together and girls are invited to share their experiences with the wider group, before the session closes with a game.

Reminder to girls that a celebration event will be held the morning after the last session, and they can invite guests with whom they would like to share their work (e.g. parents, teachers or friends).

Day 4: 2-4pm
Overnight, the facilitators mount the photos and captions on card and lay them out in the venue for the girls to review. When the girls arrive, they are able to see the exhibit of their work taking shape. Facilitate a discussion on what story they feel these photos tell. Girls are split into two groups to work as a 'news team' for their school. They are given the concept that their news team has been asked to make a broadcast that will be shown to other girls who want to know more about this process and the key messages. Girls work in their groups to storyboard and then film a short segment. The group will then come together and each group will present their storyboard, and reflect on the experience. If possible, each video is screened in the venue.

The session closes with planning and preparations for the next day's celebration. Girls are reminded to invite their guests. Facilitators find out from the girls what they would like to share of the photos/films, and if anyone would like to speak or share more about their experience during the event. A rough outline of the ceremony is shown and each girl is asked what role she might like to play – e.g. greeter, presenter, etc.

Close with a reflection game.

Day 5: 10am-12pm
The final session takes the form of a graduation ceremony to celebrate the girls' efforts and achievements over the course of the week.

During the event, a photo exhibit featuring their photo collages will be displayed around the room, and their parents, teachers and other members of the community are invited to attend. The girls will be invited to share their perspectives on the experience, including anything that surprised them and aspects they most enjoyed. The other attendees will also have the opportunity to ask questions of the facilitators.

The ceremony will close with a presentation of certificates to each of the girls to congratulate them for taking part. After that, lunch is served for participants and their guests.

Pre-workshop prep
- Participant recruitment - Consent is gained from both participants and parents to take part - All facilitators train and prepare in research ethics and these methods - Logistical arrangements for lunch and transport are made - Risk assessment signed off - Workshop materials prepared

Day 1, 2-4pm: Introducing the process and each other

Timing	Session objective	Session structure	Approach	Stimulus / input
12.30-1.30pm	Facilitators arrive, set up room	Room set-up: - Print out participant list and consent forms - Ensure seats are arranged in a circle - Ensure there are flipcharts and pens available - Ensure there are labels for name badges - Ensure there are bottles of water, soft drinks and biscuits - Identify table for food and drink - Ball/any other materials for game playing - Any wall materials up – e.g. Plan banners		Participant list Consent forms Refreshments Name tags
2-2.15pm	Arrival, registration	Welcome: - Girls are welcomed as they arrive - Asked to sign/tick their name on participant list - Girls and facilitators make their own name badges - Girls are offered lunch		
2.15-3pm	Introduction and consent	Introduction to workshop: - Facilitators introduce themselves with fun fact - Facilitators formally welcome the girls - Brief explanation of objectives and format of the workshop - Opportunity for questions		Consent forms Powerpoint slide/or key points about project on flipchart Information sheet on project for girls to take

		- Facilitators request the participants' consent and collect signed forms		away
3-3.20pm	Introductions and getting to know each other	Ball game: - Participants and facilitators sit in a circle and pass a ball around the circle. The person holding the ball has to say their name and something they enjoy. New questions are introduced (e.g. favourite colour, animal, somebody they look up to). - Other 'getting to know each other' games? Movement and name game: - Participants and facilitators go around and share their name and an action. The rest of the group then repeats their name back and does the action. Works well if you make the action a fun dance move!		Ball
3.30-3.40pm	Expectations from the process	- Girls split into small groups and discuss what they are hoping to get out of the next few days. During the group work, facilitators may consider leaving the room to allow the girls to speak freely. - Group comes back together and one person from each group presents on the discussion - Facilitators note expectations on flipchart paper and stick them up around the room.	Working in small groups	Flipchart, pens Post-it notes Facilitators on hand to answer any questions
3.40-3.50pm	Establishing ground rules	- Introduce the concept of 'ground rules' as a group agreement to uphold certain behaviours and values in the space. Give an example of a ground rule such as 'listen to each other.' - Ask participants to shout out other ground rules they think are important to creating a safe, fun space for all. - Potential ground rules may include: respect each other; be friendly; listen when others are speaking;		

		speak up and participate.		
3.50-4pm	Wrap up	- Facilitators thank the participants for their time today - Briefly introduce idea behind Photovoice session tomorrow - Inform girls when and where to meet tomorrow (same time and place) - A quick fun closing game: 'The ship is sinking' - In this game, participants spread out the room. One facilitator calls out 'the ship is sinking' and participants call back the phrase as they walk around the room. The facilitator continues to call out 'the ship is sinking' until they are ready to call out a group number that participants must try to form. The facilitator says: 'the ship has 3 people' for example and then participants should try to find a group of 3. If they cannot, they are out and should sit down. Repeat with various group numbers. - Thanks and goodbye - Girls are invited to take drinks/snacks with them		
Day 2, 2-4pm: Photovoice fieldwork				
2-2.15pm	Welcome/arrival	- Girls arrive at the venue - Time for drinks and lunch - Warm up game: The Sun Shines on' game: Make a circle with chairs – one person stands in the middle of the circle and their aim is to get a chair. They say the 'sun shines on' and then introduce a factor, such as anyone with a brother…anyone in the group who has a brother must switch seats and try not to end up the one without a seat. If they are without a seat, they become the person in the middle on the circle.		Refreshments

2.15-2.25pm	Getting familiar with the camera	- Girls are introduced to cameras on phones. Place the phone/camera in the middle of the circle. Ask participants if they have used something like this before. If so, they can share their understanding of how it can be used. Ask the participants one at a time to pick up the phone, and try turning it on as well as selecting the camera function. Once they have opened the camera, they should try taking a photo of something or someone in the room (or themselves!). After each girl takes a photo, the group should have a look and feedback what they think is positive about the photo and areas that could work better. This helps introduce participants top tips for taking photos. Facilitators can prompt to pull out key principles, which include:
		   o Lighting (keep the sun behind you to create a brighter photo)
		   o Composition (different types of photos including portrait and landscape)
		   o Zoom for close-ups
		   o Focus by tapping on the screen
				Smartphones

2.25-3.45pm	Fieldwork	- Girls are split into two groups and assigned a pair of facilitators (one local, one Plan UK) - Facilitators explain that each group will have a camera and girls should aim to take 5 photos each that help them share the story they want to tell about education *or* that is something meaningful to them about their education. Give the participants an opportunity for questions. - Groups head out into their schools and communities - Girls are accompanied by facilitators at all times, and travel in small groups together.		Smartphones

		- Facilitators encourage girls to consider why they are choosing to take particular photographs		
3.45-4pm	Wrap up	- Facilitators collect the cameras and briefly explain that the next day will involve exploring the meanings and motivations behind their photos - A quick fun closing game: 'Today we learned something.' In this game, facilitators and participants walk in a circle clapping their hands and singing 'today we learned something.' Facilitators should call on one girl at a time saying 'what did you learn', the girls can then respond 'today I learned about…' Continue and give each girl a chance to share. Encourage the girls to not repeat what have others said and try to be specific about their learning. - Facilitators thank the participants for their time today - Inform girls when and where to meet tomorrow (same time and place) - Thanks and goodbye - Girls are invited to take drinks/snacks with them		
Day 3, 2-4pm: Sharing stories and making sense of the photos we took				
2-2.15pm	Welcome	- Girls are welcomed as they arrive - Chance to take a drink and lunch - Quick warm up game: 'Fruit salad'. In this game, girls sit in a circle on chairs (there is one less chair than number of girls). Each girl names 3 fruits. One person stands in the middle and calls out a fruit name, for example 'pineapple!' Everybody who had pineapple as one of their fruits must quickly swap place with someone else in the circle. The person in the middle should try to steal someone's chair. Whoever is left without a chair is now the person in		Refreshments Printer (overnight) Printed photos

		the middle of the circle. Repeat.		
2.15-3.15pm	Sharing stories	- Facilitators ask girls for their reactions to the photovoice activities – what did they enjoy? Was there anything they found difficult? How did they feel about using the camera? - Printed photos are spread out in the middle of the circle for all participants to see. The group sits around them in a circle. Girls select the photos they took. They are asked to think about which photo is most important to them and why.	Group discussions	Printed photos
3.15-3.45pm	Peer-to-peer interviews on film Introduction to captions	- Each girl is invited to share the story of her photos and which one is most significant/why – no such thing as a wrong answer! - When girls share their stories, a peer should use the camera phone to video her response. Use lapel microphones to capture the audio. This is a really fun activity that gives the power to participants to film each other and ask questions. - Facilitators make notes of recurring themes/surprising elements of the discussions. Ask follow-up questions and discuss as a group after each story shared. **Add on activity** (if time): - Facilitators explain the girls will now have a chance to write and decorate captions of the photos they took (they can select just one or two) - Girls split into two groups and have fun with creative materials and writing their captions - Facilitators roving and on-hand to help	Plenary	Camera phones and lapel microphones Caption paper Creative materials set up on tables
3.45-4pm	Wrap up	- Facilitators thank the participants for their time	Plenary	

		today - Inform girls when and where to meet tomorrow (same time and place) - Short closing game: The human knot. This game is designed to demonstrate the power of working together in a group. Ask for a volunteer to leave the room. Organise girls into 2 groups, and each stands in a circle. Each person raises their left hand and grabs the left hand of someone else in their group. Then raise the right hand and grab the hand of a DIFFERENT person. The volunteer can return to the group and gives directions with the aim of unravelling the knot and returning to a group circle. Participants should not let go of the hands of the person they are holding. After 30 seconds, stop and reflect on how difficult it is to unravel with only the direction of one person. Thank the volunteer and ask them to now join a group. Girls should form a new knot. Repeat the process but this time encourage each group to make decisions together. Hopefully one of the groups will unravel quickly! - Thanks and goodbye - Girls are invited to take drinks/snacks with them		
Day 4, 2-4pm: Reflections and storyboarding as 'news teams'				
2-2.15pm	Welcome	- Girls are welcomed as they arrive - Girls create their name badges - Chance to take a drink and lunch - Quick warm-up: 'Secret thief' game. In this game, a facilitator starts by standing in the middle of the circle and places a pen or other small item at their feet. The facilitator is blindfolded or closes their eyes (no peeking!) and explains the girls should try to take the object without being heard. If the	Plenary	Refreshments

		facilitator hears any noise they should point in that direction. If you are pointed at you must return to the circle without the object. Repeat until someone is successful! You can then end the game, or repeat with this new person as the one in the middle.		
2.15-2.30pm	Recap and photo review	- Girls can see their work ready for the exhibit with photos and captions paired - Facilitators lead a quick discussion on what story this tells – building on participatory analysis from day before	Plenary	Pre-prepared photos and captions are mounted ready for review
2.30-3.00pm	Participatory analysis	- Introduce the concept of thematic analysis using examples. Write down words and or phrases that share common themes and ask girls to group them. There are no right or wrong answers! But they should be able to justify why they have grouped things together. Encourage them to work and communicate with each other. - Girls are invited to then look at and organize the photos into themes that they see emerging - Group discussion on what has come out	Plenary	Photos Cards with words or phrases written on them (for introducing thematic analysis)
3.00-3.05pm	Quick energizer	- 'Move, shake' game. This is a call and repeat game. One facilitator calls out 'I shake, I shake, I shake' and does accompanying actions. Participants repeat the words and movement. Then the facilitator calls 'I kick, I box, I head' and does the accompanying actions. Participants repeat. The facilitator then calls 'I stand, I sit, I stand' with the accompanying actions. Participants repeat. And then final call is 'I will never sit down again!'		
2.30-	Storyboarding and	- Girls are split into two groups to work as the local	Small groups	Flip chart for

Time	Activity	Description		Materials
3.30pm	being News teams	'news team'. They are given the concept that their news team has been asked to make a broadcast that will be shown to other girls in the area who want to know more about this process and what the findings are/key messages. Perhaps provide key questions (e.g. what has been your experience in this process; what did you learn; what do you want other girls to know?) - Girls work in their groups on a big piece of flipchart to storyboard…they can draw, write and decorate their flipchart with all the pieces of information they want to share. Encourage everyone in each group to be involved. They may all want to work at once on the flipchart of take turns. - When they are ready, each group can then film their short news segment/ presents their storyboard on film. Have a girl from the other group do the filming. Encourage everyone to be involved and speak while on camera. - The groups then come together and each group screens their video if possible. Some time for group discussion and questions after each video.		storyboarding; coloured pens Microphones Smartphones for filming Tri-pod
3.30-3.50pm	Planning for the next day's celebration	- Facilitators provide a high-level outline – and ask the girls to feed in to add detail and make changes. Key question include what would we like to present from the work created; would anyone like to speak during the ceremony? - Ask girls to each volunteer to play a role, e.g. as a greeter or presenter, etc. When they volunteer for a role, they should write their name beside the activity. For some activities, a few participants might like to work together. - Remind girls to invite their guests for the event (likely parents or teachers).		Flip chart Pre-prepared high-level outline

3.50-4pm	Wrap up	- Girls are asked for final thoughts on their experience today - Closing activity – 'Rain storm' game. In this game, the group will work together to create a rain storm. The facilitator tells a story with accompanying actions (and sounds!) that the girls repeat. It starts with the rain coming down softly (snap your fingers). Then the rain start to get a bit harder (light clapping). Then the storm arrives (slapping thighs). Finally, the thunder comes (slapping thighs and stomping feet). Then the storm begins to end – repeat the actions in reverse. - Inform girls when and where to meet tomorrow (10am, same venue) - Thanks and goodbye - Girls are invited to take drinks/snacks with them		Snacks
Day 5, 10am-12pm: Graduation Ceremony				
9.00-9.15am	Set-up	- Facilitators arrive early to set up - Display girls' collages on the wall; set up for film screening if possible		Certificates Photo consent forms for other participants? Photo collages Refreshments
9.15-10.00am	Final workshop activities with participants	- Start with reviewing the process and thanking the participants for all their work over the past week. Give each participant a card with a group photo on it and an individual message (prepare this in advance!). - Review roles decided on for the ceremony - End with a game called 'Warm fuzzies.' Each person gets a piece of blank paper tapped to their		Thank you cards (with group photo) for each participant Blank paper Tape Marker pens

		back. Everyone should circulate around the room and write one thing they like about that person on their paper. Make sure that all participants have written on everyone's back. When finished, girls sit in a circle remove the paper and read it. They can keep the paper.		
10-10.15am	Event begins! Arrival and registration of guests	Welcome: - Participants are welcomed as they arrive - Asked to sign/tick their name and role on participant list - Asked to sign consent form if they are happy to have their photo taken - Participants are invited to make their own name badges - Participants take a drink and snack		Attendance list Music system Microphone (if necessary)
10.15-10.30am	Introduction	- Facilitators welcome the girls and other attendees to the ceremony - Facilitators thank the girls for their participation and give a brief overview of the objectives and format of the workshop - Facilitators also inform participants how outputs/reports will be shared (through Plan Port Loko)		
10.30-11am	Participant feedback	- Girls are invited to share their perspectives on the experience using their collage as a visual aid if they wish to		
11-11.20am	Q&A	- Other stakeholders are invited to ask questions of the facilitators and girls - A facilitator notes down key points		Flipchart
11.20-11.45am	Presentation ceremony	- Facilitators explain that each girl will receive a certificate to congratulate them for their efforts over the week		Certificates

		- Each girl is invited to the front of the room to receive her certificate - If appropriate, each girl is also presented with a picture frame as a gift (suggestion that they might use it for their collage)		
11.45-11.55am	Group photo	- Girls gather outside for a group photo with facilitators - Photo also taken of all participants (provided consent received)?		Camera
11.55am-12pm	Thanks and wrap up	- Guests and participants gather inside - Facilitators inform girls who to contact with any feedback on the workshop - Participants invited to take a drink and snack - Facilitators thank all participants		Refreshments
12-1pm	Lunch and party	- Lunch served for all guests - Music, dancing		Music system
1-1.30pm	Clear-up	- Facilitators clear the room of all materials/refreshments		
Close				

[i] As indicated in European Commission documents *Science Policies in the European Union: Promoting Excellence through Mainstreaming Gender Equality*. A Report from the ETAN Expert Group on Women and Science. European Commission, 2000; *Women and Science: Excellence and Innovation – Gender Equality in Science*. Commission Staff Working Document, Brussels 2005.