Designing and monitoring distance teaching and learning interventions:
A guide for projects and implementers

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Girls' Education Challenge

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About this guide

This guide was designed to support projects and implementors to consider how to design, implement and monitor distance teaching and learning (DTL) interventions in a time where flexibility and adaptation of interventions is necessary to keep children learning.

It is a result of collaboration between the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) Fund Manager (FM) and the EdTech Hub to support GEC projects, but has wider application for projects and implementors in other contexts. The guide helps projects and implementors to examine the distance teaching and learning approach they are using or intend to use through using guiding questions in five domains. The domains were determined through collaboration between the GEC FM, the EdTech Hub and GEC projects when examining distance teaching and learning approaches.

This guide:

1. Provides a structure to examine distance teaching and learning approaches through five domains and cross-cutting principles.

2. Does not provide answers or pass judgement on what should be done unequivocally, but the guiding questions prompt projects and implementors at every stage around what needs to be considered and will hopefully result in gaps being addressed, or an acknowledgement of the need to prioritise, and what the trade-offs might be.

3. Showcases case studies from GEC projects to illustrate concrete reflections and actions that projects and implementors can use to support the design, implementation and monitoring of DTL approaches. Thanks go to the GEC projects that provided rich, detailed case studies.

- Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO)/British Council, Nepal: Sisters for Sisters' Education
- Link Education International, Malawi: Team Girl Malawi
- People in Need, Nepal: Aarambha
- CRANE and Viva, Uganda, Building Girls to Live, Learn, Laugh and 'SCHIP' in Strong, Creative, Holistic, Inclusive, Protective, Quality Education
- PEAS, Uganda, GEARR-ing Up for Success After School
- Street Child, Nepal: Marginalised No More

4. Signposts several useful resources from the EdTech Hub and other organisations that support the design, implementation and monitoring of distance teaching and learning interventions. Note that this list of resources provides a starting point for distance teaching and learning but is not exhaustive.

Background

The Covid-19 pandemic caused significant disruption to many sectors and industries, with education being severely impacted. As schools closed and educational routines were disturbed, countries, projects and organisations used distance learning approaches to enable children to continue their learning. This change meant that many children from different economic backgrounds started to receive educational instruction from non-traditional sources.

As countries, organisations, teachers and students grappled with the fast-changing context, little was known about effective DTL interventions. This was the case for the 41 projects being managed and implemented under the Girls' Education Challenge, which operates in 17 countries.

As the 41 projects shifted their teaching and learning interventions, differences and similarities emerged in the approaches taken and the challenges faced. It was clear that there were core tenets that needed to be considered by all projects to ensure an effective DTL approach. These included the local context, DTL modality, content and curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. It also included monitoring, evaluation, learning and adaptation (MELA). These tenets have been drawn together in this document to provide a practical guide to the areas projects should consider. This guide is intended to assist projects in the design and delivery of DTL interventions and help prepare governments, organisations, schools and teachers to tackle future shifts in the education sector.

WHAT IS DISTANCE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

Traditionally, DTL is when teaching and learning take place when there is physical distance between educators and students. However, DTL can also include situations where there is a mix of distance and face-to-face contact. DTL can be delivered through many different forms from TV, radio and Internet through to community volunteers and parents. DTL can also be a hybrid between different modes depending on the country, context, and situation of students and teachers.

The varying DTL methods help connect students, educators, peers and mentors to ensure that students can continue their learning and stay connected to their studies. DTL approaches can also address key challenges such as students being away from their peers, school playgrounds/buildings, school meal programmes and other resources which are essential in a student's learning journey.

Overview

This DTL guide was produced to support the design, delivery and monitoring of GEC projects. The guide draws on thinking around global DTL practices and is rooted in the contextual experience of GEC projects.

The production of this guide was a collaborative process between the GEC Fund Manager, the EdTech Hub and GEC projects in Nepal, Malawi and Uganda. The guide consists of five sections:

1. Local context and education system;

2. Distance teaching and learning modalities

3. Content and curriculum

4. Pedagogy and assessment
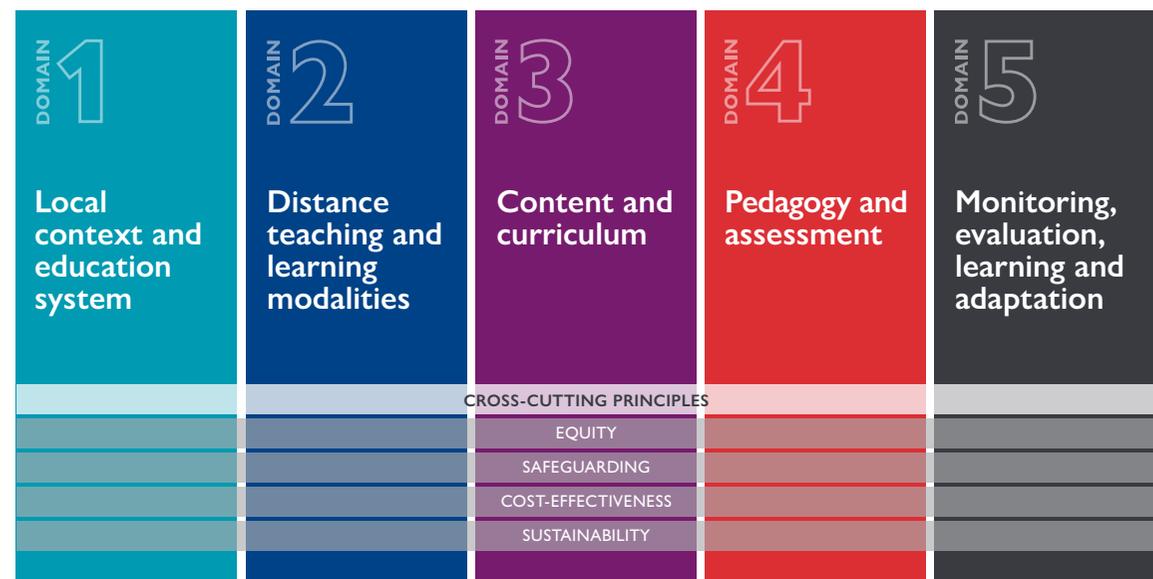
5. Monitoring, evaluation, learning and adaptation

Each section of this guide defines the domain, provides guiding questions and relevant resources that can be used to assess and guide DTL interventions. They also reflect the varying DTL approaches across countries and the realities projects face (*see figure 1*). The guide's cross-cutting principles – equity, safeguarding, cost-effectiveness and sustainability – are reflected throughout the sub-categories and questions. These should not be seen as having equal weighting or as a quality index; rather, the intention is to stimulate and guide discussion in these areas.

As the pandemic progresses, many countries and schools find themselves in a position of staggered reopening or cyclical opening and then closing. These patterns require frequent reorganisation of how learning happens, and the materials used to support and assess learning. Transition between grades and stages of education has suffered and schools find themselves having to understand where their students are in their learning, who needs support and how to provide that support. The GEC projects now find themselves using various forms of blended learning to support students in and out of school, and as they return to school. This guide does not only support the design, development and monitoring of DTL approaches, but can also be used to support the thinking and implementation of blended approaches to learning.

> **"The GEC projects now find themselves using various forms of blended learning to support students in and out of school, and as they return to school."**

Figure 1. *Distance teaching and learning domains*

DOMAIN 1	DOMAIN 2	DOMAIN 3	DOMAIN 4	DOMAIN 5
Local context and education system	**Distance teaching and learning modalities**	**Content and curriculum**	**Pedagogy and assessment**	**Monitoring, evaluation, learning and adaptation**

CROSS-CUTTING PRINCIPLES

EQUITY

SAFEGUARDING

COST-EFFECTIVENESS

SUSTAINABILITY

How to use this guide

The guide can be used to help projects and practitioners with the design and evaluation of DTL interventions. To gain the most out of the guide, we suggest that you first consider the stage the DTL intervention is at in terms of design and implementation. If it is in the early stages of design, we would recommend reviewing all the sections, as each of them provides unique suggestions and considerations. However, if you are already implementing your DTL intervention, then we would recommend jumping to the section which would help you tackle a challenging area (for example, pedagogy and assessment).

To understand what 'effective DTL provision' looks like, each section includes examples from GEC projects in Nepal, Malawi and Uganda. These examples have been developed into case studies (see *link in 'About this guide' section*). These case studies are from the GEC projects and they illustrate how GEC projects have implemented successful DTL approaches and provide an example of how the guide can be used to evaluate them.

A spreadsheet tool accompanies this guide. It allows users to document and track their response against each of the guiding questions, which have been organised into 'minimum', 'recommended' and 'additional' categories to help users focus on areas of interest.

Finally, the guide also includes tick boxes next to each question so that you can track progress of the areas you have considered.

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1. Local context and education system

This domain focuses on tailoring DTL interventions to the local context, National Education Sector Plans and Strategies, and the needs of girls in each country. It also addresses whether the project has the potential and corresponding objectives to strengthen education systems in the long term.

Guiding Questions

Mapping

Who are the learners and stakeholders (for example, school, government and NGOs/CSOs)?

How does the intervention engage with parents, caregivers and families?

How does the intervention respond to household needs?

Are community leaders and other key stakeholders supportive of girls' learning?

How do these groups (parents, community, government etc.) engage in the girls' learning process?

Does the intervention map the local context, infrastructure and market? (i.e. if using SMS, has the telecommunications market been assessed and is it able to support the DTL approach?)

What opportunities does DTL bring to the local context (e.g. travelling to school was previously a barrier, but now it may not be)?

What are the changing learning needs of girls who remain out of school?

Country alignment

Does the DTL approach facilitate access to a government (or other) platform?

Does it give additional support/added value to an existing programme?

Are the DTL objectives and goals of Ministries or stakeholders also included?

Does the intervention consider the Ministry of Education in the project's overall goals to enhance girls' learning?

Do national educational policies support or hinder the intervention objectives?

Is the DTL curriculum aligned to national assessment systems?

Have local or national resources (e.g. people and funding) been used?

Does the DTL approach align with the local context in supporting transition/local workforce opportunities?

Does the DTL approach support future education delivery?

Equity

Are activities designed around other commitments that girls may have (for example, domestic responsibilities)?

Does it address the barriers that learners face in accessing learning?

Does it advocate for the reduction of these barriers?

Safeguarding

What community-level factors place girls at risk?

Do contextual sociocultural norms support or constrain girls' safety?

Relevant resources and further reading

- A five-part education response to the Covid-19 pandemic' (Section 2)

- 'Girls' Education and EdTech: Rapid Evidence Review'

Has the intervention considered engaging the Ministry of Education in the project's overall goals to enhance girls' learning?

The English and Digital for Girls' Education (EDGE) component of the Sisters for Sisters' project supports 1,350 adolescent girls through girls' clubs that already used radio to provide teaching and learning. In responding to Covid-19, the intervention expanded and further developed the radio component which has resulted in much wider engagement and reach. The DTL approach involves the weekly broadcast of radio and television programmes centred around gender equality, social issues and English language development. Now embedded into the government system, the resource is accessible to 7.3 million students and 147,000 teachers across Nepal.

While designed for home-based distance learning, the resources (including radio/audio, SD card, SMS and written materials) designed under the EDGE component are versatile in that the radio and the worksheets can be used in a range of ways and for different groups/audiences. This contributes to their sustainability. For example, in addition to home-based distance learning, they can be used in the classroom for teaching about gender equality and a range of other, important social issues. The storylines, characters and exercises have been thoughtfully created to help learners explore complex and challenging social issues.

The government of Nepal, including the Centre for Environment and Human Resource (CERHD), formed a working group to investigate how the resources could be used after the pandemic. The materials are being reviewed, adapted and uploaded onto an online, publicly accessible portal. As a result of the project's engagement with national bodies, the impact of this distance learning approach could potentially be long-lasting and have far greater reach than first envisaged.

2. Distance teaching and learning modalities

DTL modalities encompass a range of high, low and no-tech options used to carry out teaching and learning outside of the typical classroom environment (e.g. during Covid-19 school closures). This domain outlines the modalities projects (both GEC and non-GEC) are using, how they are using them and who is delivering them.

Guiding Questions

Modalities

What DTL modalities reach learners most effectively (for example, mobile phones, radio, television, online learning or paper-based materials – or different combinations of these)?

Is an analysis of technological resources needed to determine availability and penetration of mobile, radio and digital services in the local area?

Are the modalities readily available or new to learners? If new, what are the risks and challenges of this?

Does the DTL modality provide value for money?[1]

What DTL facilitation means are best suited to support learning (listening to radio individually, participating in small groups, using WhatsApp, discussing SMS content, etc.)?

Who is delivering the DTL modality (teacher, volunteers, community), and how?

Are there implications for scale / sustainability (for example, will it continue after the project closes)?

Are there multiple channels or approaches for learners to access learning content and get feedback?

Do learners have access to additional resources at home, such as textbooks?

Will learner preferences impact how they engage with the DTL approach?

Can lessons be learned from other projects/programmes in the country or similar contexts (for example, have there been effective uses of educational radio in the past that tracked learning and impact in ways that can be translated to the present intervention)?

Are there limitations to how the modality can or cannot be used (for example, learners with hearing impairments may not be able to use radio-based lessons)?

Will different interventions need varying implementation times to generate impact?

Small groups

Would it be helpful to create a community of learners to support the DTL approach?

Will group-based learning enable or hinder learning gains?

Will group-based learning promote social skills and wellbeing?

What are the logistical considerations for facilitating and managing work in small groups?

How could technology support or hinder small groups?

Are the educator/facilitators experienced in facilitating small groups?

What other facilitation approaches can be used to implement the DTL approach?

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1 VfM is complex and has multiple meanings. VfM can be considered in myriad ways including economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity.

Self-guided learning

Can self-guided learning activities be used?

What are the factors that make self-guided activities successful (for example, time, space, connectivity and parental engagement)?

How will technology support or hinder self-guided learning?

What support structures exist to enable successful self-guided learning?

Equity

Do learners have pre-existing access, ownership of devices and familiarity with modalities?

How do you reach learners without phones and/or electronic devices, data or internet?

Do learners have permission to use and access DTL devices?

Are all sub-groups of learners included (for example, children with disabilities, low-income households, young mothers, those with linguistic differences and those from different geographical areas)?

Can children with disabilities access the resources used in the DTL approach? Is alternative provision needed?

Safeguarding

What safeguarding risks could the DTL modalities present?

Are mechanisms for girls to report safeguarding concerns included?

Is safeguarding age-appropriate (for example, when working with adolescent girls)?

Other

Are there are trade-offs between blended learning and purely remote DTL?

Relevant resources and further reading

- 'Radio rapid evidence review'

- 'Using TV to support learners in low and middle-income countries'

- 'Messaging apps, SMS & social media: Rapid Evidence Review'

- 'The potential of using technology to support personalised learning in low- and middle-income countries'

- 'Using blended learning to support marginalised adolescent girls' education'

- 'Using technology to support gender equity, social inclusion, and out-of-school learning'

- 'Using education technology to support learners with special educational needs and disabilities in low- and middle-income countries'

- 'Nepal "Ask me anything" responses to EdTech questions' (see Question 1)

- 'Distance Learning A guide to playful distance learning – online and offline'

Has the intervention considered logistics in facilitating and managing work in small groups?

TEAM Girl Malawi provides community-based education (CBE) classes to 5,000 out-of-school girls and 1,200 boys in three cohorts, as well as girls' clubs with a focus on sexual and reproductive health and other life skills.

Schools and learning centres in Malawi were not closed in 2020, as the spread of Covid-19 appeared to be less severe in Malawi than in other countries at the time. However, the government of Malawi released guidelines for social distancing in the learning environment.

For this reason, TGM chose to modify its existing approach without moving to full distance learning. Before the Covid-19 outbreak, the project was implementing CBE classes in the community/district locations. On average, the CBE classes had 60 learners, with a trained facilitator and learning assistant for each class. During Covid-19, the project decided to reduce the number of girls per class, initially to four girls and later to 15 per class. The number of CBE centres increased, and the small group approach took place in locations close to where learners were based (in accessibility and risk-assessed sites). The number of classes per week was reduced and the project received approval from the Ministry to reduce the CBE curriculum from seven to four subjects.

With an increase in CBE centres, TGM decided to upgrade learning assistants to become facilitators. They provided training and follow-up support to these staff. In addition, TGM procured learning packs to aid home learning and re-developed and printed facilitator guides to incorporate home learning activities. They also developed a life skills subject textbook and guide that was distributed to the beneficiary girls and CBE facilitators.

3. Content and curriculum

Educational content and curriculum include any learning materials disseminated to learners, whether in digital or print format. Educational content can be mapped and organised into a broader set of resources forming modules for a particular subject. These modules can then be combined to form the overall learning curriculum. The content used in an intervention could be based on the national curriculum or developed as a form of non-formal education.

Guiding Questions

Content design

Has content been designed to align with the learning needs and interests of the beneficiaries?

Is the content sufficiently differentiated so that it supports both high attaining and low attaining learners in different age groups?

How can learners and educators be involved in the design and delivery of content?

Can the content be offered in the 'mother tongue' languages of learners?

Creation and curation

What are the cost implications for content development?

What are the costs of creating new digital content rather than curating existing, contextually relevant digital content?

Does the content creator or curator have sufficient experience and support to devise educational content?

How engaging is the content (for example, does it use play, gamification or other approaches to keep learners engaged)?

Is the content related to, or aligned with, the national curriculum?

How will the curriculum support girls to transition by meeting the standards required for them to progress in their education or career pathway?

Delivery

Are the pace and frequency of the delivery sufficient to generate the intended learning outcomes?

Is the DTL content and curriculum sufficiently flexible and suitable to be used through re-openings, closures and blended learning modalities?

Equity

Are gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) criteria incorporated into the curriculum?

Relevant resources and further reading

- Open Educational Resources in Africa: A curated resource list

- Nepal "Ask me anything" responses to EdTech questions (See Question 4)

- Deploying an e-learning environment in Zanzibar: Digital content curation

- In the local context — using digital technologies to develop local content (from the Education for the most marginalised report)

- Accelerated learning and EdTech: rapid evidence review

Has the intervention considered whether the creator or curator has sufficient experience and support to devise educational content?

The Sisters for Sisters' Education project created several radio programmes to support girls in their continued learning and to prioritise social issues. Building upon existing resources, and despite time sensitivity, the development of the radio programmes and the associated materials followed a rigorous process. This led to the development of a high-quality, relevant resource.

The project diligently sought out specialist expertise for each aspect of the development of radio programmes. The British Council has extensive experience in material development for English language teaching and was, therefore, able to hire respected consultants to create content. Curators of content were teachers who had worked on the project for the last two years, and so had a deep understanding of the learning needs including the social issues across the communities impacting upon girls' learning, safety and wellbeing.

After careful selection of the themes to be included, the project recruited highly experienced, local, Nepalese writers with specific expertise in producing stories for audio/radio. Supported by a strong team within the British Council, the writers and radio producers worked closely with curriculum experts to ensure the storylines would translate well in the audio medium. The British Council was also able to quality assure the work and the final product using their own highly qualified, academic staff.

4. Pedagogy and assessment

Pedagogy refers to the approach and practices used by teachers to promote learning. It also covers the approaches found in the materials and resources to enable learning. Assessments are used to measure learning and can also be used to inform and adapt pedagogy.

Guiding Questions

Professional development

How can educators be involved and supported in the development and delivery of the DTL approach?

How do you create safe and inclusive learning spaces, to promote social-emotional resilience and well-being?

Should you use formal and/or non-formal educators/facilitators? What is the rationale behind this decision?

Which pedagogical approaches are appropriate (e.g. Teaching at the Right Level) for learner needs and capacities?

Assessments

How is learning progress tracked and measured?

How are ongoing assessments carried out? And by whom?

How can technology support formative and summative assessments?

Is the assessment tool easily accessible and usable by other stakeholders?

Feedback loops

What is the frequency, rate and quality of feedback that learners receive?

What is the frequency, rate, and quality of feedback that educators receive? Who does this come from and how?

How are assessments utilised to inform adaptations to pedagogy?

Equity

How are gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) criteria incorporated into pedagogy and assessment?

How does the language of instruction affect pedagogical practices and assessments?

Is the assessment tool accessible to all students and can it reflect their learning?

Safeguarding

Are there any do no harm risks linked to assessments (for example, calling girls or sharing results with parents)?

Relevant resources and further reading

- Characteristics of effective teacher education in low- and middle-income countries: what are they and what role can EdTech play?

- Overview of emerging country-level response to providing educational continuity under COVID-19: best practice in pedagogy for remote teaching

- Effective Teacher Education in Low-connectivity Settings: A Curated Resource List

BUILDING GIRLS TO LIVE, LEARN, LAUGH AND 'SCHIP' IN STRONG, CREATIVE, HOLISTIC, INCLUSIVE, PROTECTIVE, QUALITY EDUCATION, CRANE AND VIVA, UGANDA

Has the intervention considered how gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) criteria are incorporated into pedagogy and assessment?

CRANE and Viva's approach to content and curriculum during the Covid-19 pandemic has focused on aligning to the Ugandan national curriculum, as well as addressing the needs and interests of their beneficiary girls. Learning packs developed by the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) were in English and the project printed and distributed these, with contents broken down into different competencies and levels for various classes. When NCDC was unable to deliver more packs, CRANE and Viva ensured their learners could continue to learn by developing, printing and distributing their learning packs. The development was undertaken by selected teachers working in conjunction with the project's Education Secretariat. These packs were designed:
• to be more inclusive (more accessible to children with disabilities) and more differentiated for the different levels/ classes
• with content that is intended to engage learners with interactive, real-life and experiential activities
• with a gender-sensitive approach that aimed to cater to the needs of all learners. For instance, the pictorial representations of both genders are equally used, and the language and general content are gender and socially inclusive.

To further embed principles of GESI, the teaching team at the Secretariat has prepared a course on gender equality in the classroom which helps teachers to incorporate gender and social inclusion aspects in both pedagogy and assessment.

5. Monitoring, evaluation, learning and adaptation

Monitoring, evaluation, learning and adaptation (MELA) provides opportunities to measure and enhance impact. Monitoring refers to activities that collect reliable data on an intervention as part of its design and implementation. Evaluation measures the success of an intervention against pre-defined indicators. Learning and adaptation refer to the process of leveraging the data and other information (for example, insights from interviews) to generate learnings that can be applied towards iterating and improving upon the implementation of an intervention.

Guiding Questions

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

What qualitative and quantitative outcome(s) is the DTL approach trying to achieve?

Is the DTL approach generating — or likely to generate — significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects?

Are the M&E systems suitable for use during and after Covid-19?

Is value for money measured? If so, how (for example, learning adjusted years of schooling)?

How are engagement with materials (paper-based, radio programmes, TV, etc.) monitored?

Does the M&E system allow for the intervention to prioritise where more support is needed?

How can remote monitoring structures and systems be implemented effectively?

Learning and adaptation

Is there a learning and adaptation system in place that enables operational/delivery changes? What feedback loops are being used?

How are 'factors of success' that enable effective learning across the sector/GEC portfolio identified and captured?

How are learners' changing and ongoing needs assessed?

How is the quality of the DTL approach assured?

How is learning disseminated to wider stakeholders (for example, national/government forums and data sharing)?

Other

What are the minimum resources needed to successfully implement the DTL approach?

What human resourcing is needed to foster success?

Relevant resources and further reading

- Monitoring distance education: a brief to support decision-making in Bangladesh and other low- and lower-middle-income countries Ensuring rigorous monitoring and evaluation of initiatives using digital technologies in education for the most marginalised (from the Education for the most marginalised report)

- A Roadmap for Measuring Distance Learning (edu-links.org)

Has the intervention considered how to implement effectively remote monitoring structures and systems?

The PEAS project supports 7,493 beneficiary girls enrolled in the 28 PEAS secondary schools established in rural locations in Uganda. Before the Covid-19 outbreak, project activities included continuous professional development for teachers, school management and governance training, girls' clubs, and community advocacy to support girls' education. During Covid-19, activities have included establishing and maintaining regular contact with beneficiary girls, printing and distribution of secondary home learning packs, and the production of a set of radio lessons broadcast on local radio stations.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic and school closures in Uganda, PEAS drew up a medium-term response plan (MTRP) monitoring framework, which included remote monitoring methods. PEAS has not adapted monitoring tools used before Covid-19 but did streamline the number of indicators (in line with the MTRP) to focus on those relevant for the school closure period. PEAS maintains a monitoring, evaluation and learning dashboard, which is updated regularly with monitoring data that has been collected for these indicators. The PEAS team holds weekly programme meetings, with MEL as a recurring agenda item, which has enabled the project to adapt programming rapidly and to deal with any issues the data has revealed.

Most parents or caregivers of PEAS' beneficiary girls make school fee payments by mobile money. In the wake of Covid-19, PEAS requested use of these phone numbers to maintain contact with beneficiary girls, to assess girls' learning needs and progress, as well as to gather information about the issues and challenges the girls faced in their daily lives. The project conducted three phone surveys with beneficiary girls throughout 2020. Collected data was used to inform the support (academic and psycho-social) offered to girls by the teachers responsible for maintaining weekly phone calls with them. The project also piloted a maths learning assessment approach over the phone via SMS.

Acknowledgements