Girls' Education Challenge

What we are learning about learning

The Girls' Education Challenge (GEC), launched in 2012, is investing £300 million in the education of a million of the world's poorest girls to expand their opportunities and improve their lives. The programme supports 37 projects in 18 countries to enable girls to learn through improved schools, better teaching and greater community engagement.

There is a wealth of knowledge on women and girls' exclusion from education, and the impact this has on societies and economies. However, governments, donors and policy makers continue to wrestle with how to tackle this challenge and get millions of the world's poorest girls into school and learning. The GEC aims to change this. An exceptionally rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluation of the GEC projects is providing us with a unique and comprehensive resource for understanding how to overcome the factors which hinder the learning of disadvantaged girls. At the midpoint of the programme, the projects' evaluation studies are already showing increased attendance and improved results in both literacy and numeracy.

What we are learning

Conditions for learning – what must be in place for girls to learn?

Girls need safe access to schools and to be able to afford all the costs of their education.

Well-designed loans and scholarships can tip the balance in favour of sending a girl to school, particularly when combined with other support. While potentially more sustainable, income generation activities have not yet shown an impact. Improvements to school infrastructure have increased attendance. Other conditions include transport, which not only makes journeys shorter, but also improves the girls' safety on the way. Simple but visible interventions such as bicycles often win public support.

Environment for learning – factors which prepare girls to learn

Girls are better able to learn when they know their families and communities value their education; when their school environment is safe, inclusive and aspirational for them; and where there is support for their personal development and well-being.

Even if they want to see their daughters go to school, parents who are illiterate find it difficult to support their children's education. Adult literacy programmes have helped parents help their children with homework. A number of projects are changing views on corporal punishment and violence towards girls and some report notable results in attendance. Strong child protection mechanisms are also making a difference. Many projects have identified the difference that paying individual attention to girls can make to their self-esteem and confidence, whether through smaller classes, role models or peer support.

Teaching and learning – approaches to accelerate girls' learning

Effective teaching improves learning and fosters girls' aspirations. To make this happen, we need skilled teachers who feel valued. Carefully planned use of technology supports progress, as do opportunities for girls to catch up on missed learning.

Teaching and learning interventions range from those focused on literacy and maths to more generic approaches, such as training teachers to make girls feel included. A few projects are using ICT innovatively – for example, by analysing pupil information to address gaps in learning. Projects with the best results so far offer girls additional learning opportunities, such as after-school clubs. However, retention of good teachers is proving a challenge, and projects are looking into ways to make teachers feel valued.

Leadership of learning – decisions which affect girls' education

Leaders with clear vision and high aspirations are crucial in improving the life chances of girls through education.

Projects have seen the benefit of engaging with head teachers early. A number of projects also work with school management to improve links with parents. Female participation on school councils is proving successful in raising expectations for girls' education. The evidence to date also affirms the influence community leaders have on girls' enrolment and attendance. Many projects are seeing the importance of using local staff while working with education authorities to sustain the outcomes of their work.

Snapshot of progress to April 2016

4,599
Classrooms constructed / renovated

34,424
Girls with disabilities reached

67,451
Teachers trained

1,631,619
Girls reached

9,620,967
Textbooks / student kits disbursed

£16,721,101
Girls' bursaries / stipends / cash transfers

How the GEC makes a difference

Continual learning and adaptation

The GEC is implementing a diverse range of interventions in different contexts. This means continual learning and requires flexibility. For example, the GEC has had to adapt to extreme situations such as Ebola in West Africa, a devastating earthquake in Nepal and the severe drought in Southern and Eastern Africa. The GEC draws from the expertise and local knowledge of in-country teams monitoring the projects. By using the lessons learnt to improve the management of the programme, the GEC is also contributing to the best practice of managing complex challenge funds.

Working in fragile and conflict-affected states

A large number of girls supported through the GEC live in conflict-affected countries, such as Afghanistan, Somalia and South Sudan. The volatility in these countries means that the GEC has had to take a particularly adaptive approach to management so that projects can tailor education and evaluation to their contexts. This has ensured that projects that need the most support receive higher levels of assistance and monitoring.

Unprecedented evidence gathering

A rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluation in the GEC helps illustrate and understand the programme's impact. The programme is tracking a representative sample of approximately 70,000 girls over five years. This will lead to a substantial source of evidence on successful strategies for girls to learn and achieve their potential. These evaluations also lay a solid foundation from which to test further innovations in education.

Increased focus through Payment by Results

The GEC applies a Payment by Results (PbR) approach, which aims to incentivise projects to focus on results. The GEC's approach to PbR is unique in that, unlike most programmes, the 'results' are not defined as outputs – instead, projects need to demonstrate improvement in the girls' learning outcomes. There are currently 16 projects that have a proportion of their budget linked to girls achievement in maths and literacy.
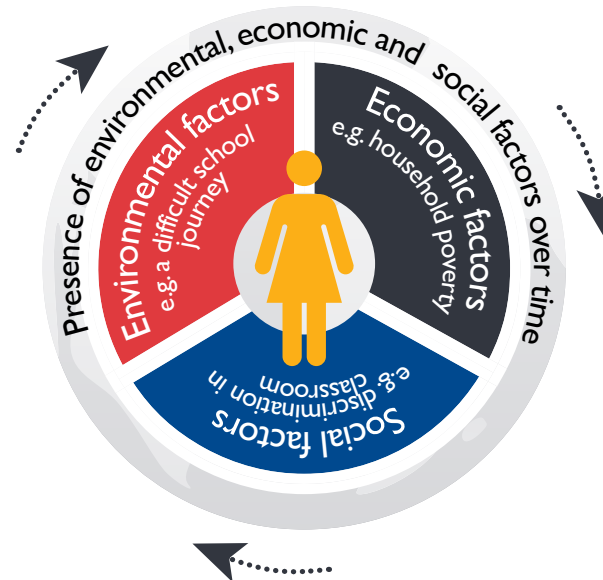
Community of practice

The GEC has a strong and well-articulated mandate to learn and to share this learning. The programme fosters 'peer-to-peer' knowledge exchange at a global scale. An online forum enables projects and their partners to contact one another, ask questions, participate in discussions, and access useful resources. The GEC also hosts regular regional meetings between projects as well as widely-attended webinars on topical issues, from child protection to evaluation design.

What we are seeing

The GEC has reached over one million disadvantaged girls. Some of these are the most marginalised girls in the world, including:

- 178,000 girls now attending school and learning in Afghanistan
- 35,000 girls who had dropped out from school
- 30,000 disabled girls offered an opportunity for a better learning environment and greater support from their communities.

Figure 1: *Learning outcomes for girls are affected by a range of factors*

The GEC projects are addressing the combination of environmental, economic and social factors that exclude marginalised girls from education and have a devastating effect on their future opportunities.

Over 700,000 girls to date have achieved better learning outcomes through the GEC. Of these, over 500,000 have met the set targets and achieved significantly higher learning outcomes than their peers.[1]

Also, attendance of girls in GEC schools is increasing at a higher rate than that of their peers outside the programme.

The GEC is providing governments, donors and other stakeholders with evidence to inform their policy making.

The GEC has shown that results can and should be rigorously measured, even in fragile and conflict affected states. But we have also learnt about the challenges, such as the difficulty with applying payment by results in such environments.

The GEC has attracted over £56m in matched funding from the private sector and NGOs.

Strategic partnerships with the private sector are galvanising new educational models with the potential for long-term sustainability.

The GEC has established a community of practice among the projects, facilitating learning across and beyond the projects.

[1] *At midline, these GEC projects have demonstrated over 0.2 standard deviation improvement in learning. This compares well to a range of successful education interventions across the world as demonstrated in the academic literature on randomised control trials (RCTs).*

Completion

Transition

Access

16-19:
into employment or higher education

"I like studying to achieve my dreams. I can help my parents and community."
(BRAC Tanzania)

"My parents' attitudes changed. Before they used to say: 'Girls and cats should be in the kitchen'. Now they invite us to study. They now read our marks and get fuel for the lamp."
(Link Community Development)

"Before the radio programme, I was thinking of going to the tea plantations to look for money and support myself."
(HPA)

"My mother discovered that I was doing more chores while my brother is just sitting, so she divided the chores more equally."
(World Vision)

"I like how our teacher teaches us, she teaches us good."
(BRAC Tanzania)

10-16:
secondary education & vocational skills

"Some of my friends were thinking about getting married but then I told them what I'd been taught, and they changed their minds."
(World Vision)

6-10:
into school & acquiring foundation skills

"Before when I was on my period, I was not here at school. I even missed tests. Now we are lucky, we get sanitary pads and soap."
(Link Community Development)

"I used to come to school late every day because my home is too far from school. Because of this, I always missed the mathematics class, because mathematics is always the first lesson. Since the school bus, I no longer miss the class."
(Eco-Fuels Africa)

Shakila's story
(AKF, Afghanistan):
Baghlan is a province in Afghanistan where most residents are subsistence farmers and villages are located far from the city and government schools.

"My name is Shakila. There are seven people in my family: my parents, three sisters and one brother. My father is a farmer and all the members of my family are illiterate. It was my dream that I would not be illiterate like them, and that I would get a chance to go to school. But the girls' school is too far from my village and my father would not let me go so far. He would say to me, 'The school is too far for you to walk, and even if you walked that far the dangers and threats on the way to school are too great for me to risk your life.'"

Shakila was disappointed. She gave up on her dream to become educated, until she heard about a school that Aga Khan Foundation was going to build in her community. News was spreading all over the province, and twenty-four girls of Shakila's age registered for class. "From that day forward we have learned new things from our teacher every day. Everyone thinks that this will change my future, and now when I go home and tell my parents what I learned, they are excited. My father says that once I complete my studies at our community school, he will send me to the government school to continue my education."

"One day I will finish my studies and become a teacher, and this way I will be able to serve my family and my community to be able to create a bright future for them. I am so thankful to everyone who brought this to reality for me."

Maurine's story
(Viva/CRANE, Uganda):
Maurine is a bright girl who became a mother at a young age. As a result, she had to leave school.

Her parents were unhappy with her and she was destined to a life at home looking after her baby and carrying out the day-to-day household tasks. The mentors at the local Creative Learning Centre (CLC) heard about Maurine's situation and decided to meet with her parents. Maurine's parents agreed that she could attend the CLC.

Maurine enjoyed the CLC and the advice she received from the teachers. They did not beat or judge her. She learnt new practical skills like making reusable sanitary pads but also developed further in academic subjects like maths, English and science. Gradually, she regained confidence and decided that after the CLC she would return to her studies. But, she worried that her parents would disagree.

The mentors continued building a relationship with Maurine's parents. The parents finally agreed to take care of Maurine's child while she attended school. Now her father encourages other parents to give their daughters a chance to complete their studies. Not only did Maurine's relationship with her parents improve but she also finished secondary school. Today, she is working as a loans officer in a small microfinance bank and paying for her daughter's school fees.

Molenta's story
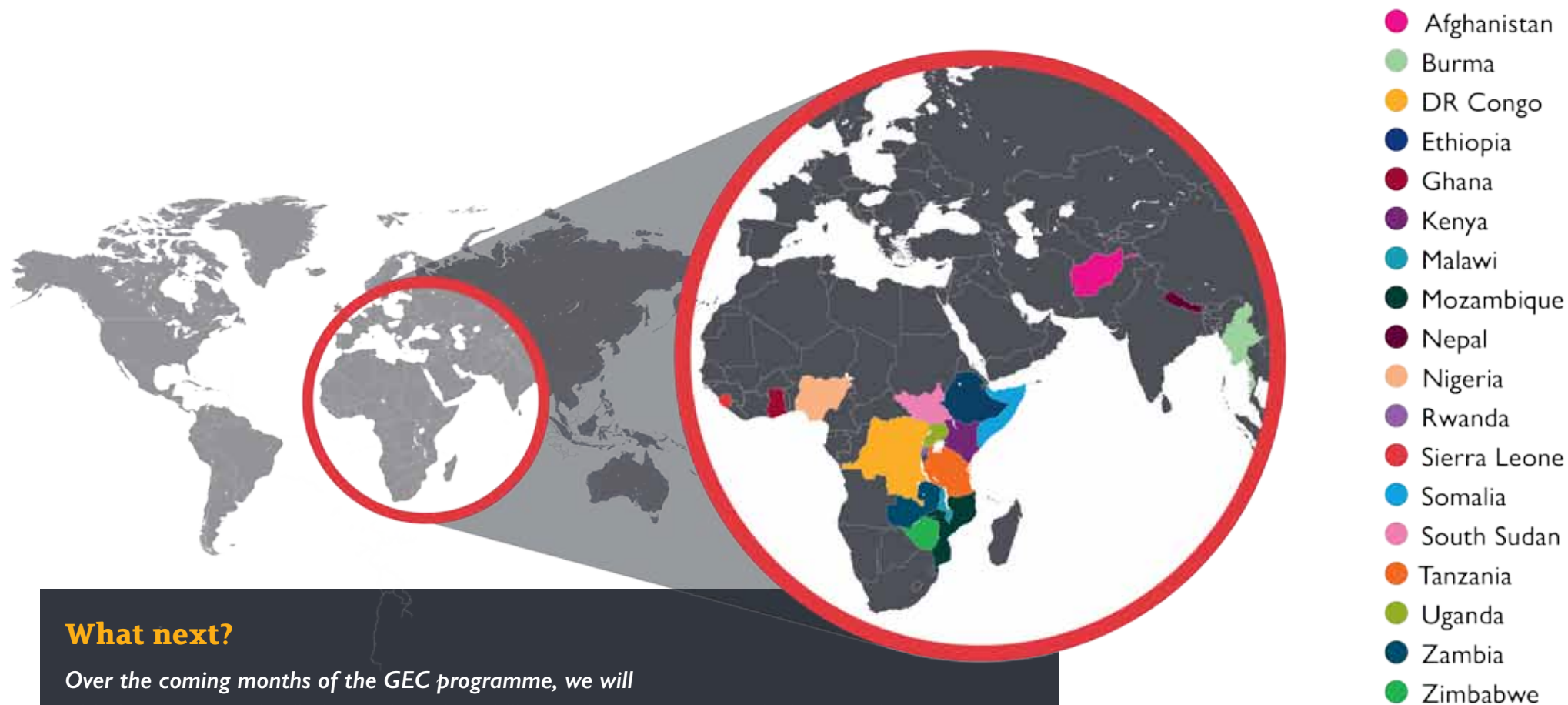### (Leonard Cheshire Disability, Kenya):
Molenta lives with her parents and five siblings in Nyalenda slum in Kenya.

She began lessons at a special primary school class for disabled children but was soon moved to the main class after teachers noticed she was a gifted student. However, her parents found it increasingly difficult to cope and struggled to meet the family's needs. Without her family's support, Molenta dropped out of school. Spending her days at home, her parents made it clear she was useless to them. Soon, she left home.

Molenta happened to talk to a teacher from a nearby school, who arranged a meeting with her mother and a GEC supported Community Resource Worker from Leonard Cheshire Disability. They talked to her about Molenta's disability, rights and how her family could support her. Finally, Molenta returned home and re-enrolled in school. Her current teacher praises Molenta as a cheerful and hard-working girl.

The teachers in Molenta's school have been trained on inclusive education and teaching strategies that ensure children with disabilities are able to learn in a mainstream classroom alongside their peers. After joining the school's parents' group, Molenta's relationship with her mother completely changed. She feels accepted and loves going to school.

Where does the GEC operate?

Legend:
- Afghanistan
- Burma
- DR Congo
- Ethiopia
- Ghana
- Kenya
- Malawi
- Mozambique
- Nepal
- Nigeria
- Rwanda
- Sierra Leone
- Somalia
- South Sudan
- Tanzania
- Uganda
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe

What next?

Over the coming months of the GEC programme, we will

- Undertake more detailed analysis of the midline findings to understand why some interventions appear to be working more successfully than others.
- Support projects in preparing for their endline evaluations and use the data to evaluate the impact of the GEC and fill the existing evidence gap on how to overcome the barriers that prevent disadvantaged girls from learning.
- Use what we have learnt about the effectiveness of interventions to assess the value for money of GEC projects.
- Continue to work with projects towards the GEC goal of long-term sustainability of outcomes.

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Challenge

UKaid
from the British people

More information on the Girls' Education Challenge can be found at www.dfid.gov.uk/gec