Thematic Review

School Governance

March 2018

GEC Thematic Reviews

This paper is one of a series of thematic reviews produced by the Fund Manager of the Girls' Education Challenge, an alliance led by PwC, working with organisations including FHI 360, Nathan Associates and Social Development Direct.

The full series of papers is listed below:

- Understanding and Addressing Educational Marginalisation
      Part 1: A new conceptual framework for educational marginalisation
- Understanding and Addressing Educational Marginalisation
      Part 2: Educational marginalisation in the GEC
- Economic Empowerment Interventions
- Community based Awareness, Attitudes and Behaviour
- Addressing School Violence
- Girls' Self-Esteem
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Executive summary

Much of the existing literature suggests that school governance interventions can result in statistically significant improvements in student outcomes such as attendance and learning. Evidence from the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) to date likewise offers some positive results. In many projects, interventions that involve working with school councils have not only been able to enhance attendance by directly targeting out of school girls and those at risk of dropping out, but also seem to have affected learning positively. Emerging evidence, however, indicates that not all projects are witnessing positive impacts from interventions associated with this theme yet.

This paper considers the question: When governance interventions work, what features allow them to do so? It highlights how governance interventions have helped to overcome barriers to girls' education. A range of governance interventions were implemented by projects who worked alongside school councils during the first phase of the GEC to overcome these barriers. These interventions included:

1. Enhanced responsiveness: the ability to recognise and adapt to varied needs of citizens, e.g. making schools girl-friendly and targeting the most marginalised.
2. Short-route of accountability: the ability of citizens and civil society to hold service providers to account directly, e.g. Monitoring absenteeism and Monitoring fund usage.
3. Empowerment: the ability to enable people, to exercise more control over their own development e.g. running community schools and giving women and girls decision making authority.

To explain the diversity in outcomes on GEC projects from these interventions, this paper points to four key design and implementation findings that emerged and are key to maximising the efficacy of school governance interventions:

1. Facilitation of structured forums for discussion results in real stakeholder engagement.
2. Training school council members helps to ensure that reforms yield desired outcomes.
3. Cognisance and understanding of local power dynamics allows for more effective implementation.
4. Integration into the broader education system enhances intervention sustainability.

How should practitioners and policymakers use these findings? The four design and implementation lessons have direct bearings on what future school governance interventions should look like. In addition, this paper also proposes three recommendations for policy makers and practitioners that are related to findings from GEC1:

1. Encourage projects to not only increase community participation, but also to continue supporting and training communities, especially on the outcomes we care about.
2. Consider outcomes beyond attendance and learning when assessing efficacy of governance interventions.
3. Encourage projects to think about capacity development for head teachers.

1. Introduction

This paper presents insights on school governance in the context of the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) programme portfolio. Of the 37 projects in the first phase of the GEC, 27 projects worked on school governance, mainly through school councils. School councils are defined here as a group of individuals who can affect school-level decision making. In some projects, school councils comprised of parents only; in others, they included teachers and other community members; and in others still, they included students as well. In line with these differences, projects themselves used a number of different terms for such councils, including School Management Committees (SMC), Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), School Development Committees (SDC), and Community Education Committees (CEC), in addition to the more specific Mothers' or Students' Groups. This paper does not set out to find a 'best model' but rather to identify the important common success factors of school governance interventions. The paper also looks at how interventions focused on head teachers contributed to enhancing school governance and management.

Background note

At a wider level, governance interventions related to school councils and to head teachers are set in contexts of education decentralisation, whereby decision-making authority over various education elements such as finance, infrastructure, pedagogy and/or teacher management is devolved from central authorities to schools, head teachers, communities, or other non-governmental providers. This type of decentralisation has been popular in the education sector. Indeed, in recent decades, most developing countries have experimented with the reform in some form or other (Channa 2014). Yet the nature of these reforms varies widely across countries based not only on what decision-making authority is devolved, but also on who that specific authority is devolved to. Given both the prevalence of, and diversity in, governance interventions across developing nations, evidence on this theme from the GEC is expected to contribute to the literature on the efficacy of such reforms, while at the same time informing the larger debate on how schools are best governed and managed.

What does the evidence on this theme tell us thus far? Much of the current literature suggests that school governance reforms can result in statistically significant improvements in student outcomes such as attendance and learning (see Coleman et al. 1981; Burde and Linden 2013; Channa and Faguet 2014). These improvements, according to both the literature and Theories of Change posited by various GEC projects, are generally brought about through three mechanisms in particular: greater responsiveness, accountability and empowerment. To date, discussions with project staff and analysis from recent project endline reports all point to growing evidence from the GEC portfolio that corroborates the positive findings in the literature on student outcomes – they indicate that for many projects, school governance interventions have been accompanied by higher attendance, as well as greater attainment in literacy and numeracy for girls.

This result, however, is not universal, and there are projects in which the relationship between governance interventions and outcomes is harder to discern. In addition, drawing firm causal links for this theme, as with other intervention themes in the GEC, is difficult as

projects tend to have multiple components, making disentangling the impact of governance interventions challenging.

2. Overview of the school governance discourse

Several authors show that giving schools and local councils more autonomy can increase test scores[1] and reduce absenteeism and dropout rates[2]. This evidence comes from countries as diverse as Kenya, Philippines, and Indonesia. On the other hand, evidence from a number of Latin American countries does not support this hypothesis and demonstrates the importance of remembering that results do not necessarily hold in all contexts[3]. As a result, most influential surveys of the empirical work in the sector have repeatedly reported mixed, and often contradictory findings[4].

One reason for this is that the quality of the empirical evidence is not always consistent. In spite of the positive conclusions regarding impact on learning outcomes, both Channa and Faguet (2012) and Carr-Hill et al. (2015) assert that while the quantity of high quality evidence in the sector is growing, it is still not only small but also limited in its geographic scope.

Besides the varying quality of evidence, two other factors may be responsible for the contradictory findings in the literature: the differing nature of governance interventions, and the context. In order to understand how the nature of the intervention could dictate impact, it is critical to understand the variety of roles and decisions that could be devolved to schools and local councils. The OECD suggests four categories within which decision-making can be devolved to schools and local councils (Winkler and Gerschberg 2000), which are displayed in figure 1 below. These include Organisation of Instruction, Planning and Structures, Personnel Management, and Resources. Even within these four categories, as shown, a variety of decisions exist, implying that authority over these decisions could be combined in multiple, unique ways to arrive at distinctive forms of interventions.

Figure 1 OECD decision making categories

Organisation of Instruction	Select school attended by student Set instruction time Choose textbooks Define curriculum content Determine teaching methods
Personnel Management	Hire and fire school director Recruit and hire teachers Set or augment teacher pay scale Assign teaching responsibilities Determine provision of in-service training
Planning and structures	Create or close a school Selection of programs offered in a school Definition of course content Set examinations to monitor school performance
Resources	Develop school improvement plan Allocate personnel budget Allocate non-personnel budget Allocate resources for in-service teacher training

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[1] Duflo et al. 2008; Galiani et al. 2008; Khattri et al. 2010; Pradhan et al. 2011
[2] Jimenez and Sawada 1999; Skoufias and Shapiro 2006; Blimpo and Evans 2011
[3] Gunnarson et al. 2009; Glewwe and Maiga 2011
[4] see Channa and Faguet 2012 for a review

The question then becomes which of these categories of decisions, when devolved, could have the largest impact on attendance and learning, the two outcomes with which the first phase of the GEC was primarily concerned. While the evidence is mixed, some have argued that giving authority to local stakeholders over personnel management and resources[5] could be the most effective route to improving student outcomes. Theoretically speaking, one could easily push these ideas further, and borrow from the literature on academies, charter schools, and private schools[6] to conclude that the more authority is decentralised, the better the result. In recent years, evidence[7] has emerged which has demonstrated that directly involving parents and other stakeholders in monitoring attendance and in discussing learning can yield statistically significant effects on student outcomes.

Even if governance interventions incorporate the relevant components that could affect attendance and learning, it is important to acknowledge that results may still vary as a consequence of context. A number of authors, for example, demonstrate that the development level of a nation matters (Hanushek et al. 2008; Carr-Hill et al. 2015) and that the time and experience with the reform affects the impact (Hess 1999; Borman et al. 2003; Bando 2010). Similarly, other scholars have suggested a myriad of other prerequisites for school governance reforms to be successful ranging from capacity building and training (see Di Gropello 2006; Duflo et al. 2008), community participation and oversight (see Jimenez and Sawada 1999; Faguet 2004) to overall literacy and economic development (e.g. Blimpo and Evans 2011; Loayza et al. 2011). Numerous case studies of governance reforms concur, and highlight that although the overall evidence does appear to be optimistic, different approaches to intervention design and implementation, as well as varying contexts can result in dramatically different student outcomes (see Barrera-Osorio et al. 2009).

Leading from the above discussion, the GEC evidence on this theme will aim to contribute to two areas in particular. First, it aims to provide evidence on the efficacy of governance interventions in particular contexts. Second and perhaps more importantly, it attempts to shed light on the design and implementation features, as well as other prerequisites, that may enhance the efficacy of such interventions.

3. School governance in the GEC

School governance interventions were quite common in the first phase of the GEC. Of the 37 GEC projects, 27 projects worked with school councils. The aims of the projects in doing so, however, were quite diverse. While poor school management did not emerge as a key barrier in the GEC baseline, most projects saw governance interventions as a successful channel for addressing other barriers. Of these other barriers, poor quality of schooling, safety and security concerns, negative attitudes towards girls' schooling, and lack of female aspiration and decision-making power were perhaps the most relevant for this theme. In

[5] see Pritchett and Pande 2006
[6] see for e.g. Coleman et al. 1981; Tooley et al. 2007; Andrabi et al. 2008; Abdulkadiroglu et al. 2009; Clark 2009; Thapa 2012
[7] authors such as Guryan (2016), Rogers and Fellows (2016), Andrabi et al. (2016) and Afridi et al. (2017)

addition, because the GEC also has three Community-Based Education (CBE) providers, which have set up community schools that operate primarily through a shura (female school councils) or school council primarily to enhance local access, the barrier related to distance to school, also became critical.

Figure 2, Thematic theory of change:
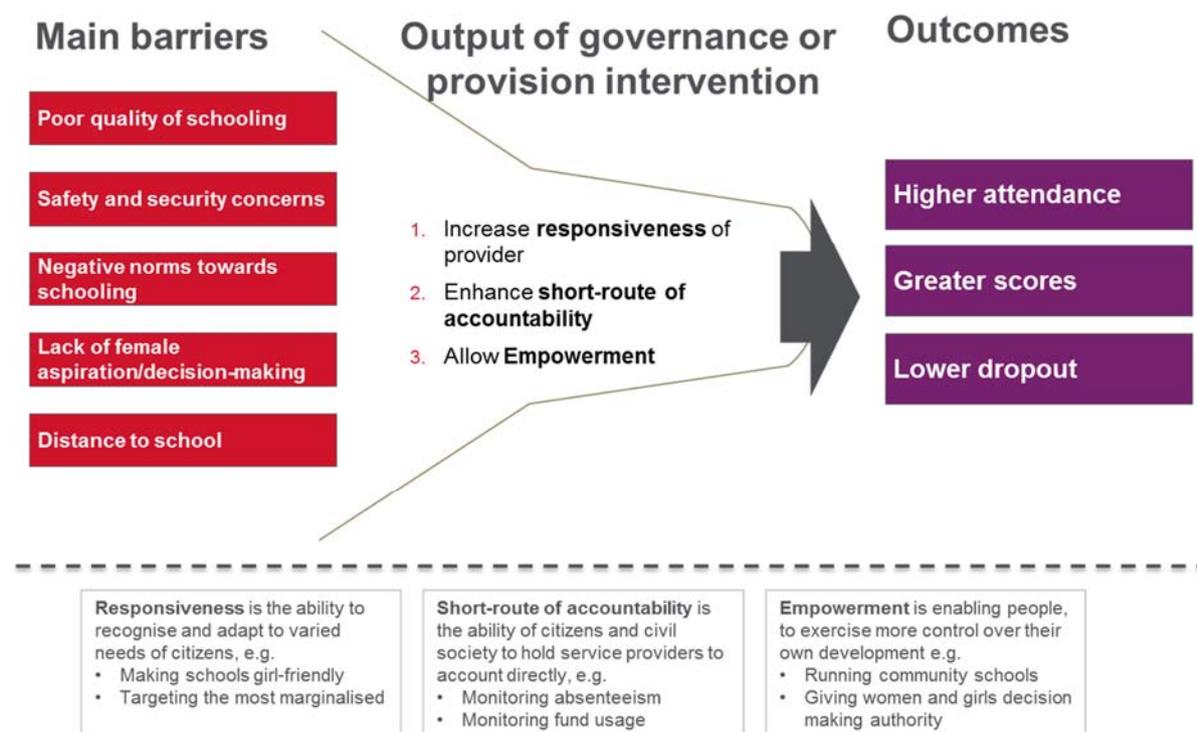
Theories of Change - How did governance interventions help overcome barriers?

In terms of intervention design, projects worked with school councils in many different ways. In general, though, forums were formed or meetings facilitated, councils received training and/or ongoing support to achieve some goals, and/or councils received grants or other monies to manage or allocate to activities or beneficiaries.

The intervening relationships that dictate how and why these interventions are meant to work are complicated, but the idea behind decentralising decision-making authority to school councils, other similar local structures, or indeed to communities and non-governmental providers rests on three core arguments. These three arguments, summarised in the figure above are put forward in the academic literature and are also widely reflected in a variety of GEC project documents:

1. First, advocates argue that taking decision-making closer to the people is likely to enhance responsiveness (see Faguet 2004). In other words, school councils are more likely than central or regional government authorities to know what the most urgent needs and priorities of their communities are, and, therefore, are likely to be

responsive to those needs. In practical terms, this could mean that, for example, school councils will be able to address poor quality education by implementing remedial classes for students lagging behind; or, for instance, by raising money to build more classrooms in overcrowded schools. Responsiveness to local needs can also help overcome the distance barrier by going even further and establishing schools in communities that lack convenient access.

- E.g. Education Development Trust (EDT) in Kenya trained school councils on gender sensitive school planning so that they could take the specific needs of girls into account and plan accordingly. Save the Children in Mozambique gave school councils a small budget to make infrastructural improvements they deemed necessary.

2. Second, the theory posits that giving decision-making to school councils or local school management is likely to increase accountability (see World Bank 2004). This is because not only are local councils and other decentralised management structures best placed to monitor teacher absenteeism, for example, due to their physical proximity, but also because those who make up these local structures are more likely to have a personal stake in the quality of local schooling. Greater accountability could also work to improve safety and security concerns – councils could for instance question school management about poor safety records, or take corrective action in instances where corporal punishment or gender-based violence are reported. Tackling this safety and security barrier through a governance intervention in turn could increase student attendance, and learning.

- E.g. Link Community Development in Ethiopia provided a forum in which student results were discussed. Parents and other key stakeholders held school management and teachers to account on performance on the basis of what they learned from these meetings.

3. Finally, across the GEC projects, a further argument made in favour of school councils is that it empowers communities to take responsibility for their education outcomes, and in particular mobilises them around the cause of girls' education. This mechanism can again help address all the barriers highlighted above, but is particularly useful for tackling negative attitudes towards schooling by engaging directly with community members. It is also useful in addressing the barriers around lack of female aspiration and empowerment, as involving women and girls in decision-making for the school through school councils, mothers' associations and student clubs serves to not only provide role models for young girls, but also to directly involve them in advocating for their needs. Ultimately, again the end outcome of tackling the barriers related to negative norms and low aspirations, is the same – improved attendance, and higher learning attainment.

- E.g. The shuras (female school councils) introduced in all three CBE projects in Afghanistan focused on the empowerment route. These projects explicitly trained shuras to see themselves as stakeholders of schools, and to mobilise communities to meaningfully engage in girls' education.

The three mechanism types outlined above are not mutually exclusive, and projects

designed interventions that tap into more than one mechanism. In both the Educate Girls End Poverty (EGEP) and Somali Girls Education Promotion Programme (SOMGEP) projects in Somalia, councils were trained to monitor, and thus provide accountability, for student absenteeism. In addition, they also worked through the empowerment route as they trained councils on raising resources from community members and Somali diaspora in order to pay for school teachers and infrastructure improvements.

4. Key findings

The findings presented in this section draw from midline and endline evaluation reports, project annual reports, webinars with the GEC community of practice, and discussions with project staff and beneficiaries to consider the impact of GEC governance interventions on attendance, learning, and gender equality.

The results suggest some positive links between governance interventions and improved learning and attendance outcomes, although a causal relationship cannot be proven. In general, findings favour councils charged explicitly with monitoring attendance and learning. Interestingly, in line with the literature, when positive changes on student outcomes do appear, it is possible to see how the three mechanisms of responsiveness, accountability and/or empowerment may have played a role.

Attendance

Given that many school councils are charged with the responsibility of monitoring attendance of students, it is no surprise that several projects reported positive evidence on this front, when they include interventions to strengthen school councils and their influence.

- A prime example of this is Relief International's EGEP project in Somalia where CECs worked with girls who had recently dropped out or those who were at risk of doing so. A CEC member of Waberi Primary school highlights the attendance problem and the council's solution, "…lack of parental follow up is the main reason of poor attendance. We are establishing relationships with parents and the school to do more follow up on this." The new forms of accountability created by such an arrangement often involved close monitoring of students with high absenteeism and door to door visits. This boosted attendance in EGEP schools. Moreover, these initiatives were supplemented by others such as early marriage awareness training and motivational talks. From midline to endline, attendance rates increased by about 4% to 5%, ending in the 84-88% range (see the thematic paper on Educational Marginalisation for further comment on this).

- In a project implemented by Link Community Development in Ethiopia, a Girls' Education Advisory Committee (GEAC) was tasked with holding weekly sessions with at-risk girls, focusing in particular on instances of child marriage and on students

assessed to have excessive household chores. According to one student, the GEAC "made girls aware of the value of education and encouraged them not to quit school." The project's endline indicates that attendance for project girls stood at 92%, and had improved significantly as compared to control group girls since baseline because of this tailored responsiveness to needs of at-risk girls. The report goes on to conclude that "advice and counselling of the GEAC was regarded as one the three most important interventions that influenced attendance."

- The PEAS project in Uganda did not witness statistically significant improvements in overall attendance against their control group, however they did report that through their councils, parents were increasingly monitoring not just student, but also teacher absenteeism. According to project staff, this increased accountability reduced absenteeism in both students and teachers in many cases. The PEAS endline in fact suggests that 96% of girls whose parents were contacted by the school over absenteeism now attend school more than 80% of the time.

- In the three CBE projects in Afghanistan, the school councils or shuras provided similar levels of accountability and responsiveness in addition to empowering communities to take ownership of student attendance. While none of these projects used control groups to compare their attendance statistics with, their data is impressive. Overall attendance figures for all three projects figured in the mid 90% range throughout the life of the project cycle, with the projects reporting that spaces created through the GEC were not enough to cater to local demand. In fact, depending on the location and project, differences in attendance as compared to government schools in the vicinity were almost 30 percentage points.

- Furthermore, qualitative research for all three CBE projects offers strong evidence of the effectiveness of "community champions" in mobilising families to allow girls to attend school. Often, the involvement of such community champions has been through selection onto school councils. Like their council counterparts in government schools, CBE shura members worked on not just getting girls into school, but also on getting them to stay there and attend regularly. According to the STAGES project, for example, school management councils have been trained to work with parents on their expectations of children during harvest and planting seasons. This has aided in allowing children to access greater instructional time than they generally would have during harvest and planting times. In addition, given the fragile context, school management councils in especially difficult to access or insecure areas played a key role in getting school supplies to communities and in monitoring classes to ensure that teachers were present and prepared. These roles further display the responsiveness and accountability mechanisms at work.

- Endline evidence indicates one other critical path through which school councils in the GEC may have affected attendance: through raising funds and spending it in ways that can address absenteeism and enrolment. The CECs in the EGEP project in Somalia for instance, directly tackled the poverty barrier. According to the project's quarterly report, the CEC of Darwish Primary School in Garowe, for example, provided financial support to students. A member of the CEC notes: "There are

hundreds of children in the town who are not enrolled in school. We are teaching 240 girls and boys with no fee. If parents have three children, we only charge for two children and teach one for free." Similar anecdotes can be found in the reports for the SOMGEP project also in Somalia. According to their quarterly report, one government school CEC lobbied for financial support from their diaspora community and was able to successfully use raised funds to construct eight new classrooms in their school. According to the project, this move increased student enrolment by 62% (from 260 to 423 students). In Afghanistan, estimates suggest that the monetary value of in-kind contributions of communities is significant, and has gone a long way in ensuring that children attending CBEs have an appropriate space to learn. Shuras often play a critical role in coordinating these in-kind contributions.

Not all projects which invested resources in governance related interventions were able to demonstrate a significant impact on attendance. In the Camfed project in Zambia, for example, the Fundación Escuela Nueva (FEN) democratic school governance model was implemented. Over 26,000 students received Safety Net Fund support through School Based Committees to attend school. By the endline, the attendance rate for marginalised girls who received support was 1 percentage point above the attendance rate of those students who did not; this was not statistically significant. Likewise in the holistic IGATE project in Zimbabwe, the project was unable to demonstrate a statistically significant impact on attendance.

Case Study 1: A strong shura can pave the way to success in girls' education, STAGES project in Afghanistan

Dahan-e-Tagaghal is seven kilometres from the nearest government school, therefore, many parents were reluctant to send their children to the school. To address this, STAGES established a community-based primary school, and also offered accelerated learning classes for older girls who hadn't been able to attend school. In the beginning, project staff focused on mobilising the community to raise their awareness about the importance of education in Islam. An important part of this process was recruiting community leaders to participate in the school management committee. They were then trained with the knowledge and skills they needed to champion education in their community.

School management committee members played a critical role in the success of community-based education. They were responsible for identifying a place where classes can be held – one with enough space and light, access to clean drinking water and sanitation and hygiene facilities. Because communities are expected to provide these learning spaces, school management committee members had to persuade families to donate a room for the life of the project. The management committee had to identify a suitable teacher who was accepted by the community to monitor classes and student attendance.

The school management committee in Dahan-e-Tagaghal excelled at all these tasks. Committee members visited the schools and accelerated learning classes each week to observe teaching and provide feedback for teachers. They also met with the parents of absent students and encouraged them to prioritise school attendance which contributed to high attendance rates. They conducted meetings with the parents of girls participating in accelerated learning classes to convince them to support their daughters' attendance. Due to the excellent work of this management committee, the Dahan-e-Tagaghal classes are very active and students' maths and language skills are improving quickly.

The Dahan-e-Tagaghal management committee also helped other committees. STAGES arranged for other committees to visit Dahan-e-Tagaghal and learn from their experience. The Dahan-e-Tagaghal school management committee members say that they work hard to support education because, "…this class is in our own village and our daughters don't have to walk long distances – that's why we're so committed."

Source: Extract from GEC Case Studies Booklet, p. 11

Learning

In a number of projects, school councils were charged with and trained for the responsibility of directly monitoring student progress, or with stressing the importance of learning to stakeholders. In these projects with more direct links between school governance and children's learning, there is some interesting evidence:

- Perhaps the most prominent example of directly engaging parents in learning can be seen in Link Community Development's project in Ethiopia. Link implemented

School Performance Appraisal Meetings, in which the learning progress of students was explicitly discussed. One parent commented:

> *"As a parent, I and other parents had never received a call from school to discuss our daughters' grades or matters in relation to them apart from some instances in which they were required to bring a parent to school to confer matters of default on their part. These days, we are given a chance to extensively discuss with the school..."*

The project saw a statistically significant improvement in both literacy and numeracy from baseline to endline compared to the control group, although it should be noted that the intervention had multiple components in addition to this element.

- Qualitative data from the endlines of projects implemented by STAGES, BRAC, and CFA in Afghanistan also indicated that improved learning in CBE classes may be related to the key role given to shuras (councils). The three projects all exceeded their literacy and numeracy results at endline, with their CBE students performing better than students in government schools. While none of these projects have control groups, each endline explicitly attributed their strong learning results in part to the successful performance of shuras. Shuras were charged with not only finding space for schools and identifying teachers, but also with monitoring attendance and, critically, classes. Shuras anecdotally reported having approached students to inspire them to study harder, ensured teacher timeliness, and created a sense of commitment to education in the communities that they operate in - all factors that have likely affected student learning positively. Indeed, there is overwhelming evidence that increased engagement with community members has resulted in more positive attitudes towards schooling. These positive attitudes may be contributing to better test scores for example by raising aspirations for children, increasing the emphasis on school work, and through a reduction in girls' household chores.

- In the SOMGEP project, which displayed some positive results for literacy but not for numeracy, qualitative data indicates that some school councils are reinforcing the quality of education. A school council member from Somaliland elaborates, highlighting both the accountability and responsiveness mechanisms: "Teachers who are not good are replaced. The girl who can't learn, is returned to a lower level. Lessons are also explained to her, and she is asked about her concerns, complaints." The Discovery project in Ghana, Nigeria, and Kenya reported instances of councils providing blackboards and improved seating for schools, intended to assist in the learning process. The use of both solutions demonstrates that handing down responsibility to those closest to the education process can enhance responsiveness in decision-making related to learning. Along a slightly different vein, in the EGEP project from Somalia, school councils helped identify students for their accelerated learning intervention. While the overall project did not achieve its learning targets, the accelerated learning initiative itself had good outcomes in that those students selected caught up and achieved the project target levels for literacy and numeracy.

- Likewise, while the PEAS project in Uganda did not demonstrate statistically significant progress in learning, independent research undertaken for the project strongly demonstrates the critical role played by school management in contributing to learning. The report (Ark 2016) suggests that schools in the PEAS network scored significantly higher than all other public and private schools in Uganda on school management metrics as defined by the World Management Survey's education instrument. According to this report (Ark 2016: p.1), PEAS schools "are characterised by on-going training for school leaders, consistent use of data to set school improvement plans, and strong accountability…" Interestingly, this improved management is "correlated with better learning outcomes, both in terms of overall attainment and test score growth". See also case study below.

Case Study 2: Independent research on PEAS project shows key role of school management

Purpose of research: To understand role of school management in driving student attainment in Uganda

Method: A total of 200 public and private secondary schools across Uganda participated in the study. School leaders were surveyed on the phone and scored across four broad school management themes including operations, monitoring, target setting and people management using an established management instrument. Answers were combined into an index and analysed against test scores for 14,000 students across the schools.

Results: On average, schools with higher management scores had higher student scores, after controlling for other factors. Based on the statistical analysis, target setting appeared to be the most important area of school management for performance. In this instance, target setting referred to the goals and aspirations around improving schools and student performance as set by head teachers and teachers. Thus, school leadership that took the most structured approach to planning for success also had students who performed the best.

PEAS schools scored one whole point above the national average on the management score, and 2 marks better than average on the student performance measure. This difference in student performance is exactly what would be predicted based on the higher quality of management in PEAS schools.

Source: Preliminary Analysis from Ark (2016)

It should be noted that councils do not need to have been tasked with engaging with learning to affect it positively. There are two indirect ways in which school governance interventions could work instead. First, they could enhance attendance; while there does not exist an automatic causal link between attendance and learning, higher attendance would imply that students have exposure to greater instructional time and could learn more (although this is dependent upon other factors such as quality of teaching). Second, governance

interventions could give councils the space to be responsive to a specific need that is limiting learning. If learning is, for instance, affected negatively by inadequate infrastructure in schools or a lack of toilets, then decisions made by school councils to address these problems may lead to greater learning. As an example, we see the latter kind of effort in Camfed Tanzania, which has invested in school infrastructure.

There were many other projects in which relationships between leadership and governance activities, and learning outcomes, were difficult to discern. There was some evidence for instance that in some cases, councils were spending money primarily on infrastructure such as fences, which has proven harder to directly link to learning theoretically or empirically. Furthermore, there was also some evidence that schools and teachers did not necessarily welcome engagement and participation of parents, claiming that parents were not equipped to effectively facilitate student learning.

Gender Equality

Unlike other governance interventions found in developed and developing countries which tend to cater to boys and girls equally, a unique design feature of many GEC governance interventions is that they have aspired to specifically cater to the barriers related to girls' education. Thus, it is interesting to consider how these interventions fared in contributing to gender equality.

It is apparent that several of the GEC governance interventions had some success in improving attendance for girls in comparison to the attendance of boys, thereby contributing to gender equality. The shuras in Afghanistan, for example, have gone a long way in ensuring more girls enrol in and attend school. Link's intervention had the same positive effect in preventing dropout of at-risk girls in Ethiopia. These committees have often been involved in reporting abduction cases to law enforcement, and in solving sexual harassment and violence cases between boys and girls in schools.

In contrast, there is evidence that other projects also tackled other gender-related barriers, but have yet to see a direct impact of their governance interventions on girls' attendance and learning. The PEAS Uganda and the SOMGEP project in Somalia are two good examples of projects that did not perform as expected on outcomes, but provide evidence that they contributed to the leadership potential of girls through their governance interventions nonetheless. PEAS schools implemented a Girls' Policy, encouraging girls to input into decision-making. Their endline indicates that among the girls who expressed their views, 92% reported that their views were taken up by the school management. Likewise, SOMGEP children's participation in councils was encouraged. According to their midline, some 70% of girls' clubs in fact met with the CEC on a regular basis. By involving student leaders in council meetings and education campaigns, they on one hand ensure that students' views were incorporated into school improvement plans, and on the other, also provided students with an opportunity to actively advocate for girls' education in their villages. In both cases, these interventions are likely to have contributed positively to the confidence and aspirations of girls.

Other projects aspired to affect the confidence of women and girls in other ways. Shuras in the STAGES project, for example, had a target around participation of women in councils. Although results were mixed on this front, there was some evidence at the endline that women were increasing meaningful participation and had greater power over decision-making, an important factor in shifting gender power relations in institutions. A female shura member noted, "Yes, our activity has increased compared to last year. And I think this is because we are more experienced and our self-confidence has increased compared to past years. All these cause that we take more part in school shura decisions and they consider our decisions more." The SDC in the IGATE project, in contrast, focused on making school environments more girl friendly, and did so by focusing on WASH-type interventions to enhance girls' confidence and self-esteem. At endline, there was no discernible impact on learning, but multiple respondents reported the positive impact of these interventions on girls' confidence. See also the Thematic Paper on Self-Esteem and Case Study Box 4.

5. Key lessons

The above section paints a somewhat optimistic picture of the impact of governance-related interventions, with many, although not all, having demonstrable positive effects. In addition, it should be noted that several endline reports make almost no reference to governance interventions. One reason for this may be that governance is not considered a core intervention area by these projects; another may be that disentangling the effects of governance from other related interventions has proven difficult for external evaluators. However, the Evaluation Manager noted that inconclusive evidence on school governance interventions does not necessarily indicate that interventions have been ineffective or unsuccessful (Coffey, 2017).

This unevenness in both impact and in reporting mirrors larger trends in the literature and begs the question: **when governance interventions work, what features allow them to do so?** To that end, this section uses qualitative analysis from midline and endline reports, as well as discussions with key informants, to propose four key lessons on the design and implementation features that enable school management interventions to be effective. All four lessons not only affirm findings in the existing literature, but also build on them by providing even more specificity around what is needed for greater efficacy.

Lesson one: Facilitation of structured forums for discussion results in effective stakeholder engagement

On design and implementation, one of the emerging lessons appears to be that it is the **provision of structured forums for information sharing** that is effective in engaging local stakeholders. These forums include both school councils and other formats such as community meetings that attempt to involve local stakeholders in school governance decisions on girls' education.

- The IGATE Zimbabwe project, for example, supported school councils in facilitating

regular structured meetings with the wider community. By providing such standard forums where school performance and challenges can be discussed, the project was able to both mobilise communities and benefit from stakeholder engagement in school planning and subsequent monitoring.

- The Link Community Development project in Ethiopia reports similar engagement with local stakeholders through their School Performance Appraisal Meetings model (SPAM). These meetings, like IGATE's, mobilised communities and created a new norm of sharing and discussing school performance by stakeholders in the community. At endline, evidence indicates that parental participation within schools increased progressively during the project and is now sizeable: 68% attended meetings as compared to 43% of the control group, 73% knew channels to voice their opinions as compared to 22% of the control group, and 60% actively participated in school activities as compared to 27% of the control group.

- The Discovery project corroborated this learning, noting that the formation of school councils empowered communities by giving them a voice in decision-making that was previously lacking. This empowerment is also evident in the shuras implemented in the community-based education models in the GEC Afghanistan projects. The formation of shuras, according to endline reports, has not only allowed for effective implementation of the community schools, but in many cases, also helped address negative norms around girls' schooling. In most cases, parents' views of school councils also improved. The endline of the Mercy Corps project from Nepal reports that there has been a 58% increase from baseline in the number of parents who believe that school councils are willing to make a positive change in schools.

It is important to acknowledge that much depends on the quality of implementation of this aspect. In the BRAC Afghanistan project for instance, throughout the project life cycle there have been some reports of unevenness in implementation of mothers' groups by geography, as well as varied frequency of group meetings due largely to security concerns. The ENGINE project in Nigeria works with 101 School Based Management Committees (SBMCs) of which many were found to be inactive at initial assessment. To address this, where committees were not active, ENGINE encouraged meetings and documentation of activities. According to the project, active SBMCs had an impact on attendance rates by maintaining a school environment that is supportive of girls' learning and sanitation needs. Nonetheless, this unevenness does imply that some communities may be unable to tap into the benefits this particular design feature provides.

Lesson two: Contextualised and focused training is important to ensure that governance reforms yield desired outcomes

From the evidence thus far, it appears to be clear that training of councils is a critical component of effective design and implementation as it enhances their capacity. Capacity is defined here as "the ability of people, institutions and societies to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives" (UNDP 2002). To that end, most projects have made progress at least in implementing some training. Over 19,000 school council members have been trained in Afghanistan alone, while some 4,000 members have been trained in Zimbabwe through the GEC. It is important to reiterate here that training of

councils is a key design feature in interventions supported by the GEC and is grounded in the literature, which suggests that capacity building enhances the efficacy of governance interventions.

Successful training in the portfolio, according to emerging evidence, has had two characteristics: it has been **customised to the local context**, and has **focused on building planning skills**. The STAGES Afghanistan project is a good example of the former. Not only did their school council training train women from conservative societies at home rather than in a school or other public place, but their training content and activities are also adapted to accommodate the lower literacy levels of female council members. In addition, in areas where there are periodic or persistent security challenges, training was further adapted to be delivered via mobile phone. The project implemented by CARE Somalia is a solid example of developing planning skills. Many projects provide specific training on designing school improvement plans, and evidence from CARE's midline evaluation went a step further to demonstrate indicative support for the idea that students in schools where councils have an established plan score higher on learning tests.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that not building adequate capacity in school councils can have challenging consequences. In one GEC project, gaps in the manner of training provided to councils became apparent. The national government where this project operated had a stringent financial management policy that councils had to adhere to, which included the production of annual financial statements by school councils and annual financial audits conducted by district inspectors. At both the design and implementation phase the project in the country was unaware of this policy. As a result, school councils were unable to deliver on this requirement adequately.

In a slightly different vein, two in-depth studies on shuras from the STAGES Afghanistan project found contradictory evidence on the efficacy of their shura training. One study noted that participants were unable to recall or apply material from their training sessions, while the other found the opposite. This contradiction may possibly be the result of unevenness in implementation, the quality of the delivery of training, or even the utility of the training. In the IRC DRC project, council members received training in management of scholarship funds, community sensitising, selection of beneficiaries, gender issues, and school improvement plans. According to their midline report, while many respondents noted that training sessions were "very effective", there were suggestions that a number of council members had little information or understanding of project activities because of illiteracy.

Lesson three: Cognisance of local power dynamics allows for more effective implementation

Another key learning about design and implementation emerging from the portfolio is that when working with school councils and community members at large, it is important to be cognisant of local power dynamics and to design interventions accordingly. In cases where this is ignored it is possible, as noted in an earlier section, that elite individuals or groups may "capture" decision-making power and resources, thereby improving outcomes only for a select few.

Often these unequal dynamics may be related to gender. Illustrative of this is the EGEP Somalia project, which reports that power dynamics tend to be difficult in mixed gender committees as men are often reluctant to operate under the leadership of women or even in joint committees with women. To address such challenges related to local dynamics, Camfed Tanzania employed a sophisticated system in which their facilitators were trained beforehand to identify and address unequal power relations on councils. One approach they used to address this issue was to break larger groups into smaller ones where people felt more comfortable voicing their opinions.

Link Ethiopia used simulation games for capacity building of their councils. These games helped participants understand the decision-making process, and gender issues were embedded in these simulations. In some instances, ensuring broad-based participation called for segregation rather than assimilation. An example of this was seen in the STAGES Afghanistan project which established separate male and female school management councils in some areas where a mixed gender council was not considered acceptable. In addition, in these more traditional areas, women were trained separately from men.

Such approaches may not always work in all contexts, and a deeper social norm change may be the only way to ensure that all voices are heard.

Lesson four: Integration into the broader education system enhances intervention sustainability

An emerging and perhaps unsurprising lesson on sustainability of school governance reforms is that it is important that reforms fit in well with the broader education system. This theme, it should be clarified, includes interventions that attempt to facilitate wider education system reforms implemented by governments such as strengthening capacity of head teachers or establishing legally mandated school councils. At the same time, it also includes interventions that establish governing bodies at the local level outside of the standard education system, generally with the aim of extending participation in school decision-making to different stakeholder groups such as mothers or students.

In both cases, sustainability is likely to be enhanced if on one hand, there is some level of integration with the national education system, and on the other, if there is a basic level of engagement with local officials and authorities. To that end, Save the Children Mozambique, for example, worked with the government to align its work with new national education standards. Meanwhile, PEAS Uganda recognised the importance of the broader framework under which they operate; yet because they operate low cost private schools, their alignment with the Government's school governance structure remains unclear.

6. Considerations for practitioners and policy makers

In summary, the evidence on the effectiveness of school governance interventions in influencing attendance and learning from the first phase of the GEC is mixed. From a policy perspective, this paper presents some evidence offering causes for optimism for this type of intervention, while highlighting just how important it is that interventions are designed and implemented well.

Beyond the four design and implementation lessons offered in this paper, which have direct policy implications, this paper also offers three considerations for policy makers. These considerations have the ability to improve the impact of governance interventions in the next phase of the GEC and other programmes and to enhance our understanding of how different types of governance interventions affect a variety of important education outcomes.

1. **It is important to encourage appropriate community participation in education projects, and to continue supporting and training communities throughout the project**

In general, GEC endline evaluations show that most projects managed to engage parents and community members above and beyond the level of engagement seen in control groups. Even in the projects which lacked control groups such as in Afghanistan and Somalia, the standalone participation of stakeholders was impressive. Across the board, the endline evidence pointed to greater inputs from community members, and increased participation by parents, and especially women. These are important first steps for the project communities.

Yet, in many environments cases this increased engagement did not have a noticeable effect on attendance or learning. One reason for this may be related to how Theories of Change were designed - both the existing literature and evidence from the GEC supports the idea that councils which focused on direct interventions and clear roles such as "monitoring learning" may have had a greater impact on attendance and learning than those with indirect interventions such as, for example, "creating more gender-friendly". Indeed, IGATE summarises this point nicely when contending that, "A key finding, then, is that working around the edges to influence learning – from 'without' rather than from 'within' the classroom – limits numeracy and literacy achievements significantly." (Please see the thematic paper on Teaching, Learning and Assessment for more detailed comments on this)

In some cases, lack of impact or increased participation was because parents and council members were simply unaware of how they could affect learning. On one hand, this implies that council support and training must continue into the next phase of GEC. On the other, it also indicates that governance interventions, and the nature of training and support needs to be much more targeted if it is to impact learning outcomes.

Therefore, awareness raising and sensitisation is an important first step of community engagement if participation is to be meaningful and useful in enhancing the quality of schooling. However this must then be followed up by the use of direct interventions, with clear roles for the councils, and appropriate support and training to enable this to be carried out effectively.

2. Consider outcomes beyond attendance and learning when assessing efficacy of governance interventions

Although learning and attendance outcomes are a key priority in the GEC, when assessing the impacts of governance reforms it may be worthwhile to look beyond these outcomes. This may provide a better understanding of what governance interventions achieved and what they did not.

Several projects designed governance interventions with other goals in mind, in addition to improved attendance and learning targets, or as an intermediary step towards these. Many, for instance, wanted to tackle barriers for girls such as negative norms around girls' schooling, low aspirations, and unsafe, unclean learning environments. There is some evidence that these projects were successful in addressing these barriers, although in the short timescales of the programme, these did not lead to a measurable impact on learning or attendance. However, it is possible that over time, the impact of these interventions will eventually be seen in the areas of attendance and learning in a statistically significant way. Therefore, mixed findings on attendance and learning outcomes should not necessarily be construed as a disappointing result.

A set of intermediate outcomes have been added to project logframes for the next phase of the GEC, to reflect the importance of these steps on the way to achieving learning outcomes.

Finally, school councils often provide a critical link to sustainability. Therefore, attitudinal changes towards girls' education programming, norms of greater parental participation, and the belief that community stakeholders can affect education are important outcomes in order to extend the impacts of the project beyond its implementation.

3. Encourage projects to think about capacity development for head teachers

The importance of leadership in setting the culture, vision and expectations for outcomes for children and in contributing to school effectiveness and improvement is widely recognised in the global north. The importance of head teachers in enhancing the quality of school management is widely supported in existing research. GEC projects have been encouraged to include interventions involving head teachers, both in terms of governance and also to reinforce and embed teacher training. Head teachers as a stakeholder group sometimes fall between activities for teachers and activities for school councils - for coherence it is important to consider them in both.

It is likely that in the future, GEC projects will continue to work with councils and forums to

improve school governance. Ensuring strong design features, and improving the quality of implementation based on learning from the phase, will enhance the ability of these and other projects to contribute positively to education outcomes.

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