



### Background

Social and emotional learning (SEL) as an approach in education started in the early 1990s, when it was identified that children, young people and schools were inundated with lessons under the heading of 'social education' which were unrelated, ineffective, uncoordinated and not covered in the academic curriculum.<sup>1</sup> These included drug prevention, moral education, civic education and sex and relationships education. Since then, SEL has emerged and gained momentum as an approach which helps address the needs of young people, underpinning academic performance and achievement and positive outcomes for students. More recently it is suggested that the use of SEL in, but not limited to, education might be instrumental in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>2</sup> Recognised as an approach which can be particularly helpful for children who have experienced trauma, or who are particularly vulnerable, SEL has been adopted in international education, development and humanitarian programmes.

During the COVID-19 crisis, Link strengthened the focus on SEL across projects in Ethiopia and Malawi, and will continue to include it as an intervention which builds resilience when emergencies occur. In Uganda, Link will consider building a SEL component into work with refugee children both in camps and in host communities.

In a tracer study conducted by the Leave No Girl Behind GEC project, TEAM Girl Malawi, 82% of respondents provided examples of how sessions to build confidence and self-esteem helped in their lives:<sup>3</sup>

**"I am now knowledgeable about human rights and how to and where to report abuses."**

**"I am now confident of demanding my rights. If anyone abuses me verbally, I am able to report that to trusted adults."**

### Overall Approach

Link Education International (Link) incorporates social and emotional learning (SEL) approaches in its work with government, schools and civil society partners across all contexts in which it works. The approach is based on a large body of evidence highlighting

<sup>1</sup> <https://casel.org/history/> downloaded on 21/05/21

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/unlocking-your-emotions-achieve-sdgs-emotional-intelligence> downloaded on 21/05/21

<sup>3</sup> Tracer Study Round 2, December 2020

that SEL approaches can impact positively on children’s wellbeing, resilience, learning, and school attendance through improved self-esteem, self-awareness and confidence for learning. It contributes to Link’s overall approach to supporting the inclusion of all children in education.

Link implements SEL approaches both as a targeted intervention for children who need extra support, and as an approach that cuts across all activities. As a cross-cutting intervention, SEL is embedded in training and follow-up for teachers, school leaders and supervisors, and community-school structures, as well as in school performance review and planning. It involves sharing information on the benefits of an approach that encourages children and develops their confidence. It also identifies actions that different education stakeholders can take according to their specific role in supporting education (e.g. head teacher, teacher, PTA member, school supervisor, mother-group member).

Social and emotional learning approaches complement Link’s strategic goals and theory of change, including the crosscutting themes of gender, inclusion and safeguarding. They are adapted for the different country contexts in which Link operates.

**SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.<sup>4</sup>**

The global COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent research into its impact on learners in Link-supported projects<sup>5</sup> has further emphasised the value of social and emotional learning for children and young people, particularly the most vulnerable. As a result, Link is further committing to strengthening SEL approaches which build resilience and preparedness for such crises should they occur again and put at risk children’s education.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has brought critical attention to the value and importance of social and emotional learning (SEL) and Soft Skills, in coping with crisis.<sup>6</sup>**

## Experience

### MALAWI

The TEAM Girl Malawi project (Transformational Empowerment for Adolescent Marginalised Girls in Malawi) aims to significantly improve learning outcomes for 6,000 highly marginalised adolescent girls and 1,200 boys in three districts in Malawi, enabling them to transition to education, training or employment for improved learning and life



<sup>4</sup> <https://casel.org/what-is-sel/> downloaded on 21/05/21

<sup>5</sup> STAGES COVID-19 Rapid Assessment Report (2020)

<sup>6</sup> USAID (2020) BEST PRACTICES ON EFFECTIVE SEL/SOFT SKILLS INTERVENTIONS IN DISTANCE LEARNING

chances. The students face multiple, intersecting barriers to learning including disability, child marriage, motherhood, poverty, and harmful gender norms.

Link Malawi's Complementary Basic Education (CBE) model meets the needs of vulnerable young people through a modified curriculum focused on literacy, numeracy and lifeskills using gender inclusive practices. The project includes a targeted SEL component delivered through clubs by a partner organisation. *Nzotheka Clubs* provide learning on comprehensive sex education, self-awareness, self-confidence, wellbeing, and resilience. The methodology is highly participatory with fun activities that enhance learning using music and dance.

A rapid needs assessment in response to COVID-19 emphasised the importance of mainstreaming SEL throughout learning activities. 21% of learners reported feeling more anxious,<sup>7</sup> so in addition to the academic work, CBE facilitators covered COVID-19 prevention and emotional resilience activities with their students. This adapted delivery supported learners' return to class, improved teacher-learner relationships and embedded the importance of wellbeing for better learning outcomes. 87% of respondents in a tracer study (December 2020)<sup>8</sup> stated that SEL sessions had helped their self-confidence and self-esteem. New programming in Malawi uses Sport for Change methodologies and enhances SEL for those most at risk via netball.

## ETHIOPIA



In Ethiopia, Link's Girls' Education Challenge Transition (GEC-T) project 'STAGES',<sup>9</sup> directly supports 61,345 girls to access better quality education and make the transition from primary to secondary school. The girls are all defined as marginalised, living in rural, poor districts of the Southern Nations and Nationalities Peoples Region (SNNPR). Girls in Ethiopia face many similar barriers to education as girls in Malawi, which contribute to poor literacy and numeracy outcomes, drop-out from school altogether, and poor transition from one cycle of education to the next, particularly from primary to secondary school. Link's first Girls' Education Challenge project in the same local government areas highlighted that low levels of confidence and self-esteem contributed to limiting their life-chances. A lack of female role-models, limited access to learning which considers social and emotional development, and to lifeskills such as financial literacy further impact on girls' transition through school and into the world of work. Additionally, high levels of migration from rural to urban areas as well as trafficking of women and girls present grave risks and impact on girls' educational opportunity.

In the GEC-T STAGES project, targeted SEL approaches include capacity development of schools and communities to provide direct support to girls. This might be through counselling, or through implementing weekly workshops with young people which aim to

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<sup>7</sup> TEAM Girl Malawi Rapid Assessment Report, June 2020

<sup>8</sup> Tracer Study Round 2, December 2020e

<sup>9</sup> Supporting the Transition of Adolescent Girls through Enhancing Systems

develop their self and social-awareness, decision-making, relationship skills, self-management, problem-solving, self-esteem and confidence.

As a cross-cutting theme, SEL is mainstreamed to trainings with teachers on methodology, to school supervisors and leaders who monitor and support teachers, and to school community bodies such as Parent Teacher Associations and School Improvement Committees which support and hold schools accountable. Mainstreaming a SEL approach into teacher training materials and delivery, also means incorporating it into the monitoring instruments, and mentoring and coaching materials that are used during school visits by school supervisors and inspectors. In this way, the benefits of SEL can be sustained beyond the project, and embedded within the education system.

An external midline evaluation of Link’s SEL approach showed an increase in Grade nine girls’ SEL score of over 23% from baseline to midline. One Grade nine girl said **“The teachers come to class on time, let me read books in the library, and advise us in issues related to life and learning. They do not permit us to stay back from our peers.”** With regards to the impact on teachers, a government official stated, **“Since teachers started implementing active learning methodology in the past two years, female students’ academic achievement has improved, and girls’ self-confidence and self-awareness have developed.”**

Embedding SEL approaches within learners’ classroom and extra-curricular experiences and across teacher and leadership training contribute to better overall learner outcomes.



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<sup>10</sup> Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). (2020). What is SEL?. Retrieved from: <https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>