



Background

Every girl has the right to education.¹ A quality, relevant education gives girls the opportunity to reach their full potential and lead the lives they choose.

Girls' education is transformative for girls themselves, their communities, and society as a whole:

- If every girl received 12 years of free, safe and quality education, women's lifetime earnings could increase by \$15 trillion to \$30 trillion globally.²
- Each additional year of secondary education for girls is associated with an average 6% reduction in the risk of child marriage and pregnancy before the age of 18.³
- For every additional year of girls' schooling on average, a country's level of climate resilience is improved.⁴

Global Commitments

Sustainable Development Goal 4 states that by 2030, "all girls and boys, women and men, should have equal opportunity to enjoy education of high quality, achieve at equal levels and enjoy equal benefits from education."

"We recognise the importance of gender equality in achieving the right to education for all. We are therefore committed to supporting gender sensitive policies, planning and learning environments; mainstreaming gender issues in teacher training and curricula; and eliminating gender-based discrimination and violence in schools."

-Incheon Declaration for Education 2030

¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); Convention Against Discrimination in Education (1960); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979); African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1986); Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs (1990); The Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All (2000); Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006); UN General Assembly Resolution on the Right to Education in Emergency Situations (2010)

² Wodon, Q., C. Montenegro, H. Nguyen, and A. Onagoruwa, (2018) Missed Opportunities: The High Cost of Not Educating Girls. The Cost of Not Educating Girls Notes Series. Washington, DC: The World Bank

³ UNESCO (2011) Education Counts. EFA Global Monitoring Report. Paris: UNESCO

⁴ Kwauku, C. and Braga, A. (2017) Three platforms for girls' education in climate strategies. Brooke Shearer Series, number 6. Washington DC: Brookings Institution

While such commitments are strong and despite steps having been taken **globally** to achieve these commitments, 129 million girls around the world are still out of school.⁵ The barriers they face include social norms and expectations around early marriage, pregnancy, and domestic roles; lack of sanitation facilities and unsafe environments at school and on the journey to school; the pressures of family poverty which mean girls are often involved in child labour or domestic chores and childcare, while boys' education takes priority; and low academic expectations. Girls are also more adversely affected by education disruption during emergencies, with lasting consequences.

Once girls are in school, they face further challenges. Girls are more likely to drop out early, have poor attendance, have low self-esteem, and have lower learning outcomes than boys. Girls are also at risk of gender-based violence and discrimination in their communities and at school, which further undermines their learning.

The barriers to attendance, participation, and learning are compounded for girls with disabilities and those from minority ethnic and language backgrounds. As a result of these challenges, only 2% of marginalised girls complete upper secondary school.⁶

A [survey carried out by Save the Children](#) in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Malawi, Nigeria, Somalia, and Uganda, shows that, "18 months into the COVID-19 pandemic, up to 1 in 5 of the most vulnerable children have not returned. This is not typically because of fear of the virus itself, but a direct result of child labour, child marriage, financial hardship, relocation and other consequences of the pandemic – and girls are particularly at risk."

About Link

Link Education is Scotland's leading international education charity, working to improve education for children and communities in some of the poorest rural areas of Ethiopia, Malawi and Uganda, and helping thousands of people escape the cycle of poverty. We focus on enhancing teaching and learning in schools, as well as building life-skills and promoting inclusion for the most marginalised. Our vision is one where all children have access to good quality education, giving them hope and a strong foundation for a brighter future. We take both a top-down and bottom-up approach to transform education, supporting broad system and school-wide improvements while recognising the need for more tailored, localised support to overcome specific challenges.

⁵ [UIS Fact Sheet 56, p.2, September 2019](#)

⁶ UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2019) Meeting Commitments: Are countries on track to achieve SDG 4? Montreal: UIS

Our Approach

Link takes a holistic approach to girls' education. We recognise that gender intersects with other factors such as poverty and disability in a way that often means girls are especially marginalised. The barriers girls face change throughout their lives, often becoming most acute during adolescence and at key points such as transition to secondary school. Using a gender lens, Link works with partners from governments and communities, as well as the girls themselves, to analyse these complex interactions and design programmes that address the barriers to girls' learning at community, school and systems levels.

We work with communities to challenge social norms and expectations which disadvantage girls, such as early marriage and domestic roles, and to strengthen support for girls' education and safety.

We collaborate with school leaders and school governing bodies to improve sanitation facilities so girls can continue attending school when they get their period; safeguard girls in school and on the way to school; and develop strategies to raise girls' attainment.

We train teachers and leaders on gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogy, giving them the skills to ensure girls are learning. We support the teaching of social and emotional skills alongside the more traditional aspects of education to empower all children – and girls in particular – to complete school and move forward to further education or sustainable livelihoods.



With government partners we promote curriculum content which is relevant to girls' lives and contains positive role models for girls, especially in STEM subjects. We support national girls' education strategies, and work with government staff in the middle tier to include girls' education and consider equity in school improvement plans.

Girls' rights to education are woven throughout Link's work. Our approach papers on Climate Resilience and Social & Emotional Learning highlight some of the ways we work thematically on girls' education.

Our Experience

Link has had an explicit focus on girls' education for over 20 years. As we work to improve access to quality education for all children, we recognise the specific barriers that girls face and tailor our programmes to address these challenges. We are proud to have received funding from **UK Aid's Girls' Education Challenge** since 2013, where our work has contributed to international understanding of best practice in girls' education.⁷

GIRLS' EDUCATION CHALLENGE – ETHIOPIA

Link's first Girls' Education Challenge project reached 62,700 girls in 123 Ethiopian schools to improve their learning, attendance and retention. Final results⁸ showed a 197% improvement in reading fluency assessment scores and a 301% improvement in numeracy assessment scores among participants against project targets. Phase two of this project, STAGES, builds on this success and focuses on strengthening the education system to support transition from one level of education to the next. The project seeks to highlight and help address the specific barriers that girls face in enrolling and remaining in school, and learning whilst there. As well as focusing on school leadership and teaching quality for girls' education, STAGES provides some direct support to particularly marginalised girls, and works closely with community-school structures including parent-teacher associations, school improvement committees, and village education and training boards. Embarking on the establishment of and support to Mother and Father Groups has been another means of strengthening parental and community support for girls, and proved to be particularly impactful during school closures as a result of COVID-19.

Direct support to girls includes working with the government's tutorial system to provide additional learning opportunities to girls identified to be struggling with their lessons, and also considers social and emotional factors which can impact on girls' confidence and self-esteem for learning. The STAGES social and emotional learning (SEL) approach is mainstreamed throughout trainings for teachers and school leaders, and also directly supports girls via tailored confidence-building and counselling sessions. These trainings are delivered by government education staff who have been trained by Link, ensuring learning and understanding is embedded at every level.

“There is a change in community attitudes. People start to believe. Girls' education becomes society's education. Education is the only way to overcome poverty.”
-Zone Education Manager, Ethiopia.

“... the project changed our lives forever. It brings change for a lifetime. They have given what cannot be lost, no one can take it away from us.”
-Female teacher, Ethiopia

⁷ For example, https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/xuacqlo3/gec_s2s_report_final.pdf;
https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/ruznhuh0/thematic_review_q2_v10.pdf

⁸ See our GEC 1 external evaluation report [here](#)



At the STAGES midline-1 evaluation (2021),⁹ findings show how social and emotional wellbeing can interact with other barriers that girls face to lead to thoughts of drop-out from school. It highlights a statistically significant increase in girls' self-esteem compared to project baseline (average score from 43.7% to 67.1% for grade 9 girls), with girls highlighting that the SEL support has increased their resilience to the learning challenges they face, and built their courage to stay in school despite societal pressure to marry or find work. One student stated that the advice and counselling received from teachers and school leaders “considerably strengthened me to keep moving forward”. A girl already married with children and still in school, persisted with her education despite pressure to drop out stating that “the counselling sessions have helped me to continue my education”. The project will continue to build on these achievements.

TEAM GIRL MALAWI (TRANSFORMATIONAL EMPOWERMENT FOR ADOLESCENT MARGINALISED GIRLS IN MALAWI)

TEAM Girl Malawi focuses on the most marginalised girls and the unique support they need. Girls enrolled in the project face complex barriers to education, including extreme poverty, early marriage and motherhood, household responsibilities, child labour, and disability.

In community-based classes these out-of-school girls learn basic literacy, numeracy and life skills, while Girls' Clubs impart sexual and reproductive health knowledge, and develop resilience and self-esteem.

We are working with school leaders and government staff to make schools safer, more inclusive spaces. Community engagement is raising aspirations for marginalised girls while protecting them from abuse and child marriage.



⁹ See the external evaluation midline report [here](#)

Our holistic support is empowering girls to choose their own pathway into mainstream education, vocational training or employment. By working through local government and in partnership with communities, these changes will be sustained in the long term.

- **88% of girls** graduating from our complementary basic education classes have improved reading scores, 86% have improved in maths, and 83% improved in life skills.
- **89% of project stakeholders** reported that the project had helped to remove barriers to girls' attendance.
- **90% of facilitators** at community learning centres reported their gender perceptions had changed.¹⁰

**“I didn't even know how to write my own name but now, I know how to write it”
-TEAM Girl Malawi graduate**

**“The parents are making sure that they advise their children to go to school and to do vocational skills compared to what they were doing before.”
-Community Member, Malawi¹¹**

UGANDA

Link Uganda's School Transformation through Enriching Accountability and Resilience project (STEAR, 2019-2022) focused on the functionality of Community Based Structures to support school improvement for all children.

In 100 government primary schools in Bunyoro region, using Uganda's Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards, data showed that most Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Management Committees (SMCs) lacked the agency to hold duty bearers accountable: only 45.5% of schools met leadership requirements; few teachers were planning lessons; and headteachers were rarely supervising teachers. Many schools had low attendance, low retention, and low transition rates.

Link Uganda, trained 1,646 PTA and SMC members to support their school leaders develop relevant and evidence-based school improvement plans that meet the needs of all learners, as well as how to monitor progress on achieving the targets set out in these plans.

A new understanding of school data has driven school and community-led improvements that directly support girls' attendance and achievement. These include: construction of a dormitory to reduce the risk of gender-based violence and threats of child marriage; recruitment of the first female teacher in a school to support girls; stronger supervision of teachers to ensure teaching is gender responsive; and co-option of a female community member to act as a role model in school.

¹⁰ TEAM Girl Malawi Midline Evaluation, 2022

¹¹ TEAM Girl Malawi Midline Evaluation, 2022

