

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.

Background

Over 263 million children are out of school around the world and during the COVID-19 pandemic this increased to 1.6 billion.¹ Children's education may be disrupted due to an emergency related to climate, conflict, or a global pandemic. Other children find that mainstream education is incompatible with their individual circumstances, such as being involved in child labour, child marriage, pregnancy, and family responsibilities. Still others, especially children with disabilities or who speak minority languages, drop out or never enrol because schools are not welcoming spaces or do not meet their needs.

Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) are designed for children and young people who have missed out on education and need to catch up in order to transition back into formal schooling or other positive pathways. Accelerated Education is education delivered in a flexible, age-appropriate way in an accelerated timeframe. It can include accelerated learning, catch-up in or out of school, bridging, and remedial programmes.²



¹ <https://inee.org/collections/accelerated-education>

² https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/AEWG_Key_Programme_Definitions-screen.pdf

Approach

We recognise that children who are out of school face multiple barriers to learning and we work to address these holistically. Our work is aligned with the Accelerated Education Working Group's ten Principles for Effective Practice. Link also recognises the value of extra-curricular tutorial lessons for students who are in school, but struggling in the classroom. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the potential of these already existing programmes to support catch-up learning.

Ten Principles of Accelerated Education

1. AEP is flexible and for over-age learners
2. Curriculum, materials and pedagogy are genuinely accelerated, AE-suitable and use relevant language of instructions
3. AE learning environment is inclusive, safe and learning-ready
4. Teachers are recruited, supervised and remunerated
5. Teachers participate in continuous professional development
6. Goals, monitoring and funding align
7. AE centre is effectively managed
8. Community is engaged and accountable
9. AEP is a legitimate, credible education option that results in learner certification in primary education
10. AEP is aligned with the national education system and relevant humanitarian architecture

Recognising their responsibility to educating out-of-school children, Malawi, Ethiopia and Uganda have departments and policies in the Ministry of Education dedicated to accelerated education. With a large population of refugee and displaced people, Uganda also has specific policies for education for these groups. Where Link delivers accelerated education, we align with government curricula and processes to ensure that when learners graduate from AEPs their qualifications are nationally recognised and they can transition into their next phase of education or life. Find out more in our **Working with Government** approach paper. Whilst not strictly an accelerated learning programme, Link Ethiopia supports government-established tutorial classes for girls who are struggling in the classroom to avoid drop-out and improve their transition to higher grades.

At the same time, we contextualise AEP provision to ensure it meets the needs of specific groups of children. Often this is accomplished by working closely with communities to select suitable learning spaces and set class times to fit around other commitments, such as farming or religion. Communities also play a key role in identifying the barriers for learners such as language of instruction, disability, or parenthood, and help to address these, for example by providing informal childcare at learning spaces. As AEP is designed for those who have been left behind by mainstream school, it must be inclusive of every out of school child, no matter their circumstances and barriers.

Accountability is another vital area for the involvement of community members. In Malawi, adapting our work in schools, we facilitate community members to form committees to oversee the work in the Complementary Basic Education centres and ensure they meet basic criteria for safety or teachers' timekeeping. Committees also follow up on learners' attendance, using their position within the community to meet learners and their families to solve problems and provide encouragement.

Across all country projects, in addition to ensuring that children learn core academic skills, we integrate social and emotional learning into the curricula, and focus on essential life skills including financial literacy and sexual and reproductive health. This plays a dual role in supporting learners to overcome barriers to attendance and learning such as low self-esteem and pregnancy, while preparing them to make positive life choices in future. See our **Social and Emotional Learning** approach paper.

Experience

MALAWI

TEAM Girl Malawi is providing accelerated learning to over 6,000 adolescent girls and boys who never enrolled in school or dropped out without gaining basic literacy and numeracy. The participants face multiple, intersecting barriers to education, including poverty, early marriage, pregnancy, motherhood, and disability. They attend classes taught by trained Facilitators in community-based learning centres.

The curriculum used in learning centres is adapted from the government's core Complementary Basic Education syllabus. Feedback from learners and Facilitators indicated that it was challenging to cover all seven curriculum subjects due to learners' high rates of absenteeism often due to the complex barriers they faced. This meant that learners were struggling to progress in most subjects and both learners and Facilitators were experiencing high levels of stress. In partnership with the government, we adapted the curriculum to four core subjects – Chichewa, English, Maths and Life Skills – and integrated other subjects as themes within these. This reduced the content so that the focus was on foundational literacy and numeracy, ensuring that learners gained skills they could build on and would be ready to transition back to school or into other pathways.

Facilitators are trained to use an inclusive education approach which emphasises the role of an inclusive teacher as a problem-solver. They are responsible for identifying students who have problems with presence, participation or achievement, looking for the cause of the problem, and trying to help overcome it. This is especially important to re-engage learners who are out of school or at risk of dropping out.



ETHIOPIA



In Ethiopia, the STAGES GEC-T project supports the government-instituted tutorial classes for girls who are struggling in the classroom. The project works with school leaders and teachers to identify girls who need additional support, and provides training for teachers who are interested to tutor the girls after school hours. Follow-up coaching and mentoring support is provided to teachers by district school supervisors, who also participate in the training. As a result, tutors are better able to understand and respond to the different needs of girls in the tutorials, including possible social and emotional learning needs. Following an agreed number of tutorial sessions (1 hour per week for each subject), the assumption is that girls will cope better in the classroom, are less likely to drop out of school, will have increased confidence, and are more likely to transition to higher grade levels. Following the COVID-19 school closures, the start-up of tutorial classes again offered opportunity for girls most affected to receive additional catch-up support. The tutorial intervention develops capacity within the system to provide the more specific support that girls may need, whilst improving the education system for all learners.

