

# EDUCATION

The link to a thriving life and a healthier, safer and fairer planet



**LINK**  
EDUCATION

## Link's Five Strategic Goals 2021-2030

# Introduction

Link Education is a family of organisations that have been working with schools, communities, governments and local partners to strengthen education systems and transform lives through learning in sub-Saharan Africa for over 30 years.

Education is a human right and a vital pathway out of poverty towards a better future. Education supports environmental stewardship, sustainable economic growth, can promote equity and peace, and lead to safer and healthier lives.

Improving education is a process that constantly evolves. It requires change within the education system, within schools and within communities to make education beneficial for all.



## Education and the Global Goals

Our five Strategic Goals will support governments to fulfil their commitments to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Charter 2063.<sup>1</sup>

SDG 4 ensures inclusive and equitable quality education, promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all, and contributes to the achievement of other SDG goals.

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1. The African Charter 2063 is Africa's strategic framework that aims to deliver on its goal for inclusive and sustainable development and is a concrete manifestation of the pan-African drive for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress and collective prosperity <https://au.int/agenda2063/sdgs>



Universal primary and secondary education attainment would help lift more than 420 million out of poverty – reducing the number of poor worldwide by more than half



Farm output needs to rise by at least 70% by 2050. Field schools and further education help farmers increase productivity by 12% and net revenue by 19%



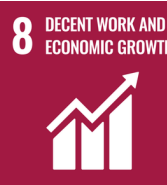
If all women completed primary education, 1.7 million fewer children would be affected by stunting. This would rise to 11.9 million if all women completed secondary education



More than 20% of illiterate girls in sub-Saharan Africa are married by the age of 15. Only 4% of literate girls in the same region are married by this age



In urban India, a household where the most educated adult had completed secondary education were 22% more likely to purify water



On average, one year of education is associated with a 10% increase in wage earnings



In France, Malaysia and Brazil, income inequality fell by approximately 7% over two decades as the share of population with secondary education grew



The higher a person's level of education, the more likely they are to express concern for the environment



A survey of farmers in Africa revealed that those with an education were more likely to make at least one adaptation to the consequences of climate change



In 102 countries, adults with a tertiary education were 60% more likely to request information from the government than those with a primary education or less



# A system in crisis

The UN Secretary General's April 2020 report on SDG progress provides sobering statistics:



## ATTENDANCE

- In 2021, 244 million children, adolescents and young people were out of school. Sub-Saharan Africa has the most, at 98 million.<sup>2</sup>
- By 2030, 1 in 6 children will still not be in school, and 4 out of 10 will not complete secondary education.<sup>3</sup>
- 130 million out-of-school children are girls (i.e. a number equivalent to the entire populations of Ethiopia and Malawi).



## QUALITY

- Of those in school, over half the children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read and understand a short story by the time they finish primary school.<sup>4</sup>
- The percentage of primary school teachers receiving the minimum required pedagogical training has stagnated at 8% since 2015 – the percentage is lowest in sub-Saharan Africa (64%).<sup>5</sup>



## FACILITIES AND FUNDING

- In 2019, less than half of primary and lower secondary schools in sub-Saharan Africa had access to electricity, the internet and computers, and basic handwashing facilities: requirements for a safe and effective learning environment.<sup>6</sup>
- The poor are hit hardest with children from the richest 20% of households allocated nearly double the amount of education funding than children from the poorest 20%.<sup>7</sup>

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2. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000382577>

3. UNESCO's Commit to education doc, SDG 4 Off-track, saved in strategy folder

4. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/overview>

5. Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, Report of the Secretary-General, <https://undocs.org/en/E/2020/57>

6. Ibid

7. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/1-3-adolescent-girls-poorest-households-has-never-been-school>

# COVID-19 and other emergencies

Pandemics and other emergencies, including conflict and climate change, combine to keep many more children from school.<sup>8</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, 90% of children worldwide had their education interrupted, impacting vulnerable children the most. UNESCO<sup>9</sup> estimates that 11 million girls may never return to school, with adolescent girls at particular risk of dropping out in low and lower-income countries. Children with disabilities, or in families with parents or carers with disabilities, are also disproportionately affected.<sup>10</sup> Digital remote learning is out of reach for at least 500 million students.

International aid budgets and in-country public budgets for education are being cut due to the impacts of COVID-19 and other economic shocks. A World Bank report shows that two-thirds of low- and lower-middle-income countries have reduced their public education budgets since the onset of COVID-19.<sup>11</sup> This is likely to lead to a funding gap of almost \$200 billion per year.<sup>12</sup>



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8. A year marked by conflict, COVID and climate change, <https://www.unicef.org/stories/2021-year-marked-conflict-covid-and-climate-change>

9. <https://en.unesco.org/news/girls-education-and-covid-19-new-factsheet-shows-increased-inequalities-education-adolescent>

10. the hidden impact of COVID-19 on children and families with disabilities, Save the Children, October 2020

11. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/02/22/two-thirds-of-poorer-countries-are-cutting-education-budgets-due-to-covid-19>

12. <https://saveourfuture.world/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Cheat-Sheet.pdf>

# Link's Five Strategic Goals

We now have the opportunity to Build Back Better and Build Back Fairer.

In response to these global challenges, Link will work with partners, communities, learners and teachers to:

- Strengthen Education Systems
- Support Education in Emergencies
- Build Climate Change Resilience
- Transform Girls' Education
- Engage Community Voice and Accountability









# Strengthen Education Systems



System strengthening includes a broad spectrum of intervention areas to ensure improvement that is high quality, sustainable and meets the needs of all. It is crucial that support is contextual and relevant, builds on the current system, and works across all levels. Link draws from over 30 years of experience, partnering with Ministries of Education and local governments to drive forward National Education Sector Plans that build sustainable, evidence-driven and equitable education systems. Our experience demonstrates that this is the most effective, efficient and cost-effective way of improving learning.

Strengthening education systems, particularly to include the most marginalised children, is at the core of Link's work.

Over the next ten years, Link will:

- Improve school management
- Build teaching quality
- Enhance teaching and learning environments
- Ensure more equitable and inclusive access to education
- Strengthen data for evidence-based school improvement
- Support early childhood, primary and secondary education



“The reason why the education system has not been doing such things was partially a lack of knowledge, skills, materials and other resources. Now that these have been significantly resolved by the project, the road to sustainability is now paved.”

– District Education Officer, Ethiopia<sup>13</sup>





## Case Study: Improving learning via better teacher training

In Ethiopia, Link's STAGES<sup>14</sup> project supports improvement of the education system for girls. One area of focus is teacher training.

Link's teacher development approach promotes regular, short training for teachers followed by time for practice and reflection, before further training. The training encourages communities of practice amongst teachers for shared learning and problem-solving. Training materials focus on helping teachers to respond to the learning needs of girls as well as boys in the classroom, and to ensure that children with disabilities and specific learning needs are included. They embed a social and emotional learning (SEL) approach in teaching, underlining the importance of building confidence, self-esteem and resilience that are so important in supporting girls and other marginalised children to attend school, participate in class activities, and learn.

**“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.”**  
- Cluster Supervisor

Middle-tier education officers and school leaders join all teacher trainings to enhance their follow-up coaching and mentoring of teachers in schools, and to develop supervisory and quality assurance capacity further up the system.

One supervisor during the STAGES midline-1 evaluation highlighted, “Before we received training, our way of supervision was simply criticism. But since receiving training, we have been involved in follow-up, evaluation and coaching and mentoring activities.”<sup>15</sup>

The materials developed will be absorbed into the existing continuous professional development (CPD) system for teachers and school leaders, meaning that learning can be cost-effectively absorbed into the current training system and sustained beyond the project. They also support the Ministry of Education's Ethiopian Education Roadmap (2018-2030).

The success of this approach has been evidenced by findings from the STAGES midline-1 evaluation (2021) which highlights that teachers, school leaders, district cluster supervisors and quality assurance experts are more responsive to the needs of girls, particularly via lesson planning, building confidence in learners, adapting teaching to student needs, and the use of teaching aids. Data also showed significant increases in girls' self-esteem.

14. Supporting the Transition of Adolescent Girls through Enhancing Systems (2017 – 2024)

15. STAGES Midline-1 Evaluation Report (2021), p.28

# Support Education in Emergencies



Quality Education is a means of enhancing protection, prevention and prosperity for communities and countries experiencing or emerging from conflict or disaster.

Disruption of education for those living in emergency situations affects immediate wellbeing alongside their educational and economic future<sup>16</sup> – whilst societies and economies emerging from crises need educated populations to lead the next generation.<sup>17</sup>

Global donors and humanitarian actors are beginning to understand the need for a comprehensive approach to sustainable development that includes Education in Emergencies.<sup>18</sup> Link has used its experience in responding to COVID-19, food insecurity, flooding, and civil unrest to ensure schools and communities can safely continue providing education for all, even in the most remote settings.

Link supports the design and dissemination of alternative teaching and learning materials that function in no-tech environments. We work with community-based structures<sup>19</sup> to strengthen child protection and train both school leaders and governance bodies to develop school plans that mobilise resources and respond to emergencies.

Over the next ten years, Link will:

- Adhere to the international minimum standards for Education in Emergencies<sup>20</sup>
- Advocate for the prioritisation of education in emergency response
- Participate in Education Emergency Cluster Response hubs
- Focus on the hardest to reach
- Strengthen school and community leadership to prepare and respond
- Build Back Better

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16. UNESCO. Accountability in Education: Meeting Our Commitments. UNESCO, 2017, p. 1.

17. [https://inee.org/system/files/resources/INEE\\_Strategic\\_Framework\\_2018-2023\\_ENG.pdf](https://inee.org/system/files/resources/INEE_Strategic_Framework_2018-2023_ENG.pdf)

18. *ibid*

19. Community-based structures are any formal or informal structures that facilitate community participation in education. Community participation in education includes processes and activities that allow community members to be heard, empower them to be part of decision-making processes and enable them to take direct action on education issues (INEE, 2021)

20. <https://inee.org/minimum-standards>



## Case Study: “How do we know what’s needed?” Responding to the COVID-19 emergency in Malawi and Ethiopia



“We want to hear from the learners directly so we understand what each learner is going through on a daily basis so we can provide the best support.”

- Link Country Director, Malawi



As schools closed in March 2020, it was unclear how children could continue with their learning, or if children and their families had access to accurate information about COVID-19. We also discovered that girls were at increased risk of being forced to marry, or becoming pregnant due to social and economic pressures, and reports of gender based violence increased.

Link worked quickly with our partners to assess opportunities for learning, and the changing wellbeing and emotional needs of learners. We designed a COVID-19 safe, rapid needs assessment to contact a sample of project participants (approximately 700) who are vulnerable learners in Ethiopia and Malawi.

We found only 43% of the learners in Ethiopia and Malawi were able to access education programmes through the radio. Mobile phone access was even lower – only 12% in Ethiopia could access internet-based learning via a phone, dropping to 3.5% in Malawi. Feelings of anxiety had increased, at 21% in Malawi rising to 51% in Ethiopia. General health knowledge on COVID-19 was also poor.<sup>21</sup>

Link worked with partners to develop early project responses, especially around continued learning and safeguarding, to meet the reality of the learners.

Link developed easily accessible, paper-based home-learning packs, worked with local radio stations to share safe health messages and drive re-enrolment campaigns, and collaborated with local leaders to address the risks associated with the pandemic, such as an increase in pregnancies, the added pressure on girls to marry, and the higher burden of domestic chores and income generation.

Despite these added pressures, when schools started to reopen in Autumn 2020, in Ethiopia over 80% of the girls we support returned to school, including 64 of the 72 girls that had been married. In Malawi, 92% of the highly marginalised girls returned to their community classrooms.

21. <https://linkededucation.org.uk/our-response-to-covid-19/>

# Build Climate Change Resilience



Education is essential in our fight to save the planet. Education shapes stronger, more equitable and healthier communities, leads to more efficient and sustainable farming practices, creates thriving economies and builds resilience in the face of conflict and emergencies – including those precipitated by climate change.

Some countries are bearing the brunt of climate change more than others and deserve collective action for adaptation and mitigation against loss and damage. Education is one of the most effective and cost-effective tools for adapting to climate change and building resilience. A solid foundation in literacy, numeracy and life skills enables more equitable sharing of knowledge, innovation, adaptive capacity, environmentally aware decision-making and social responsibility.

Girls' education in particular has shown an extraordinary and multifaceted return on investment. Research by Brookings Institute shows for every additional year of girls' schooling on average, a country's level of climate resilience is improved.<sup>22</sup> The Malala Fund's report (2021) states, 'that closing the gender gap in education can help countries better adapt to the effects of climate change and decrease the rate and impact of global warming'.<sup>23</sup>

Link has a strong track record of strengthening systems to promote adaptation, and firmly believes that an holistic and climate-conscious education system can significantly support children, communities and nations as we face the challenges of our changing climate.

Over the next ten years, Link will:

- Embed climate change resilience in school improvement planning
- Strengthen the voice of children and young people in climate resilience
- Support climate change education through school clubs, teacher training, and school leadership and management
- Prioritise community engagement and parental involvement in building resilient learning environments
- Promote education resilience planning and coordination across government sectors
- Partner with climate change thought leaders
- Change the way we work to reduce our carbon footprint

22. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2017/09/27/3-ways-to-link-girls-education-actors-to-climate-action/>

23. E.g. see Malala Foundation, Brookings Institute, UNESCO



## Intention: Adapting what's there to build resilience

Link has successfully adapted and improved education indicators that measure school performance to ensure girls' needs, child protection and the issues around wider inclusion, are understood and embedded. Expanding this model to focus on climate resilience and adaptation is an obvious next step.

Link will develop a youth-led climate risk assessment for learners (and teachers) to consider issues their learning environment might face. This data will feed into the annually mandated school improvement planning process, enabling school leaders, learners and the wider school community to prioritise and advocate for resources to protect their school from climate events.

To create schools that can be community hubs in times of disaster, eco-clubs will use the data to design activities that build resilience such as starting woodlots and planting trees, better waste disposal, and good water management.

Embedding environmental issues across teaching and learning will give learners knowledge to share with their families and beyond. Using local knowledge will ensure activities respond to the actual need, and sharing knowledge across government sectors will enable smarter mobilisation of appropriate resources.

Link looks forward to rolling out this programme with its partners.



"We work with communities across Africa that are severely affected by climate change impacts like drought and flood events. They tell us that the best route to resilience is better quality education so that people can make better, more informed choices. Link's work therefore puts them on the front line of responding to the global climate emergency. Their approach is much needed and should inspire others."

- Dr Nick Hepworth, Director, WWI



# Engage Community Voice and Accountability



Community participation, ownership and agency is at the heart of improving education and schools for all children. Link works closely with communities, often through community school structures such as School Improvement/Management Committees and Parent Teacher Associations. We aim to enhance their involvement and leadership in school activities, improvement planning and monitoring, resource mobilisation, and support to enable all children to attend, participate and achieve.

Working with communities is crucial as they provide locally-led solutions to local problems. Link's staff speak the languages of the communities we work with, understand the social norms and challenges, and develop relationships based on the local reality enabling our work to be effective, sustainable, relevant and impactful.

Supporting communities to know and understand their roles and responsibilities, and strengthening their voice and agency, results in schools and government being held accountable for delivering a quality education. Partnering with locally-based Civil Society Organisations ensures this power is sustained.

Over the next ten years, Link will ensure:

- Communities value education for all learners
- Communities know what makes a good quality school
- Communities actively participate in school governance committees
- Communities hold schools accountable for delivering quality education
- Communities take action to improve schools and support education for all groups
- Communities affect change through partnerships



“With support from Link Education, now I can check whether teachers are teaching as per the displayed timetable, the learning environment, school sanitation etc.”

- School governance body member, Uganda





## Case study: Using evidence to demand change at community, district and national level

In Uganda, as in many countries, schools are supported and monitored by school governance bodies.<sup>24</sup> Knowing how and what to monitor is key to understanding what is working and, importantly, what is not. The Education Act in Uganda (2008) lays out guidelines for these bodies, but training is not always provided.

In 2020, Link Uganda baseline data showed that only 45.5% of schools met minimum national leadership standards; many schools struggled with low attendance and retention, and most of the Parent Teacher Associations or community-led School Management Committees lacked the agency or knowledge to hold duty bearers accountable in the three target project districts.

Link supported these schools by strengthening school self-evaluation processes, trained school leaders on the new curriculum, and provided advocacy training to school governance bodies. Link Uganda developed a simple handbook to help communities understand what they should be doing to help their school. Training was delivered over one day in local languages at a time which suited the participants. It included the development of a monitoring tool that participants practiced with and found to be fun.

Link trained over 100 community groups across Hoima, Kikuube and Buliisa districts to monitor education services. These communities, who understand the challenges, know their roles, and recognise their responsibility, developed workable solutions in context, including:

- Parental contributions enabling a latrine to be built.
- Community members demanding the assignment of a female teacher on realising that all 800 pupils were taught by an all-male staff.
- Addressing the issue of girls being targeted by sexual violence when travelling to and from school. One community raised funds to build a girls' dormitory and erected a school fence to curb unauthorized access.

Communities owning challenges and solutions, creates sustainable outcomes that support the education of all their children.

In addition to this, at the national level, Link partnered with the Forum for Education NGOs (FENU), a coalition of over 100 civil society organisations who improve education through joint advocacy work. Link Uganda presented collated findings to the FENU membership from 100 school improvement reports showing that 60% of schools were not achieving minimum standards on over half of the 18 National Education Standards.

FENU members used Link's data to decide the annual advocacy priorities, namely demanding a school inclusion policy, curriculum-based social and emotional learning, and increased funds for continuous professional development training for teachers and school inspectors.

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24. Local government staff also play a key role in this process

# Transform Girls' Education



Every girl has the right to education.<sup>25</sup> A quality, relevant education gives girls the opportunity to reach their full potential and lead the lives they choose. It can be transformative for girls themselves, their communities, and society as a whole, bringing stability, strength and resilience:

- 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.<sup>26</sup>
- 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.<sup>27</sup>
- For every additional year of girls' schooling, on average, a country's level of climate resilience is improved.<sup>28</sup> Educated women have more productive smallholdings and are better stewards making the most of the world's natural resources.<sup>29</sup>

Numerous global agreements commit to equality for girls in education, empowerment and ending gender-based violence in schools. Yet still, 129 million girls are out of school.<sup>30</sup> Barriers to girls' attendance, participation, and learning include:

- social norms and expectations around early marriage and pregnancy;
- lack of sanitation facilities and unsafe environments on the way to and at school;
- family poverty which means girls are needed for child labour or domestic chores and childcare, while boys' education takes priority;
- low academic expectations.

In school, girls face further challenges. They are more likely to drop out, have poor attendance, low self-esteem, and lower learning outcomes than boys. They are also at risk of gender-based violence and discrimination.

These obstacles are compounded for girls with disabilities and those from minority ethnic and second language backgrounds – only 2% of marginalised girls complete upper secondary school.<sup>31</sup> No education means little resilience when emergencies hit, which for girls can mean early marriage or increased vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation.

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25. From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) to UN General Assembly Resolution on the Right to Education in Emergency Situations (2010)

26. 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

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

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

29. See Malala Fund, Brookings Institute, UNESCO

30. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation>

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



Over the next ten years, Link will:

- Train teachers to address girls' learning needs
- Strengthen leadership and supervision for girls' education – at school and system level
- Support school improvement planning for girls' education
- Provide menstruation products and safe spaces
- Promote girls' clubs to focus on building life skills and resilience
- Embed Social and Emotional Learning and Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights
- Shift social norms to support girls' education
- Ensure schools are safe for girls

## Case study: Giving girls choice – the power of education

**“The project changed our lives forever. They have given what cannot be lost, no one can take it away from us.”**

**- Female teacher, Ethiopia**

Link's work holistically strengthens education for girls. We support multiple structures girls require to attend school, be safe when there, and learn, like improving teacher training, providing menstrual products, and mobilising communities.

Phase 1 of our Girls' Education Challenge project in Ethiopia, reached 63,000 girls in 123 primary schools, 1,700 teachers and 12,300 community members. After four years, compared to non-project sites, we achieved:

- A 197% increase in girls' reading fluency scores, and a 301% increase in girls' numeracy scores on average, against targets
- Improvement in girls' attendance of 27%
- An increase of 40% in the number of parents who felt community attitudes were more favourable to girls attending secondary school

The project was co-designed with the girls themselves, their families, communities, teachers and government experts. Activities with greatest impact included those that:

- built the self-confidence of girls, such as Girls' Clubs
- addressed practical problems such as provision sanitary packs
- embedded solutions, like training government staff in gender awareness

Phase 2 of this project has seen a continued increase in girls' confidence from 44% to 67% and improvement in teaching methodology that supports gender and inclusion (57% to 94%). Girls have more resilience and school supervisors observe girls developing academically as their confidence increases.<sup>32</sup>



“We are going to need a new type of programming that builds on local capacities, indigenous resources and creates self-sufficiency. Programming will need to become more localized, adaptive, flexible and innovative.”



- UNICEF<sup>33</sup>

Link's model supports sustainable, accountable and scalable low-cost, high-impact education provision, and:



ensures **all vulnerable children** including those with disabilities, young mothers, orphans, girls, and the ethnically/ linguistically marginalised, are listened to and provided for alongside their peers so that everyone can attend, participate and achieve



enables education, community and national systems to **safeguard and protect** children making schools a safe, welcoming and inspiring option for all



supports **sustainability** by strengthening accountability mechanisms at the local and national levels, raising awareness of the roles and responsibilities of governance bodies, and ensuring efficiencies on how resources are mobilised, prioritised and used



**advocates** for education to always be a prioritised, efficient and effective public service where decisions are based on evidence and everyone can participate and benefit



uses **evidence and learning** to disseminate findings to influence change and build relationships with decision-makers. Sharing evidence leads to collective governance and strengthens accountability mechanisms resulting in sustainable service delivery

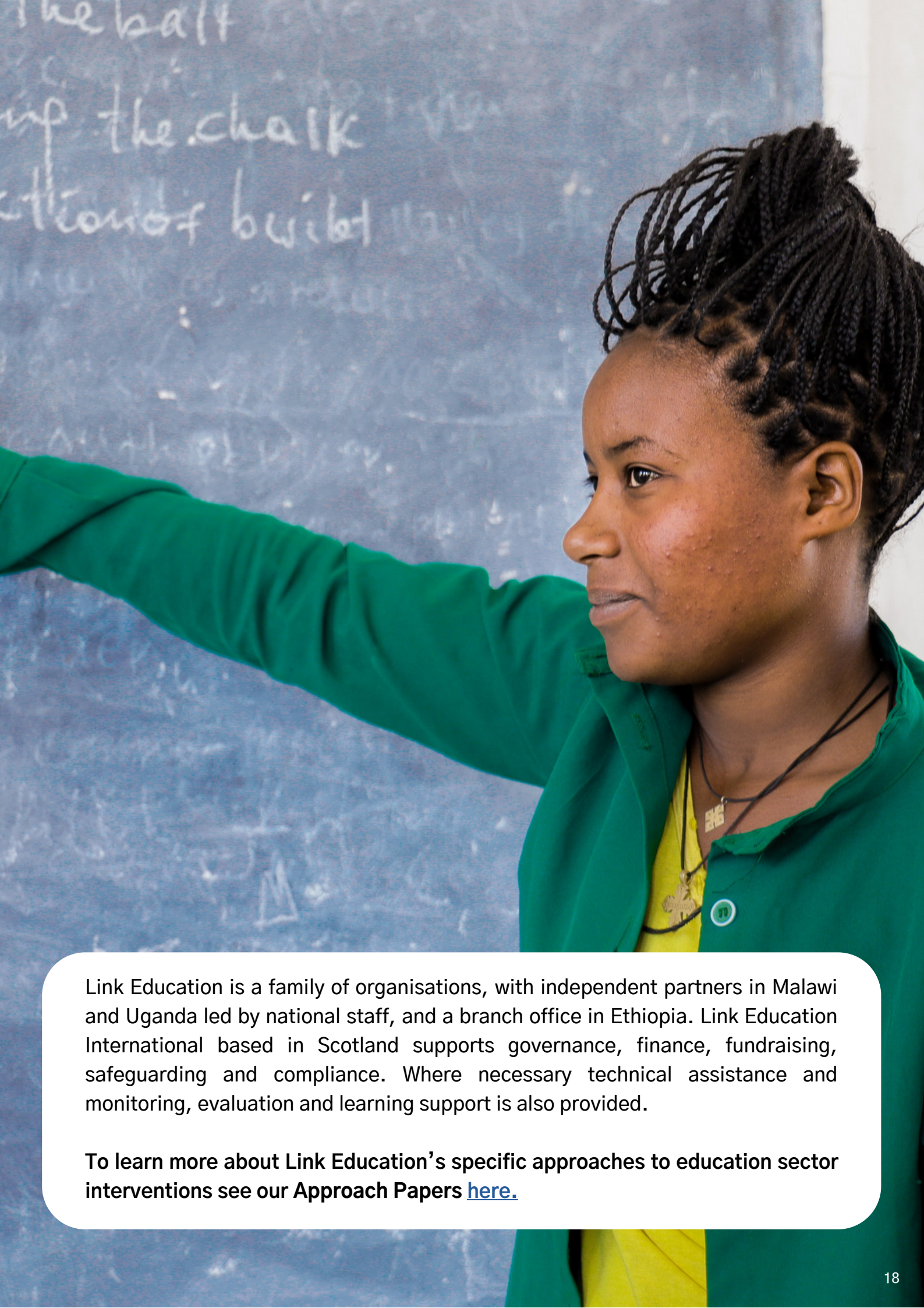


works in **partnership** with governments and communities so that our programming is localized, adaptive, flexible, scalable and solution-focused

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33. <https://www.unicef.org/media/73326/file/COVID-Climate-Advocacy-Brief.pdf>





Link Education is a family of organisations, with independent partners in Malawi and Uganda led by national staff, and a branch office in Ethiopia. Link Education International based in Scotland supports governance, finance, fundraising, safeguarding and compliance. Where necessary technical assistance and monitoring, evaluation and learning support is also provided.

To learn more about Link Education's specific approaches to education sector interventions see our Approach Papers [here](#).





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