GPE KIX SYNTHESIS REPORT

The Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange

GENDER EQUALITY IN AND THROUGH EDUCATION

A RESEARCH SYNTHESIS

GPE KIX
KNOWLEDGE INNOVATION EXCHANGE

IDRC · CRDI
Canada

GEI

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About GPE KIX

The Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE KIX) is a joint endeavour between GPE and IDRC that aims to ensure partner countries have and use the evidence and innovation they need to accelerate access, learning outcomes and gender equality through equitable, inclusive and resilient education systems fit for the 21st century.

About this report

This synthesis report is one of five commissioned by GPE KIX to consolidate evidence and lessons learned from applied research projects funded during the program's first phase, from 2019 to 2024. These multi-stakeholder projects focused on key challenges facing education systems across the Global South and generated evidence, strengthened capacities and mobilized knowledge into policy and practice. The reports in this series address five priority themes identified by national education stakeholders: data systems and data use; early learning; gender equality, equity and inclusion; out-of-school children and youth; and teacher professional development.

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For more information: www.gpekix.org

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AEP	accelerated education program
CoP	community of practice
EdTech	education technology
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
GBV	gender-based violence
GEI	gender equality, equity and inclusion
GIP	gender and inclusive pedagogies
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
KIX	Knowledge and Innovation Exchange
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LARTES	Laboratoire de Recherche sur les Transformations Économiques et Sociales
LMS	learning management system
NICs	networked improvement communities
OER	open educational resources
PDSA	plan, do, study, act
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
SRGBV	school-related gender-based violence
STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between 2019 and 2024, the Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE KIX), a joint endeavour between the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), supported 41 applied research projects focused on key challenges facing education systems across the Global South. These projects generated demand-driven and contextually relevant evidence about a wide range of innovative education programs, strengthened education stakeholders' capacities and mobilized knowledge into policy and practice. The research projects involved stakeholders — communities and parents or caregivers, teachers and school leaders, education officials from the district to the national levels and other contextually relevant stakeholders — throughout the entire research process and were undertaken by a range of universities, think tanks, networks and NGOs.

This report synthesizes evidence generated from six gender equality–focused applied research projects that were part of that endeavour. While gender equality is a cross-cutting theme embedded in all GPE KIX projects, this report specifically highlights findings from six projects in which it was the core focus:

- Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies on Students' Participation and Learning Achievement at Secondary School During the Pandemic and Beyond (Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies)
- Improving Knowledge on Gender Norms to Promote Gender Equality in Schools in Africa (Improving Knowledge and Gender Norms)
- Scaling a Youth-Led Social Support and Mentorship Program to Improve the Quality of Education for Marginalized Girls (Scaling a Youth-Led Social Support and Mentorship Program)
- School Leaders as Agents of Change Toward Equity and Inclusion (School Leaders as Agents of Change)
- Strategies to Prevent Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Foster Equity in Rural Schools (Strategies to Prevent SGBV)
- The Forum of African Women Educationalists' Gender-Responsive School Model as an Innovative Response to the Challenge of Gender Equality (FAWE Gender-Responsive School Model)

These projects involved 20 partners across 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). By consolidating findings across the six projects, this synthesis identifies both generalizable lessons and particularities in findings, situating the specific contributions of grounded research in broader bodies of knowledge. This report informs regional and global education debates by highlighting important new knowledge and findings about innovations and approaches for addressing gender inequalities in and through education at national, regional and global levels.

Context

Over the past several decades, global education commitments such as Sustainable Development Goal 4 ("Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"), supported by financial and other investments in education by governments, donors and other international partners, have led to tremendous improvements in access to education worldwide. However, systemic, gender-based disparities that affect both equal access to quality education and school completion rates for children of different genders remain, particularly in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and parts of the Middle East.

Social norms are a key factor in the continuing prevalence of gender disparities in education. In numerous cultures, traditional gender roles assign domestic and caregiving tasks to girls, who also face gendered practices, such as early marriage, that can restrict their access to education. Boys are often encouraged to seek an education but are likely to disengage from school from early adolescence.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Education 2030 Framework for Action kick-started a new era for education commitments by presenting a more ambitious vision to guide the efforts of the global community. A key component of this vision is the importance of gender equality and the significant role that education can play in its advancement. Achieving gender equality in and through education is vital, but it requires more than a focus on expanding access to education for children of all genders. A successful approach to gender equality in and through education requires specific interventions — for example, political commitments; widespread institutional reform; and targeted interventions aimed at transforming power dynamics and challenging harmful and discriminatory gender norms, attitudes, behaviours and practices.

This report looks not only at the aims and achievements of the projects listed above, but also at challenges encountered and lessons learned for future endeavours.

Key themes and findings on the effectiveness of the innovations assessed

The research projects focused on diverse aspects of gender equality in and through education and shared a goal of exploring, developing, testing and/or scaling innovative education programs, practices and approaches to enhance education access, quality and outcomes for marginalized learners. The findings from these projects are presented across several thematic areas:

- **Gender and inclusive pedagogies:** Effective teacher training in gender and inclusive pedagogy can positively influence teachers' attitudes toward gender equality and inclusion and improve educational outcomes for marginalized groups, particularly girls.
- **Working with school leaders:** School leaders play a crucial role in fostering inclusive education environments, but they often need support — from professional development networks, for example — to drive systemic change.
- **Comprehensive learning and social support for girls from marginalized communities:** Tailored programs that combine peer mentorship, life skills training and strong school-community partnerships can significantly improve retention and learning outcomes for girls from marginalized communities.
- **Gender norms and education:** Deeply entrenched gender norms continue to shape children's educational experiences and outcomes, and their influence is often much stronger than that of formal policies. Addressing these norms requires sustained community engagement and parental involvement.
- **School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV):** SRGBV remains a major barrier to gender equality in education for children of all genders. There is a need for comprehensive strategies involving schools, communities and policymakers to address it.
- **Education technology (EdTech) for inclusion:** EdTech has the potential to support inclusive pedagogies and assist marginalized learners, but it must be integrated thoughtfully to address specific contextual challenges.

Scaling strategies, challenges and lessons learned

The six research projects discussed in this report explored four different pathways to scale: adapting or expanding an existing program (**program pathway**), using evidence to inform the development of a new policy or change an existing policy (**policy pathway**), supporting an evidence-informed behaviour, practice or skill that is adopted and applied (**behaviour, practice and skills pathway**) and disseminating evidence on the effectiveness of gender-responsive education models (**methodology pathway**). The pathways employed were not mutually exclusive. Policy engagement, community engagement, knowledge mobilization and capacity-strengthening were found to be the most useful and impactful scaling strategies.

Over the span of the projects, the project teams encountered various institutional and structural challenges that impeded their efforts to scale their gender-responsive education models — for example, lack of financing; lack of an enabling policy environment in many countries; limited social capital and weak stakeholder networks; limited ability of government stakeholders to remain directly involved; unfavourable conditions for developing, testing and integrating gender-responsive education models within schools and education systems because of institutional hierarchies; entrenched gender norms among teachers, school leaders, parents, caregivers and community members; lack of understanding about gender equality and inclusion and insufficient data.

The six projects generated new insights and lessons that can inform future efforts to develop, test and scale gender-responsive education models, ensuring they are sustainable and contextually relevant and can make a meaningful impact on education systems worldwide.

- Align scaling efforts with national education policies and plans.
- Invest in early, ongoing, meaningful and inclusive knowledge mobilization with education stakeholders.
- Consider country-specific dynamics in scaling efforts.
- Seek out diverse funding sources and leverage existing resources and infrastructure.
- Prioritize awareness-raising and capacity-strengthening on gender equality and inclusion.
- Support the development of a conceptual framework for scaling gender-responsive education models.

Key strategies and effective practices for promoting gender equality in and through education

For sustainable and transformational change, interventions concerned with addressing gender equality in and through education must take a whole-of-system approach that focuses on changing unequal structures, social norms and policies so that the underlying causes of gender disparities can be addressed. Some of the key strategies and effective practices that emerged from the six GPE KIX projects discussed in this report are listed below.

At the individual, household and community levels:

- Build a collective commitment and strong partnerships between schools and families.
- Tailor interventions to empower marginalized learners — for example, peer mentoring and role modelling programs, flexible learning options and life skills training — according to local contexts.

At the educational institution level:

- Implement thorough gender-responsive training for teachers and school leaders, so they can understand gender dynamics, use inclusive teaching pedagogies and address gender-based violence.
- Integrate gender equality into schools' core leadership practices by implementing both leadership training programs and mentorship and role modelling programs.
- Challenge gender and social norms embedded in curricula and teaching practices.
- Create safe and inclusive school environments — for example, introduce peer-support programs.
- Integrate EdTech solutions that can bridge gaps in accessibility and inclusion for marginalized students, including students with disabilities.

At the policy level:

- Pioneer policy change by holding capacity-strengthening activities and establishing multi-stakeholder research committees to engage government representatives.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE KIX) is a joint endeavour between GPE and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to ensure partner countries have and use the evidence and innovation they need to accelerate access, learning outcomes and gender equality through equitable, inclusive and resilient education systems fit for the twenty-first century.

From 2020 to 2024, GPE KIX supported 41 applied research projects focused on key challenges facing education systems across the Global South. These projects generated demand-driven and contextually relevant evidence about a wide range of innovative education programs, strengthened capacities of education stakeholders and mobilized knowledge into policy and practice. The research projects involved stakeholders — communities and parents or caregivers, teachers and school leaders, education officials from the district to the national levels and other contextually relevant stakeholders — throughout the entire research process and were undertaken by a range of universities, think tanks, networks and NGOs.

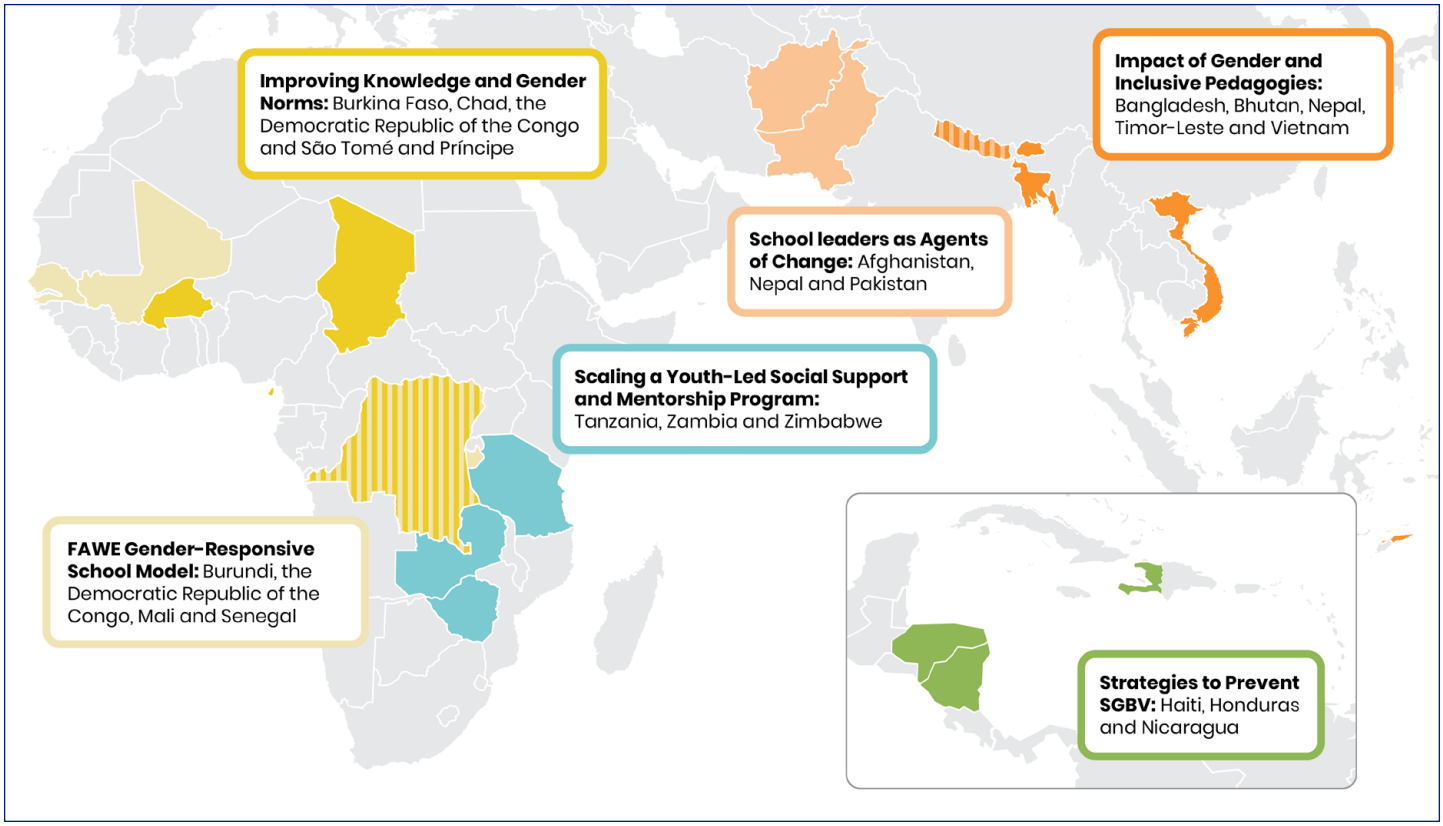
This document is one of five synthesis reports commissioned by GPE KIX to consolidate evidence and lessons learned across these projects in relation to priority themes identified by national education stakeholders: data systems and data use; early learning; gender equality, equity and inclusion (GEI); teacher professional development; and out-of-school children and youth. It synthesizes evidence generated from six gender equality–focused applied research projects. While gender equality is a cross-cutting theme embedded in all GPE KIX projects, this report specifically highlights findings from six projects in which it was the core focus.

1.1 About the projects

The six projects discussed in this report focused on different aspects of gender equality in and through education, including, for example, gender and inclusive pedagogies, working with school leaders, comprehensive learning and social support for marginalized girls, gender norms and education, school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) and the use of education technology (EdTech) to promote inclusion.

The projects involved 20 partners across 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Collectively, they generated important new knowledge and evidence about innovations and approaches for addressing gender inequalities in and through education at national, regional and global levels. Section 3 contains an overview of the projects.

Figure 1: Countries in which research projects were implemented



1.2 About this report

This synthesis report aims to inform and influence regional and global education debates by increasing the visibility of Southern perspectives on gender and education. By consolidating findings across multiple sites and projects, it identifies both generalizable lessons and particularities in findings. The report acknowledges gender diversity beyond traditional male/female binaries, however it seeks to remain consistent with how issues are framed in source material.

The report begins with an overview of both the available research on gender equality in and through education and the six research projects' objectives and approaches. These overviews are followed by a synthesis of key project findings across different thematic focus areas. Next, the pathways, strategies, challenges and lessons learned in scaling gender-responsive education models are outlined. The report concludes with recommendations in the form of a list of key strategies and effective practices for governments, civil society organizations, researchers and other education stakeholders seeking to deepen and enhance their work in this area. The detailed evidence from individual projects can be found in the primary research outputs referenced in the bibliography.

2. GLOBAL LANDSCAPE OF GENDER EQUALITY IN AND THROUGH EDUCATION

Over the past several decades, global education commitments have shaped efforts and investments made in the education sector by governments, donors and other international partners. Those commitments, and the related efforts and investments in particular, have led to tremendous improvements in access to education worldwide. Currently, there are more schools, more trained teachers, more textbooks, more washrooms and more children in school than ever before (Global Partnership for Education [GPE], 2023). Furthermore, according to UNESCO (2022), the global gender parity index for school enrolment in primary education reached 0.99 in 2021, indicating near parity in enrolment rates. However, disparities remain in different regions. As of 2020, for every 100 male students in sub-Saharan Africa, there were 96 female students enrolled in primary, 91 in lower secondary, 87 in upper secondary and 80 in tertiary education (UNESCO, 2023b). Conversely, boys are more likely to be out of school in East and Southeast Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO, 2024).

Gender parity in school completion rates has also been maintained globally in primary and lower secondary education since 2015, but there has been a reversal in upper secondary education, where the completion rate is now higher for female students than male students (UNESCO, 2024).

Another issue is that gender biases often persist in the curriculum, teachers' attitudes and school management's attitudes, and this can affect the quality of education (Unterhalter, 2017). UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring report (2022) highlights that while access to education has improved, systemic inequalities in the quality of education received by girls remain a critical challenge.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Education 2030 Framework for Action kick-started a new era for education commitments by presenting a more ambitious vision to guide the efforts of the global community. A key component of this vision is a strong consensus on the importance of gender equality and the key role that education can play in its advancement. Achieving gender equality in and through education is vital if we are to meet the targets embedded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Education 2030 Framework for Action (GPE, 2019), but it requires more than a focus on expanding access to education for children of all genders. A successful approach to gender equality in and through education requires specific interventions — for example, political commitments; widespread

institutional reform; and targeted interventions aimed at transforming power dynamics and challenging harmful and discriminatory norms, attitudes, behaviours and practices that affect children of all genders (IDRC & GPE KIX, 2023).

Gender inequalities in and through education are both a cause and an effect of broader forms of discrimination. Girls and boys are deeply affected by entrenched gender roles and the expectations that come with them (GPE, 2019). Sometimes these gender roles are visible, but at other times they may be less obvious, or even hidden (Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2010). National policies, curricula, teachers' and administrators' attitudes and practices, relationships between students and teachers, and inadequate infrastructure can all exacerbate a situation in which schools unintentionally deepen gender inequalities or fail to critically examine the sources of prejudice and discrimination.

2.1 Barriers to gender equality at the individual, household and community levels

The barriers to gender equality at the individual, household and community levels include poverty, geographical isolation, social norms, the opportunity cost of labour, gendered traditional practices, early and forced marriage, early pregnancy, lack of parental or caregiver support for education, death or illness of family members or caregivers, and a general lack of interest in school (Unterhalter, 2019).

Social norms are a key factor in the continuing prevalence of gender disparities in education. In numerous cultures, traditional gender roles assign domestic and caregiving tasks to girls, while boys are encouraged to seek an education and build careers outside the home (Kuteesa et al., 2024). Gendered practices such as early marriage restrict girls' access to education — for example, girls are often married early and have to leave school prematurely. However, in some communities in Africa and other regions, school-age boys are expected to adopt traditional masculine economic roles and responsibilities, such as cattle herding. As a result, they are often more likely to disengage from school. Additionally, children may encounter not only discrimination but also violence within school settings, and this unsafe environment discourages them from pursuing their education (Kuteesa et al., 2024).

Economic inequalities and financial challenges are major obstacles to achieving gender equality in education. Parity indices measure average disparity, but in a large number of low- and lower-middle-income countries, substantial disparities persist for girls in low-income or poverty situations (UNESCO, 2023b). Families that have limited resources or a poverty-level standard of living often prioritize boys' education over girls', as boys are seen as offering greater economic returns (Wolf et al., 2016). Consequently, girls from low-income families are particularly likely to miss out on educational opportunities. This situation is a key contributor to gender gaps in both

enrolment and completion rates. Indirect costs such as school fees and the cost of uniforms and transportation can also influence families' or caregivers' decisions to withdraw girls from school because paying for other household expenses takes priority (Hyer et al., 2008; Kabeer & Natali, 2013; Witenstein & Palmer, 2013).

Furthermore, gender intersects with other characteristics that can negatively affect children's opportunities to receive quality education, such as ability, ethnicity, refugee status or living in a remote area (Unterhalter, 2019). For example, girls who have disabilities face additional obstacles that limit their educational opportunities even more. These obstacles often stem from deeply ingrained social stigmas surrounding disability that can lead to exclusion and marginalization within both their communities and their schools. Furthermore, safety, especially during travel to and from school, is a particular concern for girls with disabilities. Families, caregivers and communities may worry about the girls' vulnerability to physical harm or harassment, which further reduces the likelihood of their attending school regularly. Overall, the intersection of gender and other characteristics creates a complex web of disadvantage, making it even more difficult for marginalized children to overcome barriers to education and realize their full potential.

2.2 Barriers to gender equality at the educational institution level

The ability to achieve gender equality in and through education is closely intertwined with the dynamics in both the classroom and the broader school environment. In the classroom, several barriers hinder progress toward gender equality, as highlighted by the GPE KIX research projects. For example, pedagogical approaches may not be designed to meet the diverse learning needs of children of different genders, and teaching methods often fail to account for differences in how girls and boys engage with learning, which can disadvantage one group compared to the other. Over the decades, there has been a growing trend of boys tending to perform less well than girls in schools. They repeat grades, learn less and drop out of school sooner. This trend is attributed to the gendered nature of the classroom, where gender rigidities and disparities affect both boys and girls from low-income backgrounds. The challenge for policymakers is how to create safe, violence-free learning environments in which girls and boys have equal opportunities (Barker et al., 2012).

Additionally, there is a widespread lack of gender-responsive curricula and teaching materials; many educational resources reflect outdated stereotypes or reinforce traditional gender roles, which limits the ability of girls and boys to explore their full potential (Osadare, 2023). One particularly significant barrier is the lack of inclusive infrastructure and resources in educational institutions. Many schools are not equipped to accommodate the needs of students, and girls in particular, with disabilities.

Furthermore, teachers and administrators may unintentionally, or even consciously, hold and express biased beliefs that influence how they interact with students of different genders. These discriminatory views can manifest as unequal expectations for girls and boys, with girls often being viewed as less capable in certain academic subjects or expected to fulfill more passive roles within the classroom. Such biases not only hinder girls' academic progress but also reinforce harmful gender stereotypes that persist beyond the school setting (Bassi et al., 2016).

Inappropriate relationships between students and teachers can also deter students from attending school. These interactions can involve abuse of power, harassment or even exploitation, all of which create unsafe spaces for students, particularly girls (Hernandez et al., 2018). In the broader school environment, gender inequality may also be reflected in inadequate school policies relating to sexual harassment, bullying or access to gender-responsive facilities, such as separate washrooms for staff and students of different genders. In many cases, the lack of strong institutional frameworks to address these issues further exacerbates the gender divide, leaving girls particularly vulnerable and limiting their ability to thrive in educational spaces.

Within the broader school environment, barriers to education for girls include the high cost of schooling (as noted above), inadequate facilities and infrastructure, SRGBV and a scarcity of female teachers (or other female role models) (UNESCO, 2023a). For example, many schools lack essential infrastructure, including classrooms, access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities, the latter of which poses significant challenges for girls, particularly when they are menstruating (Chinyama et al., 2019). Additionally, overall inadequate access to educational materials, such as textbooks and learning resources, can exacerbate inequalities in educational outcomes. Limited transportation options and the long distances to reach school, especially in rural areas, further hinder access to education, particularly for girls (Devnarain & Matthias, 2011).

2.3 Barriers to gender equality at the policy level

The barriers to gender equality in and through education include discriminatory policies that restrict access to education for pregnant girls or young mothers, and inadequate or weakly enforced legislation or policies designed to address SRGBV and harmful practices such as early and forced marriage (UNESCO, 2020). There are several formal commitments in place, particularly within the frameworks of the partnership compacts that inform GPE funding priorities, to promote gender-responsive and inclusive approaches in areas such as teacher training, curricula planning, policy and monitoring mechanisms. These commitments emphasize the need for systems to be more attuned to gender-specific challenges and the need to create an environment in which children of all genders can thrive equally in educational settings, but the reality in many GPE partner countries shows a persistent gap between policy and practice. Research indicates that teachers and school

administrators are often insufficiently trained in gender-responsive pedagogies. Without adequate training, support or resources, educators struggle to incorporate inclusive teaching methods and practices that address the distinct needs of children of different genders. The lack of institutional support further limits schools' capacity to implement meaningful changes, and this creates a disconnect between policy aspirations and actual outcomes on the ground. While many countries have adopted gender equality policies on paper, they lack the political will, resources and institutional frameworks to implement them effectively (Unterhalter, 2019).

The absence of comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems widens the gap between policy commitments and their practical implementation; the resulting lack of comprehensive data disaggregated by gender, location and socio-economic status often leads to inadequate targeting of interventions aimed at improving gender equality (Shepherd, 2019). Many countries do not have the necessary infrastructure to assess the effectiveness of gender-responsive approaches in education, and so even well-intended initiatives often go unmeasured or unenforced. Without data collection and feedback mechanisms, it is difficult to identify areas for improvement or hold educational institutions accountable for ensuring that gender equality is promoted effectively in schools.

3. OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROJECTS

The six GPE KIX projects discussed in this report focused on four aspects of achieving gender equality in and through education: exploring, developing, testing and/or scaling innovative education programs and practices. Collectively, the projects aimed to improve education access, quality and outcomes for girls and other marginalized learners.

Table 1 contains key details about each project, and the sections that follow discuss each project in more depth.

Table 1: Overview of the research projects, partners and implementing countries

Project	Partners	Implementing countries
Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies on Students' Participation and Learning Achievement at Secondary School During the Pandemic and Beyond (Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies)	• Institute of Education and Research, Dhaka University (Lead) • Tribhuvan University, Open and Distance Education Center • Vietnam Institute of Educational Sciences • Royal University of Bhutan, Samtse College of Education • Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e	• Bangladesh • Bhutan • Nepal • Timor-Leste • Vietnam
Improving Knowledge on Gender Norms to Promote Gender Equality in Schools in Africa (Improving Knowledge and Gender Norms)	• Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) (Lead) • Laboratoire sur les Transformations Économiques et Sociales (LARTES-IFAN)	• Burkina Faso • Chad • Democratic Republic of the Congo • São Tomé and Príncipe

Project	Partners	Implementing countries
Scaling a Youth-Led Social Support and Mentorship Program to Improve the Quality of Education for Marginalized Girls (Scaling a Youth-Led Social Support and Mentorship Program)	• CAMFED Tanzania (Lead) • University of Dar es Salam, Centre for Educational Research and Professional Development • University of Cambridge, Research for Equitable Access and Learning Centre	• Tanzania • Zambia • Zimbabwe
School Leaders as Agents of Change Toward Equity and Inclusion (School Leaders as Agents of Change)	• Foundation for Information Technology Education and Development (FIT-ED) (Co-Lead) • The Open University, United Kingdom (Co-Lead) • Kathmandu University • Allama Iqbal Open University • Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan	• Afghanistan • Nepal • Pakistan
Strategies to Prevent Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Foster Equity in Rural Schools (Strategies to Prevent SGBV)	• The Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE) (Lead) • Alternatives	• Haiti • Honduras • Nicaragua
The Forum of African Women Educationalists' Gender-Responsive School Model as an Innovative Response to the Challenge of Gender Equality (FAWE Gender-Responsive School Model)	• FAWE (Lead) • Laboratoire de Recherche sur les Transformations Économiques et Sociales (LARTES-IFAN) • Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie	• Burundi • Democratic Republic of the Congo • Mali • Senegal

3.1 Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies

The goal of this project was to enhance participation and learning achievement among secondary school students in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Timor-Leste and Vietnam, with a particular focus on girls, students with disabilities and other marginalized learners. It evaluated the effects of a professional development intervention known as gender and inclusive pedagogies (GIP) on teachers' attitudes, self-efficacy and classroom practices and on students' participation and learning achievements. GIP is a four-tier teacher training program that covers various aspects of gender-responsive and inclusive education — for example, recognizing student diversity, fostering inclusive school cultures and implementing inclusive teaching and assessment practices.

The project used a mixed methods experimental research design to measure the impact of the GIP intervention at baseline, midline and endline across experimental and control schools (60 experimental and 60 control schools in total across the five countries). Quantitative data was collected from teachers in all the schools through a pre- and post-intervention questionnaire. Students' academic achievement and school belongingness (i.e., how strongly they felt connected to their school and how much they felt they belonged) data were gathered as a measure of inclusion (using tests and a standardized scale, respectively). Teachers' inclusive classroom practices and students' participation were assessed using classroom participant observations and a checklist. Qualitative data was collected from selected teachers, school leaders and students at the experimental schools through individual interviews and focus group discussions, as well as teachers' reflection journals.

Findings from the study were used to engage local education stakeholders and policymakers in each country to identify and promote mechanisms to effectively sustain and scale the GIP intervention.

3.2 Improving Knowledge and Gender Norms

The goal of this project was to improve understanding of how gender norms across society and institutions can undermine or promote girls' experiences and success in formal education throughout Burkina Faso, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo and São Tomé and Príncipe. Specifically, the project focused on generating knowledge and data on gender norms to help education stakeholders better understand barriers in the education system and develop tools to achieve change.

Using participatory, innovative and adaptive approaches, the project team investigated key innovations in gender equality and analyzed contextual factors that influence the integration of gender equality into education systems. Data generated

from this project was used to improve stakeholders' knowledge of change and power dynamics in education, and to gather evidence on best practices to support social innovations on gender equality in and through education.

3.3 Scaling a Youth-Led Social Support and Mentorship Program

The goal of this project was to improve secondary education retention rates and learning outcomes, as well as post-school transitions, for marginalized girls in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It aimed to understand government perspectives on adopting and sustainably scaling elements of a youth-led social support and mentorship program called the Learner Guide program.

Developed by CAMFED (Campaign for Female Education), the Learner Guide program aims to help girls in secondary school improve their self-development and foundational learning skills, and encourages them to stay in school and improve their learning outcomes. The primary support mechanism is provided by Learner Guides, young women who volunteer in their local schools to deliver a structured life skills and well-being curriculum called My Better World, provide peer mentorship and role modelling, and create school-community linkages through home visits, thereby improving learning outcomes and reducing dropout rates. As an incentive for volunteering, the Learner Guides receive access to interest-free loans, which they can use to take advantage of business opportunities.

The project used a participatory action research approach to engage local education stakeholders and policymakers from each country and establish national scaling advisory committees. The scaling committees were tasked with advising on how the Learner Guide program could be adapted for and integrated into their respective government systems. The scaling committees met regularly, conducted school visits to observe Learner Guides in action and performed semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, Learner Guides and community members. The committee members discussed findings from these activities in national-level meetings that brought all the committees together.

Data and evidence generated from the scaling committees were used to identify which elements of the Learner Guide program were seen as priorities by the governments of the three participating countries, and opportunities and challenges related to adapting and sustainably scaling the program in each country.

3.4 School Leaders as Agents of Change

The goal of this project was to support school leaders working to improve education access and outcomes for girls, children with disabilities and other marginalized students in Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan. It aimed to develop, test and research

scaling mechanisms for a capacity-strengthening methodology known as Networked Improvement Communities (NICs) for school leaders to become agents for change in their schools and school districts.

NICs are professional learning networks in which small groups of school leaders — for example, principals or other senior school staff — collaborate to identify and address inclusion challenges in their schools, thereby enhancing their agency and ability to enact sustainable change. They provide a space for dialogue, allowing school leaders to share experiences, problems, solutions and information relating to student inclusion in school and learning opportunities.

The project explored how school leaders' agency and ability to problem-solve inclusion issues can be developed sustainably and at scale through participation in NICs and with support from a facilitator and an open learning course. Through interviews, surveys, data from the open course and participant observations in the NICs, extensive evidence about school leaders' experiences, collaboration and any changes in their attitudes and actions related to inclusion was gathered. This evidence was used to refine the overall NIC approach and guide inclusive education policy and practice in the three participating countries. Specifically, the project assessed the main factors influencing the effectiveness of NICs in each country's context, strengthened the capacity of education stakeholders to support NICs and developed models for scaling and adapting the NIC approach across the region.

3.5 Strategies to Prevent SGBV

The goal of this project was to help strengthen strategies to promote gender equality and prevent GBV in rural school contexts in Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua. Specifically, the project sought to generate empirical data to guide the treatment and prevention of violence in schools and to contribute to the development of materials and public policies aimed at addressing this issue.

A participatory action research approach, involving principals, teachers, students and families or caregivers, was used to design new tools and instruments and adapt existing ones, strengthen local knowledge and capacity, and contribute to policy proposals to incorporate SRGBV prevention into national and regional policy instruments. The methods included conducting participatory community diagnoses, mapping educational spaces and their environments, creating community biographies and identifying the network of social relations in schools. The research teams in each country used their knowledge of the current situation in the schools visited and the alliances created within them when deciding which methods to use. The purpose of using a participatory approach was to build and strengthen local knowledge on violence prevention practices, particularly for GBV, in rural school contexts in the three participating countries. The project also used participatory

methods to mobilize knowledge to strengthen local capacities and empower actors involved in addressing violence and gender bias and stereotypes in educational materials and practices.

The knowledge and evidence generated from this project were used in diverse ways. For example, the data from the participatory methods was used to strengthen the capacity of research teams in the three participating countries in the five priority topics of the project, which emerged after an initial qualitative exploration with stakeholders from the rural educational communities: gender roles and stereotypes, punishment and harmful practices toward children and adolescents, pregnancy in girls and adolescents, gender-based sexual violence and bullying.

3.6 FAWE Gender-Responsive School Model

The goal of this project was to provide education policymakers in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Senegal with a proven school model that is gender-responsive in its design and operation and can be scaled to support girls' success in school more effectively. The model was designed to equip teachers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to respond adequately to the learning needs of both girls and boys through the implementation of gender-aware classroom processes and practices. Teachers were trained to learn and adopt teaching practices that promote equal treatment and participation of both girls and boys in the classroom and the wider school community.

In addition to the gender-responsive pedagogy training for teachers, other key features of the model included gender-responsive school management training for school directors and principals, community involvement in school management, gender-responsive school infrastructure, science, technology and mathematics programs for girls, and empowerment training for girls and boys. FAWE runs empowerment clubs called Tuseme — the Kiswahili word for "Let us speak out" — that aim to improve young people's ability to make informed decisions and resist negative influences. The research project targeted 10 schools in each of the four project countries. Some schools had implemented the model a few years earlier and were already benefiting from it; others were introduced to the model at the start of the research. The research had both a quantitative component (questionnaires for principals, teachers and students) and a qualitative component (semi-structured interviews with principals and teachers, focus groups with students and parents' associations and the collecting of former beneficiaries' life stories through interviews and classroom observations).

The knowledge and evidence generated from this research have been used to support policymakers in implementing a variety of gender-responsive education models. The data from the research has been disseminated in conferences, workshops and dialogues both regionally and globally.

4. FINDINGS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INNOVATIONS TO ADDRESS GENDER INEQUALITIES

The six research projects focus on diverse aspects of gender equality in and through education. However, they share a goal of exploring, developing, testing and/or scaling innovative education programs, practices and approaches, and aim to enhance education access, quality and outcomes for girls and other marginalized learners. Collectively, these projects have made a meaningful contribution to the existing knowledge and discourse in this field by producing important new evidence that can be used to address gender inequalities in education at national, regional and global levels. The findings from these projects are synthesized below and organized thematically.

4.1 Gender and inclusive pedagogies

The delivery of gender-responsive and inclusive education depends heavily on the pedagogical practices and approaches teachers use. However, many teachers lack the necessary training, skills and attitudes to accommodate the diverse learning needs, abilities and identities of all students. To address this challenge, several of the GPE KIX projects discussed in this report focused on enhancing teachers' capacity to implement inclusive pedagogies. These projects generated valuable new evidence on the development, implementation and impact of inclusive teaching methods.

Teacher training and professional development are effective tools for promoting the use of gender and inclusive pedagogies. The findings from the Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies project show that the GIP training intervention positively influenced teachers' attitudes toward and perceived efficacy in implementing inclusive pedagogies, as well as their actual use of these pedagogies (Zinnah & Ahsan, 2024). Following the GIP training in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Timor-Leste and Vietnam, teachers implemented a variety of inclusive pedagogical practices — for example, using diverse teaching strategies and assessment techniques to accommodate different learning styles and abilities, employing gender-neutral language, monitoring gender parity in classroom discussions, selecting teaching materials that represent diverse identities, creating more physically accessible classrooms and establishing ground rules for inclusive behaviour (Institute of Education and Research, 2024; Vinh et al., 2024; Zinnah & Ahsan, 2024). During a post-GIP training interview, one teacher from Bhutan shared, "When assessing student understanding, I use a variety of methods that accommodate different learning styles

and preferences" (Wangmo et al., 2024, p. 29). Another teacher from Bhutan reported, "We are printing question paper in larger fonts for students with difficulty in vision. We give extra time for slow writers in unit tests and exams" (Wangmo et al., 2024, p. 30).

In Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Senegal, findings from the FAWE Gender-Responsive School Model project suggested that gender-responsive teacher training is an essential precursor to implementing inclusive pedagogies and supporting girls' education. This type of training was shown to help teachers analyze school textbooks and other teaching materials to identify sexist stereotypes (FAWE, 2023). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, one teacher reported, "When I'm planning a lesson, I do my best to ensure that there's no difference between [how I engage with] boys and girls [. . .] I send both girls and boys to the blackboard" (FAWE, 2024c, p. 51). This feedback highlights that teachers trained through FAWE's gender-responsive model are increasingly attuned to the specific needs of girls and boys and are integrating this awareness into their teaching practices (FAWE, 2024c).

"When assessing student understanding, I use a variety of methods that accommodate different learning styles and preferences"

"We are printing question paper in larger fonts for students with difficulty in vision. We give extra time for slow writers in unit tests and exams"

Teachers in Bhutan during post-GIP interview

BOX 1.
CASE STUDY: USE OF INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGIES IN FAWE'S GENDER-RESPONSIVE SCHOOL MODEL PROJECT

FAWE's Gender-Responsive School Model project focused on providing policymakers with a model that can be scaled to support girls' success in school more effectively. Integrating gender equality within five dimensions — management, pedagogy, learning, materials, school environment and community involvement — was a key step in the process.

To ensure the FAWE Gender-Responsive Education Model supported inclusive pedagogies, the research team worked with teachers to support them in adapting teaching processes to meet the specific needs of both girls and boys. The adaptation process included, for example, taking a gender-sensitive approach to planning, teaching, classroom management and evaluations, with a focus on eliminating gender bias in materials and using activities that are interesting for everyone and draw on a variety of pedagogical approaches.

In general, the model seems to have had a positive impact on girls' school retention. Among the students who used the model, 82.8% felt that it had contributed to keeping them in school (LARTES, 2023). One teacher from Mali stated, "Here at the Torokorobougou school, the environment has changed a lot thanks to our participation in the various training courses organized by FAWE [. . .]. [We have] started a Tuseme club, separated and labelled toilets, [and held] awareness-raising sessions that increased library use" (FAWE, 2023, p.113).

The project findings suggested that gender-responsive management, gender-responsive pedagogy and the Tuseme clubs had the greatest impact on participants. The project team concluded that these components contribute directly to strengthening students' and teachers' capacity to support girls' education.

Source: Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie et al., 2023.

The use of gender-sensitive and inclusive pedagogies can enhance education outcomes for all students. For example, results from the Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies project show that the GIP training intervention had a positive impact on girls' education outcomes. In Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Timor-Leste and Vietnam, teachers' use of GIP practices led to improvements in overall student attendance and class participation, including among girls (Khanal & Acharya, 2024; Vinh et al., 2024; Wangmo et al., 2024; Zinnah & Ahsan, 2024). One teacher from Timor-Leste who received the GIP training explained, "Now I always give priority for girls and marginalized children while answering my oral questions in the classroom — their participation and learning interest are increasing day by day" (Zinnah & Ahsan, 2024, p. 13). In Bangladesh and Bhutan, statistically significant improvements were also observed in girls' academic achievement, including grades and test scores, following the GIP intervention (Wahiduzzaman et al., 2024; Wangmo et al., 2024).

Among the students in the schools that leveraged the FAWE Gender-Responsive School Model, which has a component that focuses on inclusive pedagogies, 82.8% of the girls stated that it encouraged them to stay in school (Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie et al., 2023). The components of the model that had the greatest impact on girls' education outcomes were gender-responsive management, gender-responsive pedagogy and the Tuseme clubs. These components helped foster a learning environment in which girls felt valued and supported, and this increased their engagement and active class participation.

Exposure to gender-sensitive and inclusive pedagogies can positively influence gender dynamics among students. This was demonstrated by the Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies project. The GIP intervention in this project led to increased cooperation and collaboration between male and female students in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Timor-Leste (Zinnah & Ahsan, 2024). One teacher noted, "I observe that their mentality has changed. Nowadays boys and girls work together; I also think that they sit together. Gender discrimination has been avoided" (Zinnah & Ahsan, 2024, p. 12). Additionally, the teachers' application of GIP practices resulted in more equitable gender participation in classroom discussions and activities (Institute of Education and Research, 2024).

4.2 Working with school leaders

School leaders, such as principals, play a critical role in creating inclusive and equitable education environments in which all students, regardless of gender or other characteristics, have equal opportunities to learn, grow and succeed. Their leadership is pivotal in shaping school cultures, policies and practices that support gender equality. Two of the GPE KIX projects therefore focused on strengthening the capacity

of school leaders to recognize and address barriers to equity and inclusion in their schools. These projects generated important new insights about working with school leaders to promote gender equality in and through education.

School leaders' support is critical for the success of education initiatives addressing gender equality and inclusion. In the School Leaders as Agents of Change project, the decision to collaborate directly with school leaders to address inclusion challenges was based on their pivotal role as change agents within school systems (Dawadi & Wolfenden, 2022). Likewise, a key finding from the Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies project was that support from principals and senior management in schools is essential for the success of interventions promoting gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogies (Institute of Education and Research, 2024). Schools with proactive and supportive leadership are better positioned to implement these initiatives and ensure they receive the necessary attention and resources to succeed.

The agency of school leaders to recognize and address gender equality and inclusion issues is constrained by limited knowledge about gender equality and inclusion, misconceptions about the role of school leaders and prevailing institutional norms and practices. In the School Leaders as Agents of Change project, initial background surveys and semi-structured interviews with school leaders in Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan revealed a widespread lack of understanding about inclusive education issues and leaders' roles in promoting inclusive education in their schools (Dawadi & Wolfenden, 2022; Wolfenden et al., 2024). Although most school leaders across the three countries believed that inclusive education means all children have full and equal access to and participation in education, no matter their background or circumstances, many were unaware of any national inclusion policies set by their Ministry of Education (Dawadi & Wolfenden, 2022). Furthermore, over 70% of the school leaders surveyed had never participated in any professional development or training on inclusion (Dawadi & Wolfenden, 2022). Many also felt that they either were not responsible for promoting inclusion in their schools or lacked the means and authority to address inclusion issues effectively (Allama Iqbal Open University, 2022; Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, 2022; Kathmandu University, 2022). As one school leader from Pakistan shared during the initial data collection stage, "If we get government orders along with resources and funding, we can do it. Otherwise, we can't work on inclusion by ourselves" (Cooper et al., 2023, para. 2). In all three countries, very few school leaders reported collecting or using data to better understand inclusion challenges in their schools (Dawadi & Wolfenden, 2022).

Training in gender-responsive management has enabled school leaders to better support teachers in using inclusive pedagogies. In the FAWE Gender-Responsive School Model project, school leaders were trained in gender-responsive management that integrates equality into school administration practices and pedagogy (Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie et al., 2023). This training focused on

supporting the active participation of female teachers in school management committees, training school staff on gender-responsive pedagogy and creating and/or strengthening mothers' associations and arrangements that facilitate placing female teachers in leadership positions. The research findings suggest that, after participating in this training, most principals supported their teaching staff in incorporating gender-responsive pedagogy: 94.2% in Burundi, 91.7% in Mali and 68.4% in Senegal (Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie et al., 2023).

School leaders' agency and ability to address inclusion issues can be developed through professional networks and collaborative action. In the School Leaders as Agents of Change project, collaboration in the NICs provided school leaders in Nepal and Pakistan with new forms of support and inspiration and fostered a sense of collective agency (Dawadi et al., 2024). The participating school leaders developed a broader awareness of inclusion issues in their schools and experimented with activities to address them. For example, in Nepal, school leaders who participated in the NICs took action to improve student absenteeism rates by providing extra support to girls during menstruation and organizing a free bus service for male and female students (Dawadi et al., 2024). In Pakistan, school leaders worked closely with parents, teachers and religious groups to provide financial support for children from very low-income families (Dawadi et al., 2024) and offer more flexible school hours for working street children (Cooper et al., 2023). In a post-intervention survey, school leaders reported that they valued the NICs as a forum in which to connect with other school leaders, and credited them for enhancing their motivation and commitment to address inclusion issues (Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, 2024; Dawadi et al., 2024).

In Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Timor-Leste, school leaders who collaborated with school management committees and teachers who received GIP training were motivated and equipped to tackle critical infrastructure and resource challenges related to gender equality and inclusion (Institute of Education and Research, 2024). Initiatives included, for example, constructing separate washroom facilities for boys and girls, building accessibility ramps for students with disabilities and providing sanitary napkins for girls who were menstruating.

BOX 2.
CASE STUDY: USE OF NETWORKED IMPROVEMENT COMMUNITIES (NICS) IN THE SCHOOL LEADERS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE PROJECT

The School Leaders as Agents of Change project focused on enabling school leaders to work toward improving education access and learning for girls, children with disabilities and other marginalized students in Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan. A key strategy in this process was the use of the NICs capacity-strengthening methodology.

NICs are professional learning networks in which small groups of school leaders — for example, principals or other senior school staff — collaborate to identify and address inclusion challenges in their schools, thereby enhancing their agency and ability to enact sustainable change. NICs provide a space for dialogue, allowing school leaders to share experiences, problems, solutions and information related to student inclusion in school and learning.

The NICs approach was supplemented with support from a facilitator and an open learning course that included activities and assignments for school leaders, an inclusion audit, a problem tree to highlight key inclusion issues and guidance to facilitate small changes toward improving inclusion, using the structured plan, do, study, act (PDSA) cycle. Participants were encouraged to support one another in their efforts to address inclusion challenges in their schools, such as academic achievement among students with disabilities, out-of-school children in their respective communities, school-based safety for girls, bullying and fluctuating attendance rates across different student groups.

The project aimed to build a knowledge base for widespread NIC use and scaling across GPE partner countries by creating the tools and resources that school leaders need to continue with adaptive implementation (i.e., the ongoing implementation of the NICs and the development of associated tools and resources based on the school leaders' own experiences and needs). For example, the project findings were used to create open resources in local languages to guide school leaders in addressing small-scale inclusion problems within their schools. The resources draw on the experience and expertise of other school leaders who have encountered similar challenges, encouraging them to work together to experiment with potential solutions.

Source: Dawadi et al., 2024; GPE, 2023

4.3 Comprehensive learning and social support for marginalized girls

Despite substantial global investments in improving education access, marginalized children in underserved communities, especially girls, continue to face challenges that hinder their ability to achieve better learning and life outcomes. Efforts to address barriers to equitable, quality education often fail to meet the specific needs of girls, who require more holistic and tailored support to remain in school and successfully complete their education. Two of the GPE KIX projects aimed to address this issue. They generated new knowledge about the effectiveness of strategies designed to provide comprehensive learning and social support for marginalized girls.

Peer mentorship can enhance education outcomes for marginalized girls. In Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, the Scaling a Youth-Led Social Support and Mentorship Program project found that the peer mentorship provided by Learner Guides helped improve marginalized girls' secondary school attendance and completion rates, literacy levels and academic performance (Chimuka & Ciampi, 2023; Maambo & Ciampi, 2023; Mgonda & Ciampi, 2023). In their capacity as peer mentors and role models, Learner Guides offer personalized guidance, motivation and support to help female students overcome education barriers, boost their confidence and equip them with the tools they need to succeed academically and personally (Brasys et al., 2021).

Project partners, including government stakeholders, also recognized the peer mentorship offered by Learner Guides as a valuable complement to the support provided by teachers and guidance counsellors (Ciampi et al., 2023). Female students feel safe reporting challenges they experience to Learner Guides, who are close in age to them and have been in the same or similar situations (Brasys et al., 2021). This relatability creates a very different relationship between the Learner Guides and the girls from the one the girls have with even trusted teachers and guidance counsellors. As a representative from Zimbabwe's Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education explained during an interview, "The Learner Guide program provides learners with a mode to address sensitive issues which the teachers cannot address due to unequal power dynamics between the teacher and the learner" (Chimuka & Ciampi, 2023, p. 9). Government officials from all three participating countries noted that integrating the peer mentorship approach provided by Learner Guides within their national education systems was a priority (Ciampi et al., 2023).

After-school empowerment clubs can improve the self-confidence, self-esteem and decision-making skills of students who are marginalized. In Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, the FAWE Gender-Responsive School Model project implemented empowerment clubs called Tuseme, which cater to both girls and boys who are marginalized. For girls, the focus is on building their self-confidence, self-esteem and decision-making and negotiation skills to overcome

gender-related barriers. For boys, the focus is on helping them challenge and transform oppressive attitudes such as machismo, bullying and sexism, and fostering a genuine commitment to gender equality. FAWE's research indicates that these clubs offer a supportive environment in which the students can discuss issues openly; this ability boosts their confidence and motivation and that in turn has led to improved academic performance (Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie et al., 2023).

Establishing strong school-to-community linkages is an effective strategy for delivering comprehensive support to girls who are marginalized. Findings from the Scaling a Youth-Led Social Support and Mentorship Program project in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe showed that Learner Guides serve as important links between schools, parents, caregivers and community members. Living and working within the community, Learner Guides conduct home visits with female students who are struggling to stay in or complete school, thus bridging gaps and building strong support systems that extend beyond the classroom (Ciampi et al., 2023). This support is both different from and complementary to that provided by teachers and guidance counsellors, largely because the Learner Guides are physically and emotionally closer to the female students. As one teacher from Tanzania noted during a focus group discussion, "As teachers, we cannot see beyond school, but these Learner Guides have been useful in following up on students with issues, linking us with parents, and have always come to the rescue of students, especially girls who have a higher risk of dropping out from school" (Mgonda & Ciampi, 2023, p. 6). This sentiment was echoed by a teacher from Zimbabwe who shared, "The biggest difference they have is that the Learner Guides are more of peers to the learners than the teachers. The other difference is that the Learner Guides have more access to the learners than the teachers in terms of follow-ups and spending time with learners because they live in the communities where the learners also live" (Chimuka & Ciampi, 2023, p. 8). Government officials in all three countries identified the school-to-community linkages provided by Learner Guides as a valuable supplement to the overstretched teaching and counselling resources within schools (Ciampi et al., 2023).

Life skills training can improve marginalized girls' achievements in secondary school and beyond. In Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, the Scaling a Youth-Led Social Support and Mentorship Program project found that the life skills developed through the Learner Guide program played a crucial role in enhancing the success of female students both academically and personally. In the educational context, this life skills training helped reduce absenteeism and school dropout rates among marginalized girls, while also enhancing their academic performance (Mgonda & Ciampi, 2023). Outside of school, the training helped build girls' social-emotional competencies, equipping them with essential skills to help them manage their emotions, build healthy relationships and make responsible decisions. For example, in Tanzania, female students showed significant advances in their goal-setting

skills, sense of personal responsibility and self-confidence (Mgonda & Ciampi, 2023). In Zambia, the program helped female students develop leadership skills such as assertiveness and communication (Maambo & Ciampi, 2023). In Zimbabwe, female students improved their soft skills, such as self-confidence and resilience (Chimuka & Ciampi, 2023).

4.4 Gender norms and education

Education systems play a pivotal role in challenging harmful gender and social norms by fostering an environment of awareness, inclusivity and equality. Classroom dynamics often mirror the norms and values embedded and upheld in households and communities, and so it is essential to involve parents, caregivers and community members in the implementation of educational initiatives. A collaborative approach ensures that the positive attitudes and behaviours encouraged in the classroom are also promoted and reinforced at home. By adopting a whole-school approach and integrating gender-responsive and inclusive practices into early childhood education, education systems can empower individuals to question and subsequently dismantle deeply ingrained gender biases and discrimination, thereby addressing gender inequalities and stereotypes. However, there remains a gap in the evidence in terms of how gender and social norms in institutions such as schools either undermine or promote children's experiences and overall success throughout formal education. Three of the GPE KIX projects aimed to address this issue and influence the integration of gender equality into education systems by closing this knowledge gap.

Career choices are often influenced by gender norms embedded in classroom curricula and teaching practices. The findings from the Improving Knowledge on Gender Norms project in Burkina Faso and Chad suggested that these norms significantly shape girls' career aspirations by defining which roles are perceived as "suitable" or achievable (FAWE, 2024b). Girls are exposed from a very early age to both subtle and explicit messages suggesting that subjects such as science and mathematics are more appropriate for boys than girls. These stereotypes are reinforced through classroom dynamics, teachers' expectations and the scarcity of female role models in these fields of study. Curricula and extracurricular activities that emphasize traditional female roles can further restrict female students' career aspirations. Over time, these gendered educational experiences may limit girls' career choices and perpetuate occupational segregation, ultimately constraining girls' participation and success in the workforce. For example, girls may internalize prevailing biases and lose interest and confidence in their ability to pursue careers in traditionally male-dominated industries. In Chad, 45.7% of men and 46.2% of women acknowledge the influence of gender norms on girls' career choices (FAWE & LARTES, 2024). FAWE is therefore integrating a science, technology, engineering and

mathematics (STEM) component into its gender-responsive education model by providing incentives and remedial STEM workshops to encourage girls' participation in STEM subjects (Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie et al., 2023).

Emphasizing that classroom-related domestic duties are girls' responsibility negatively affects their educational attainment. The findings from the Improving Knowledge on Gender Norms project across Burkina Faso, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and São Tomé and Príncipe suggest that from the moment children enter school until the day they leave, they continuously encounter, interact with and reinforce social expectations of masculinity and femininity. For example, students are assigned maintenance tasks deemed socially appropriate for their gender as part of their daily school routine. In Burkina Faso, girls sweep the floor, fetch water, clean desks and bring food for the teacher (FAWE, 2024a). Although these tasks are seen as routine within the school setting, they play a crucial role in reinforcing the gendered division of labour in the household, preparing male and female students for dominant and subordinate roles in society, respectively (FAWE, 2024a). In Chad, 16.7% of the girls — and none of the boys — reported that domestic duties are their responsibility at school (FAWE, 2024b). These gender norms foster a culture of domesticity for girls and require them to leave the classroom frequently to perform domestic tasks, which reduces their time spent learning and negatively impacts their educational engagement.

Similarly, household domestic duties are disproportionately allocated to girls, and this restricts their ability to allocate adequate time to homework and studying. According to the findings from the Improving Knowledge on Gender Norms project, wider societal and household beliefs that domestic duties are girls' responsibility limit the time girls have for studying. This leads to many girls failing national tests and being forced to repeat school grades. For example, data from Burkina Faso showed that household duties often compete with students' school activities, resulting in a marked drop in educational performance (FAWE, 2024a). Currently, the average time spent by girls on domestic activities in the country is 2.1 hours, compared to just 1.6 hours for boys (FAWE, 2024a). Some girls in rural areas can spend up to six hours per day on domestic activities (FAWE, 2024a). Similarly, research in the Democratic Republic of the Congo found that household domestic activities directly and negatively impact girls' educational outcomes (FAWE, 2024c). According to one participant, "the workload assigned to girls is not in line with success at school. This inequitable division of labour in society gives boys a better chance than girls to thrive and succeed at school" (FAWE, 2024c, p. 72). One female student spoke about the gender norms that prevent her from completing her schoolwork, stating, "I'm obliged to prepare and clean [at home] because I'm a girl. I have to do it after my classes. So, automatically, I don't really have time to rest or study. I have an older brother who goes off to play

basketball after school, but I have to get home quickly to do the housework so that when he comes home in the evening, he can find something to eat and can relax" (FAWE, 2024c, p. 40).

Gender and social norms can outweigh educational policies relating to gender equality in and through education. Even when policies are in place, deeply ingrained gender and social norms can eclipse their effectiveness and have a more profound impact on students' education access, quality and outcomes. For example, the Improving Knowledge on Gender Norms project examined educational policies in Burkina Faso that permit pregnant girls to stay in school or return after childbirth and found that community gender norms often undermine these policies (FAWE, 2024a). According to one school director in Burkina Faso, "when a student is pregnant, other students (or her family) don't accept that she may be admitted to class" (FAWE, 2024a, p. 38). Similarly, in Timor-Leste, the project team found that while educational policies promote the inclusion of all children in schools, many children with physical disabilities stay at home because their parents or caregivers do not allow them to go to school (Institute of Education and Research, 2024). In both of these contexts, pervasive gender and social norms undermine the effectiveness of policies designed to promote educational equality and inclusion.

Parental, caregiver and community support and involvement are crucial for the success of education initiatives designed to address gender equality and inclusion. During the Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies project, some parents or caregivers initially resisted new teaching methods that encouraged mixed-gender interactions in classrooms (Institute of Education and Research, 2024). To overcome this challenge, principals organized teacher-parent meetings and brought the issue to school management committees, fostering greater understanding and support among parents or caregivers (Institute of Education and Research, 2024). This approach ultimately led to a positive shift in parental or caregiver attitudes toward the new teaching methods (Institute of Education and Research, 2024). Similarly, in the School Leaders as Agents of Change project, securing parental support was a challenge for school leaders working to address inclusion issues in their schools (Dawadi et al., 2024). In Pakistan, one school leader who tried to increase the enrolment and attendance of street children at her school encountered opposition from parents who were reluctant to have these students enrolled alongside their children (Dawadi et al., 2024). Through targeted collaborations with parents, local religious groups, teachers and students, she was eventually able to implement a pilot system that included flexible study hours for street children (Dawadi et al., 2024). These examples demonstrate the importance of engaging parents or caregivers and community members to promote the success of education initiatives addressing gender equality and inclusion.

4.5 School-related gender-based violence

SRGBV is a global issue that can adversely affect students' health and well-being and often results in diminished academic performance and higher dropout rates (Gender at Work, 2021). It affects all genders, but girls are particularly affected by it. The GPE KIX project Strategies to Prevent SGBV aimed to increase awareness, understanding and prevention of SRGBV. The project team adopted a participatory action research approach to generate new data and develop locally led awareness and prevention strategies to inform public policies aimed at reducing violence in schools.

Unsafe conditions during the journey to and from school can amplify the risk of SRGBV and dissuade families or caregivers from sending students to school. Parents worry about the potential violence their children could face on their way to school. Across Haiti and Nicaragua, findings from the Strategies to Prevent SGBV project highlighted a link between the distance girls travel to schools in rural areas and their level of insecurity (CLADE, 2023). For example, in Nicaragua, 24% of girls from rural areas reported feeling unsafe because of the risk of street harassment and assault and high crime rates (CLADE, 2023); in Haiti, 30% of female students reported experiencing sexual harassment on their way to school (CLADE, 2023). Many communities have responded to this issue by developing strategies to enhance the safety of children travelling to school — for example, organizing peer-to-peer walking groups in high-risk zones.

School infrastructure significantly influences students' educational experiences because it can either foster safe environments or exacerbate SRGBV. When school facilities are designed using a gender-sensitive approach, they can significantly boost students' well-being, attendance and academic achievement. Features such as separate and clean washrooms, well-lit pathways and secure classrooms contribute to a sense of safety and dignity. Conversely, inadequate or poorly designed infrastructure can leave students, particularly girls, susceptible to harassment, abuse and discrimination. For example, findings from the Strategies to Prevent SGBV project in Haiti showed that insufficient and inadequate infrastructure — such as a lack of gender-segregated washrooms, limited play spaces and a lack of fences — heightens girls' vulnerability to violence. Additionally, the majority of school-related violence against girls was found to occur near washrooms, which were often situated in isolated areas (CLADE, 2023). This underscores the importance of addressing and preventing violence not only in the classroom but also in the broader school environment.

In educational settings, girls are frequently exploited through coercive sexual encounters with teachers, who offer improved academic treatment in return. Findings from the Strategies to Prevent SGBV project showed that this type of exploitation not only damages the integrity of the education system but also perpetuates a cycle of violence and inequality. The abuse fosters fear and mistrust,

eroding girls' confidence and self-worth while reinforcing harmful gender norms. In Haiti, parents reported that teachers often tried to coerce girls into sexuality activity in exchange for guaranteed academic success. Those who refused were harassed or saw their academic grades negatively affected (CLADE, 2023). Additionally, 25% of girls in Haiti reported having experienced sexual harassment in or around schools; in Nicaragua, the same proportion dropped out of school because teachers sexually harassed them (CLADE, 2023).

Girls and their families or caregivers frequently do not report SRGBV because of a widespread fear of retaliation from teachers and school administrators. Findings from the Strategies to Prevent SGBV project revealed that the power dynamics in schools can foster an environment in which victims feel isolated and powerless. Fear of retribution — such as receiving lower grades, facing unjust disciplinary action or even expulsion — often discourages them from seeking justice or support. In Honduras, it was noted that less than 1% of girls who experienced violence in schools reported it (UNICEF, cited in CLADE, 2023). Furthermore, in Haiti, there are no sanctions for perpetrators of violence, especially if the perpetrator is a teacher or part of the school administration. Girls who experience sexual violence may also feel guilty about it because of established gender norms. The project findings revealed a widespread tendency to blame girls for sexual violence because of a belief that if they were assaulted, they "asked for it" (CLADE, 2023). In Haiti, the project team worked to break the silence and counter the stigma by creating spaces for dialogue and the examination of narratives that produce and reproduce violence to shift cultural patterns and practices (CLADE, 2023).

Eradicating SRGBV effectively requires a comprehensive, system-wide approach. Findings from the Strategies to Prevent SGBV project in Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua revealed that SRGBV manifests in various forms, including physical, sexual and psychological abuse, all of which disproportionately affect girls and reinforce harmful gender norms (CLADE, 2023). The perception of SRGBV as "routine" or "natural" creates an environment in which violence is normalized and victims are discouraged from seeking help, thus perpetuating cycles of silence and impunity. For example, corporal punishment in classrooms is not only normalized but also expected by parents and school administrators. Project data from all three participating countries showed that parents often encourage teachers to use corporal punishment to enforce respect (CLADE, 2023). A comprehensive, system-wide effort involving principals, teachers, parents and students is required to address the issue of violence in schools.

Participatory action research is a powerful tool for raising awareness of and preventing and addressing SRGBV. In the Strategies to Prevent SGBV project, the use of participatory action research to involve principals, teachers, students and families or caregivers not only enhanced participants' ability to recognize different forms of SRGBV, but also deepened their understanding of the problem and facilitated

the development of tailored, locally relevant solutions. In Haiti, the project's use of participatory action research led to a noticeable shift in attitudes to SRGBV, particularly sexual violence and the use of corporal punishment by teachers and principals (CLADE, 2024). Leaders of women's rights organizations working in selected rural schools reported significant changes in teachers' and principals' perspectives (CLADE, 2024). Similarly, in Honduras, the project's participatory action research approach increased awareness of SRGBV — in particular, recognition of issues such as corporal punishment and bullying — among principals, teachers, students and families or caregivers in rural schools (CLADE, 2024). One student summed up the impact the intervention had on them, stating, "Thanks to this project, I have learned to avoid gender-based violence and bullying. I have stopped engaging in these behaviours and have also helped my classmates do the same" (CLADE, 2024, p. 8). In Nicaragua, the project's participatory action research approach led not only to a transformation in attitudes to SRGBV but also to the implementation of practical measures to prevent violence in schools, such as monitoring high-risk areas, including the routes to school, washrooms and playgrounds (CLADE, 2024).

4.6 EdTech for inclusion

EdTech refers to digital tools — including hardware, software and digital platforms — and educational practices aimed at enhancing teaching, learning and educational administration. There is mixed evidence about the impact of EdTech and whether it addresses or inadvertently reinforces gender and other types of inequalities in education (UNESCO, 2023b). Two of the GPE KIX projects incorporated EdTech components and methodologies to support gender equality and inclusion. Their findings indicated that EdTech can play a critical role in fostering inclusive pedagogies and supporting girls and other marginalized learners, but it must be integrated thoughtfully to address context-specific challenges.

EdTech can bridge gaps in accessibility and inclusion for students who have disabilities. In the Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies project, teachers who underwent GIP training recognized that technology is a potentially valuable tool to help support and accommodate marginalized students, including children who have disabilities. For example, in Bangladesh, secondary school students with disabilities were provided with Android cell phones equipped with built-in support applications. This positively affected their attendance, participation and learning outcomes by enabling them to access and engage with educational content more easily, allowing them to learn at their own pace and in ways that best suited their abilities (Zinnah & Ahsan, 2024). In this context, EdTech helped to close gaps in accessibility and inclusion for students with disabilities.

EdTech can play a role in the development and implementation of GIP. As part of the GIP intervention conducted in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Timor-Leste and Vietnam, teachers were trained to integrate EdTech as part of their inclusive pedagogy. A learning management system (LMS), WhatsApp group and Facebook page were established so the teachers could share videos and photographs of their teaching practices with GIP elements incorporated into them. These online platforms enabled the teachers to learn from one another and exchange ideas about implementing inclusive pedagogies across schools (Institute of Education and Research, 2023). This is an excellent example of how EdTech can be used to foster a supportive community of practice (CoP) among teachers who are dedicated to inclusivity and accessibility.

EdTech can be used to facilitate professional development and collective action aimed at addressing issues relating to inclusion. The School Leaders as Agents of Change project used an open learning course to facilitate interactions and learning among school leaders who were participating in NICs. The open course operated on a digital platform that the school leaders could access either online or offline. It included case studies and videos from different contexts, as well as a discussion forum in which the school leaders could ask questions, share their ideas and highlight experiences related to addressing inclusion issues in their schools (TPD@Scale Coalition for the Global South, 2024). This example underscores how EdTech can be used to equip school leaders with the tools and knowledge they need to effectively address inclusion challenges in their schools.

5. SCALING GENDER-RESPONSIVE EDUCATION MODELS

A key focus of the GPE KIX projects was addressing knowledge gaps about how to scale gender-responsive education models, including innovative programs, practices and approaches. These models included the following:

- **Strategies to dismantle gender biases and stereotypes** and change power dynamics in education (Improving Knowledge and Gender Norms project).
- **Gender and inclusive pedagogies (GIP):** A professional development intervention to enhance secondary teachers' attitudes, self-efficacy and use of gender-responsive and inclusive teaching practices (Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies project).
- **Networked improvement communities (NICs):** A capacity-strengthening methodology to enhance school leaders' agency and ability to address inclusion issues in their schools and school districts (School Leaders as Agents of Change project).
- **Learner Guide program:** A youth-led social support and mentorship program to strengthen secondary school girls' self-development, foundational learning skills and learning outcomes (Scaling a Youth-Led Social Support and Mentorship Program project).
- **Gender-responsive school model:** A school model designed to equip teachers with gender-aware classroom processes and practices to respond adequately to the learning needs of both girls and boys (FAWE Gender-Responsive School Model project).
- **Gender-based violence prevention initiative:** A participatory action research initiative to empower members of local education communities to identify SRGBV and develop context-specific prevention tools and strategies (Strategies to Prevent SGBV project).

5.1 Scaling pathways

In its research on scaling impact, IDRC has identified five distinct pathways to scale: the program pathway; policy pathway; behaviours, practice and skills pathway; product and technology pathway; and methodology pathway (McLean & Gargani, 2019). The GPE KIX projects included in this synthesis report explored four of these pathways to scale their gender-responsive education models, often using multiple pathways simultaneously.

The **program pathway** to scale involves the development of a new program; the replication, adaptation or expansion of an existing program; or the implementation of quality improvements to an existing program, as informed by evidence (McLean

& Gargani, 2019, p. 176). For example, the Scaling a Youth-Led Social Support and Mentorship Program project aimed to understand government perspectives on adopting and sustainably scaling up elements of the Learner Guide program to improve quality education for marginalized girls. Both the Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies and FAWE Gender-Responsive School Model projects evaluated the effects of training and professional development programs on teachers' attitudes to, knowledge of and use of gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogies. The Strategies to Prevent SGBV project sought to expand the implementation and impact of its participatory GBV prevention initiative to more communities and schools.

The **policy pathway** to scale is defined as using evidence to inform the development of a new policy, influence the replication or adaptation of a policy to a new jurisdiction or expand the application of an existing policy (McLean & Gargani, 2019, p. 176). For example, both the Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies project and Strategies to Prevent SGBV project included elements of a policy pathway to scale by mapping the education policy landscape and seeking to improve it. This was done by identifying strategies to integrate the projects' GIP approach and participatory GBV prevention initiative, respectively, into national education policies, guidelines, curricula and teacher training programs. The Scaling a Youth-Led Social Support and Mentorship Program project team worked with government stakeholders to identify areas of alignment with national education policies and priorities to enhance opportunities to adopt and scale the Learner Guide program within national education systems.

The **behaviour, practice and skills pathway** to scale is defined as an evidence-informed behaviour, practice or skill that is adopted and applied through behaviour change instruction, practice standards or learning and training interventions. It is used to teach new skills and improve existing ones (McLean & Gargani, 2019, p. 177). The School Leaders as Agents of Change project, which explored how school leaders' agency and ability to address inclusion challenges can be developed sustainably at scale through collaboration in NICs and access to open learning resources, followed this pathway. Both the Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies project and FAWE Gender-Responsive School Model project engaged in the skills development of teachers to enhance their attitudes to, knowledge of and use of gender-responsive and inclusive classroom practices.

Finally, the methodology pathway to scale is defined as the strategic adoption and use of a particular way of knowing, doing or both to achieve and measure impact (McLean & Gargani, 2019, p. 177). All the GPE KIX projects used this pathway to some extent by sharing and disseminating findings about the process and impacts of scaling gender-responsive education models; conducting knowledge mobilization and exchange with local education stakeholders, implementers, civil society organizations, community members and research partners across countries; and strengthening the interest and ability of governments and other stakeholders to use research findings and best practices.

5.2 Scaling strategies

The GPE KIX projects used a variety of strategies to develop, test and scale their gender-responsive education models. The project teams found the following scaling strategies the most useful and impactful.

5.2.1 Policy engagement

Specific activities and approaches included:

- Mapping the current education policy landscape (e.g., national education curricula, teacher training and education, school equity and inclusion policies, violence prevention policies) to identify gaps, potential areas of alignment and opportunities for policy enhancement and engagement with education stakeholders.
- Identifying and working with relevant government stakeholders, particularly the Ministries of Education, Gender or Social Affairs, to identify national education priorities and opportunities to enhance education access, quality and outcomes for girls and other marginalized learners.
- Forming national scaling advisory committees that include government stakeholders to provide guidance on the adaptation and integration of gender-responsive education models into national education systems.
- Facilitating opportunities for policy engagement with government stakeholders (e.g., meetings, workshops, roundtables, presentations) to share data on the impact of the model, generate high-level interest and demand, and ensure the research informs education policy development and implementation.
- Conducting participatory action research with government stakeholders to ensure their perspectives and priorities drive efforts to adopt, contextualize and/or scale gender-responsive education models.

BOX 3.
CASE STUDY: ROLE OF NATIONAL SCALING ADVISORY COMMITTEES IN THE SCALING A YOUTH-LED SOCIAL SUPPORT AND MENTORSHIP PROGRAM PROJECT

The Scaling a Youth-Led Social Support and Mentorship Program project used participatory action research to understand government perspectives on adopting the Learner Guide program into national government education systems in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe and sustainably scaling it. A key step in this process was establishing national scaling advisory committees, which played a pivotal role in guiding the potential scaling efforts.

Research teams in each country used their existing local networks to identify key government agencies and individuals who could support the scaling process and invited them to join a national scaling advisory committee. In addition to decision-makers and technical experts from relevant government ministries (e.g., education, youth, community development), each scaling committee included members from local civil society organizations and education institutions (e.g., teachers, school leaders).

The scaling committees were tasked with advising on the potential adaptation of the Learner Guide program and its integration into their respective government education systems. Committee members met regularly, conducted school visits to observe Learner Guides in action and interviewed students, teachers, Learner Guides and community members using standardized questions that they developed prior to the visits and that reflected their priorities. They returned from school visits eager to consolidate their data and share what they had learned with members of other scaling committees.

In each country, when the committee members saw how the Learner Guide program played out on the ground and heard directly about its impact from different groups, they were convinced of its value. The fundamental question shifted from if the Learner Guide program should be scaled to how it could be scaled. This iterative process prompted deeper discussions and deliberations about the program and its alignment with national education priorities; committee members identified entry points and opportunities for scaling as well as country-specific practical considerations.

Source: Ciampi et al., 2023; CAMFED, 2023

5.2.2 Community engagement

Specific activities and approaches included:

- Engaging parents, caregivers and community members to enhance their understanding of and support for gender-responsive education models and help address gender norms that undermine inclusive, quality education for all children.
- Participating alongside parents, caregivers and teachers in school management committees to advocate for the adoption and scaling of gender-responsive programs and practices within schools and school districts.
- Forming alliances and coalitions with community-based organizations to build awareness of and support for scaling efforts and help ensure sustainability and impact after the project ended.

5.2.3 Knowledge mobilization

Specific activities and approaches included:

- Engaging education stakeholders at the local, regional and national levels continuously throughout the research process, from the very earliest stages to the final stages, to understand their perspectives and ideas, including preferences and needs regarding how research findings are shared.
- Creating opportunities for sustained interactivity between researchers and education stakeholders to promote the relevance and uptake of research findings.
- Disseminating knowledge about and findings on the effectiveness of gender-responsive education models through diverse channels and formats (e.g., reports, presentations, online platforms) to ensure broad reach and accessibility.
- Framing evidence for policy audiences and education implementers, ensuring its relevance to the local context and clearly articulating how it supports informed decision-making and effective policy development.

5.2.4 Capacity-strengthening

Specific activities and approaches included:

- Facilitating capacity-strengthening workshops and other forms of training with teachers, school leaders and government stakeholders to enhance their knowledge and implementation of gender-responsive education models.
- Creating and distributing open educational resources (OER), training manuals, guidelines and instructional materials to support the adoption and scaling of gender-responsive programs, practices and approaches.
- Establishing networks and CoPs that enable teachers, school leaders and government stakeholders to share experiences, ideas and best practices related to gender equality and inclusion.
- Leveraging EdTech and social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook) to connect teachers and school leaders with colleagues in other schools and foster continuous learning, professional development and collaborative action.

BOX 4.
CASE STUDY: EXPLORING VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL SCALING IN THE STRATEGIES TO PREVENT SGBV PROJECT

The Strategies to Prevent SGBV project in Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua explored both vertical and horizontal scaling strategies to address SRGBV in rural schools.

Vertical scaling targets upward institutional and policy change by working with education implementers and government stakeholders, such as ministries of Education. For example, in Haiti, the project team collaborated with government stakeholders to develop guidelines for preventing sexual violence and harmful physical punishment in schools. In Honduras, the project's findings influenced infrastructure improvements, such as making school washrooms, which were identified as high-risk spaces, safer. The aim of these collaborations was to embed SRGBV prevention into national education policy frameworks, thus ensuring a long-term impact.

Horizontal scaling targets outward expansion by replicating successful initiatives in other schools and communities. In all three participating countries, the project teams worked directly with educational communities to implement participatory action research using a gender approach, enabling teachers, students and local leaders to identify and address SRGBV. In Nicaragua, for example, women leaders known as Pioneers of the Mountain played a key role in identifying and responding to SRGBV, especially sexual violence and bullying, through community engagement and partnerships with health centres and civil society organizations.

Through this dual approach, the project not only influenced national policy discussions but also empowered local communities to take active roles in SRGBV prevention, thus demonstrating an integrated model of scaling that addresses both policy and grassroots change.

Source: CLADE, 2024

5.3 Key challenges to scaling

The GPE KIX projects encountered various institutional and structural challenges that impeded efforts to scale their gender-responsive education models.

Lack of financing was the most common constraint on scaling gender-responsive education models. Across the projects, governments and education institutions pointed to the need for gender-responsive education models to be financially sustainable. Without sufficient funding, it is difficult to develop and test these models and integrate them into existing education systems. Ensuring financial sustainability requires strategic planning, securing diverse funding sources and demonstrating the value and impact of gender-responsive education to attract investment.

Lack of an enabling policy environment in many countries made it difficult to identify entry points and opportunities for scaling. In contexts where education policies, guidelines and standards related to gender equality and inclusion are unclear or unavailable, it is challenging to know whether and how gender-responsive education models can be effectively adopted, adapted and integrated into national education systems.

Limited social capital and weak stakeholder networks can hinder scaling efforts. Across the GPE KIX projects, the research partners were very differently positioned in terms of their relationships with government and civil society. In contexts in which research teams lacked established networks, identifying and engaging relevant stakeholders for collaboration was significantly more challenging and time-consuming.

Sustaining the engagement of government stakeholders proved challenging for three GPE KIX projects that involved collaborations with policymakers. Government officials had many competing responsibilities, which made it difficult for them to stay consistently engaged in the projects. High-ranking officials with busy schedules were often unavailable for research and knowledge mobilization activities, especially those that ran over multiple days.

Institutional hierarchies created unfavourable conditions for developing, testing and integrating gender-responsive education models within schools and education systems. For example, many school leaders felt that they either were not responsible for promoting inclusion and gender-equality in their schools or lacked the means and authority to address issues effectively. They were reluctant to take any steps toward addressing gender equality and inclusion without the support of higher authorities in the school district or the Ministry of Education. Similarly, many teachers were hesitant to participate in gender equality and inclusion initiatives without their principals' support.

Entrenched gender and social norms among teachers, school leaders, parents, caregivers and community members can impede efforts to develop, test and implement gender-responsive education models. Deeply ingrained beliefs and attitudes about gender can make it more difficult for these groups to support and adopt interventions that promote gender equality in education. They may even

obstruct scaling efforts by fostering resistance to change, perpetuating gender stereotypes and divisions in schools and undermining initiatives aimed at creating a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

A lack of understanding about gender equality and inclusion can reduce support and hinder the effective implementation of gender-responsive education programs, practices and approaches among teachers and school leaders. In many developing countries, formal training and professional development opportunities on gender equality and inclusion are limited. As a result, teachers' and school leaders' knowledge of gender equality and inclusion issues can be inadequate and limited to thinking about equity in terms of education access rather than education quality or outcomes.

Insufficient data is a major obstacle to scaling gender-responsive education models. Many schools fail to collect or analyze data on gender equality and inclusion alongside traditional metrics like student enrolment, attendance and learning achievement. More sensitive issues, such as SRGBV, are often overlooked entirely. The lack of data makes it challenging to make the case for developing, testing and scaling gender-responsive education models and to assess their effectiveness.

5.4 Lessons learned for effectively scaling gender-responsive education models

The GPE KIX projects generated new insights and lessons that can inform future efforts to develop, test and scale gender-responsive education models, ensuring they are sustainable and contextually relevant and can make a meaningful impact on education systems worldwide.

Align scaling efforts with national education policies and plans. To anchor scaling efforts effectively, identify and leverage key alignments with national education policies and strategic plans. Start by mapping the current education policy landscape or collaborating directly with government stakeholders, such as Ministries of Education, Gender or Social Affairs to pinpoint national priorities. This approach will highlight opportunities to improve education access, quality and outcomes for girls and other marginalized learners. Demonstrate how gender-responsive education models can complement and enhance existing national policies and plans. This alignment is crucial for securing government buy-in and support for scaling initiatives.

Invest in early, ongoing, meaningful and inclusive knowledge mobilization with education stakeholders. Engaging stakeholders, especially those in government, throughout the entire span of the research process, from start to finish, allows research teams to develop a deeper understanding of stakeholders' perspectives and ideas for scaling gender-responsive education models, including their preferences and needs regarding the dissemination of research findings. Fostering ongoing, meaningful interaction between researchers and government stakeholders promotes the relevance and uptake of research findings, which will ultimately facilitate successful scaling efforts.

Consider country-specific dynamics in scaling efforts. Recognize that scaling gender-responsive education models requires a nuanced approach that is sensitive to each country's unique sociocultural, political and economic context. Conduct thorough analyses to understand local social norms, policy environments, stakeholder interests and resource availability. Tailor strategies, activities and approaches accordingly to ensure interventions are appropriate for each country's specific needs and conditions, thereby increasing their effectiveness and likelihood of being adopted.

Seek out diverse funding sources and leverage existing resources and infrastructure. To increase the sustainability of financing, mobilize resources from diverse funding sources — including government, international donors, private sector and philanthropic partnerships — while leveraging local financial and in-kind resources, such as community contributions and volunteer support, to reduce dependency on external funding. Align resource proposals with government budget cycles and leverage existing education resources and infrastructure wherever and whenever possible to ensure scaling efforts are more feasible and sustainable without creating parallel systems. Explore opportunities to embed gender-responsive education models within existing education systems, curricula and teacher training programs so that these models become part of the core educational framework, thus reducing the need for ongoing external support.

Prioritize awareness-raising and capacity-strengthening on gender equality and inclusion. Deeply entrenched social norms and biases can obstruct the success and sustainability of efforts to scale gender-responsive education models that could benefit children of all genders. Invest in capacity-strengthening initiatives that target teachers, school leaders, parents and community members. Raising awareness and strengthening capacity around gender equality and inclusion will create a supportive environment for adopting and scaling these models. Additionally, encourage the development of local stakeholder networks, coalitions and CoPs focused on gender-responsive and inclusive education. These networks can sustain collaboration and support beyond the project cycle, thus ensuring its long-term impact.

Support the development of a conceptual framework for scaling gender-responsive education models. This framework should provide explicit guidance to institutions and researchers to help them better understand and analyze scaling pathways, strategies and challenges, and equip them with the capacity and tools they will need to scale a project for impact. There are currently very few in-depth models or examples of this type of research in education, and even fewer that are focused on scaling gender-responsive education models. Advancing this work would make a significant contribution to the field of education research as a whole, and more specifically to research on promoting gender equality in and through education.

BOX 5.
CASE STUDY: UPTAKE OF THE NETWORKED IMPROVEMENT COMMUNITIES (NICS) MODEL FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

The aim of the School Leaders as Agents of Change project was to develop, test and research scaling mechanisms for the NICs model for school leaders in Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan. After the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, the project moved from Afghanistan to work with school leaders in schools serving Afghan refugees in Peshawar.

In Peshawar, the schools for refugees are currently outside the formal Pakistan education system. Although lines of accountability for different school functions are extremely complex, this has provided space for the Afghan team to work with NGOs running the schools on taking up the NICs model in its entirety.

In Pakistan, the sheer size of the education system made traction at the provincial level difficult within the project timeframe; in addition, multiple competing initiatives, many of which have considerable budgets, were all jostling for attention. However, the in-country lead harnessed his personal and institutional networks to secure interest in scaling impact among both government and non-government stakeholders. As a result, elements of the NICs model are being integrated by NGOs such as Sightsavers, and two federal government agencies have advocated for implementing the NICs approach in army public schools nationwide.

In Nepal, the more effective mechanism for scaling impact was the open course for school leaders. The course is currently being made available through a variety of platforms and with different forms of support.

Source: Wolfenden et al., 2024

6. KEY STRATEGIES AND EFFECTIVE PRACTICES TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY IN AND THROUGH EDUCATION

Promoting gender equality in and through education is an essential aspect of creating equitable societies in which everyone can reach their full potential. For sustainable and transformational change, interventions concerned with addressing gender equality in and through education must take a whole-of-system approach that focuses on changing unequal structures, social norms and policies so that the underlying causes of gender disparities can be addressed. The GPE KIX projects generated knowledge that emphasizes both the barriers to integrating gender equality in and through education and strategies and effective practices to overcome those barriers. Some of the key strategies and effective practices that emerged are highlighted below.

6.1 At the individual, household and community levels

Build a collective commitment. Promoting gender equality and inclusion in education is not the sole responsibility of schools; it requires a collective effort from families, caregivers and communities. Strong partnerships between schools and families or caregivers are essential for creating an environment in which children of all genders can develop without being restricted by social norms.

- **Involve parents and caregivers.** Schools should establish regular communication with parents through parent-teacher meetings and workshops focused on gender equality and inclusion. Interactions such as these provide opportunities to discuss students' progress, address concerns and share strategies for promoting gender equality and inclusion both at home and in school.
- **Encourage and expand community-level awareness, knowledge and skills.** Community-level training and capacity-strengthening on social norms and their impact can help shift cultural perceptions and encourage collective action on gender equality and inclusion. Such activities can include practical advice for parents, caregivers and community leaders on how to create and support a gender-inclusive environment.

Tailor interventions for empowerment. Marginalized learners often face intersectional challenges that hinder their educational success because of a number of factors such as economic hardship, social norms and GBV. Their needs can be addressed only through targeted interventions that go beyond traditional educational programs.

- **Implement peer mentor and role model programs.** Personalized guidance, motivation and support can help marginalized students overcome education barriers, boost their confidence and equip them with the tools they need to succeed academically and personally.
- **Offer flexible learning options.** Educational programs must be designed to accommodate the unique circumstances of marginalized learners. Flexible learning options, such as evening classes or online courses, can help girls who might be unable to attend school during regular hours because of household responsibilities or other barriers.
- **Provide training in life skills.** In addition to an academic education, training in life skills can enhance the success of students, particularly girls, both academically and personally and empower them to improve their socio-economic status and gain independence.

6.2 At the educational institution level

Implement thorough gender-responsive training for teachers and school leaders. Teachers and school leaders are the frontline agents of change in any education system, and their training should cover a range of relevant topics and equip them with a range of relevant skills and abilities.

- **Understand gender and social dynamics.** Educators must be aware of how social biases and stereotypes can influence classroom interactions, teaching practices and student performance. Training should include modules on recognizing and challenging unconscious biases.
- **Use inclusive teaching pedagogies.** Teachers should have strategies to create inclusive lesson plans that ensure the equal participation and representation of all genders. This includes using gender-neutral language, presenting diverse role models and encouraging all students to pursue their interests, regardless of traditional gender roles.
- **Be able to address gender-based violence.** Educators should be trained to identify, prevent and respond to incidents of GBV in and around schools. This involves understanding the legal frameworks, reporting procedures and support mechanisms available for students who are affected by GBV.

Integrate gender equality and inclusion into schools' core leadership practices. This will ensure that these values are embedded in the institution's ethos.

- **Offer leadership training programs.** School leaders should participate in specialized training that emphasizes the importance of gender equality and inclusion in educational settings. This training should cover strategic planning, infrastructure support, policy implementation and effective communication of gender-related and inclusion issues.

- **Provide mentorship and role modelling.** School leaders can be powerful role models by demonstrating a commitment to gender equality and inclusion through their actions and decisions. They should also establish mentorship programs that support the professional development of female educators and encourage young women to pursue leadership roles.

Challenge social norms embedded in curricula and teaching practices. The content of education — that is, what is taught and how it is taught — plays a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions of gender roles and equality. Education systems must adopt a gender-responsive and inclusive curriculum that challenges traditional norms and stereotypes and promotes inclusion for children of all genders.

- **Revise learning materials.** Textbooks and learning materials should be reviewed and revised to eliminate gender and social biases. This includes ensuring that children and adults of all genders are portrayed in diverse roles and professions, providing students with a balanced perspective on gender.
- **Create and use inclusive lesson plans.** Teachers should have lesson plans that actively promote gender equality and inclusion — for example, discussions, case studies and activities that challenge traditional gender roles and encourage students to think critically about the impact of social norms on society.
- **Offer STEM incentives.** Girls' participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics should be supported through remedial workshops and incentives such as scholarships or awards.

Create safe and inclusive school environments. A safe and inclusive school environment is foundational to the educational success of all students, particularly girls. Schools must ensure that their physical infrastructure, policies and practices support the safety, dignity and well-being of every student.

- **Improve infrastructure and safety.** Schools should invest in safe, clean, accessible facilities, including secure washrooms and well-lit premises, to create an environment in which children of all genders feel safe and valued.
- **Peer-support programs.** Peer-to-peer companion programs can enhance the safety and well-being of girls by providing them with a support network within the school community. These types of programs encourage mutual support among students and contribute to a more inclusive school culture.

Integrate EdTech solutions that can bridge gaps in accessibility and inclusion for marginalized students, including students with disabilities, while making sure it does not exacerbate or create new inequalities among students.

6.3 At the policy level

Pioneer policy change. Governments play a critical role in shaping educational landscapes. To foster gender equality in and through education, it is essential to engage government stakeholders through participatory action research.

- **Establish multi-stakeholder research committees:** Form committees that include representatives from the government, schools, universities, NGOs and community groups. Multi-stakeholder research committees can guide the research process, ensuring that it aligns with policy goals and addresses local gender equality and inclusion challenges.
- **Encourage capacity-strengthening:** Support capacity-strengthening opportunities on gender equality in and through education and inclusion for government stakeholders, emphasizing the importance of community involvement and the practical application of research findings to policy development.

7. CONCLUSION

Promoting gender equality in and through education is a multifaceted endeavour that necessitates collaborative efforts at all levels of society. By engaging government stakeholders, educational institutions, families, caregivers and communities, we can create a comprehensive framework that challenges existing gender norms and addresses barriers to inclusion. The GPE KIX projects underscore the importance of creating and using tailored strategies that empower educators, involve parents and caregivers and provide targeted support for marginalized students. Through continuous dialogue, capacity-strengthening and adaptive practices, we can forge pathways for lasting change, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive in an equitable educational environment. Ultimately, fostering gender equality not only enriches the lives of individuals but also contributes to the development of just and inclusive societies.

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