AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

Delivering girls' education where the risks are high

10 key priorities for programming
in fragile contexts

2021

Girls'
Education
Challenge

UKaid

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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Table of contents

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In partnership with

Glossary of terms

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AGES	Adolescent Girls Education in Somalia
AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
ALP	Accelerated Learning Programme
BEF	Boys' Empowerment Forum
CBE	Community-Based Education
CLPCPs	Community Led Participatory Change Plans
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
EGER	Evidence for Gender and Education Resource
FCAS	Fragile & Conflict-Affected Situations
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (UK)
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GEC	Girls' Education Challenge
GESI	Gender Equality & Social Inclusion
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IALA	Improving Adolescent Lives in Afghanistan Project
NEST	National Education Strategic Plan (Ministry of Education, Afghanistan)
OOSG	Out-of-School Girls
PASS+	Primary (School) Access through Speed Schools + Project
PSEAH	Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
PSS	Psycho-Social Support
REALISE	Réussite et Épanouissement via l'Apprentissage et L'Insertion au Système Éducatif
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
SOMGEP-T	Somali Girls' Education Promotion Project – Transition
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
STAGES	Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Education Success
TPD	Teacher Professional Development

Foreword

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It was our distinct privilege to host the 'Girls' Education in Fragile Contexts' conference in March 2021, which generated rich insights through exchanges among over 200 teachers, education experts and policymakers from across the world dedicated to advancing girls' education. At a time of increasing fragility and with less than a decade remaining to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we discussed one of the most pressing issues of our time: how to help girls learn better, live better, and thrive — how to help them fulfil their potential and create or seize new opportunities. In short, how to help them have better futures.

This commitment has been fundamental to the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) for over a century, since the establishment of the first Aga Khan Schools, which encouraged education for girls and boys. In the last three decades alone, AKDN agencies have directly helped over 10 million girls get into school, stay in school, and learn in school. Today, we continue to live this legacy through our work, which places marginalised children and youth — especially girls — at the centre of our education strategy.

The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) and its partners work in some of the most challenging contexts in the world. Everywhere, our aim is to root global resources in local realities to understand what works to help girls and boys learn against the odds. That phrase — learn against the odds — encapsulates the task we face in ensuring high-quality, relevant and sustainable education opportunities against a backdrop of uncertainty, insecurity, and unpredictability.

For almost a decade, the UK has been rallying the world on the issue of girls' education, galvanising international attention on this fundamental issue and catalysing significant investment, attention, and action globally. We must recognise and applaud its leadership and achievements. Since 2013, through the path-breaking leadership of FCDO, and with support from the fund manager PriceWaterhouse Coopers, the Girls' Education Challenge has brought the collective expertise of many highly-experienced organisations to bear on the challenge of promoting girls' education in some of the world's most difficult contexts.

Our experience shows that change — indeed, progress — on girls' education is possible in even the most conservative communities. With the right kind of engagement — focused on addressing and removing the practical obstacles and challenges to girls' participation — we can make a difference. This should give us confidence that it is worthwhile, but also help convince us that this engagement must be maintained. We owe it to the generation of girls who have grown up with us these past eight years — and to all the others who have not yet had the chance.

AKF must now work to ensure that a generation of girls (and boys) do not suffer due to the pandemic forcing learning out of the classroom.Looking forward, we want to think about the lessons for future girls' education programming in fragile contexts. What have we, as a global collective of organisations, learned through our respective experiences that could be replicated and adapted? And what questions still need answers — and action?

Arising out of the conversations during the Conference, as well as through further consultations and review of case studies, we have identified a set of priorities and recommendations that we hope will serve as a useful guide to all of us involved in designing and delivering girls' education programmes in fragile contexts. We know that there is no 'one size fits all' - all solutions have to be tailored to local conditions and anchored in local ownership. But there is much to be gained by learning from each other, uniting as organisations with families and communities to help transform the lives of the girls we serve.

The lessons featured here convince us that the ambitious goal of quality education for every girls is achievable. Despite the challenges, we have found not only optimism for the future of education for girls in fragile contexts, but a will and commitment to continue no matter what the odds. Thank you for everything that each of you is doing for girls and their futures.

Matt Reed
Global Director of Institutional Partnerships, Aga Khan Foundation
Chief Executive Officer, Aga Khan Foundation (United Kingdom)

Executive summary

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> *Our experience shows that change – indeed, progress – on girls' education is possible in even the most conservative communities."*
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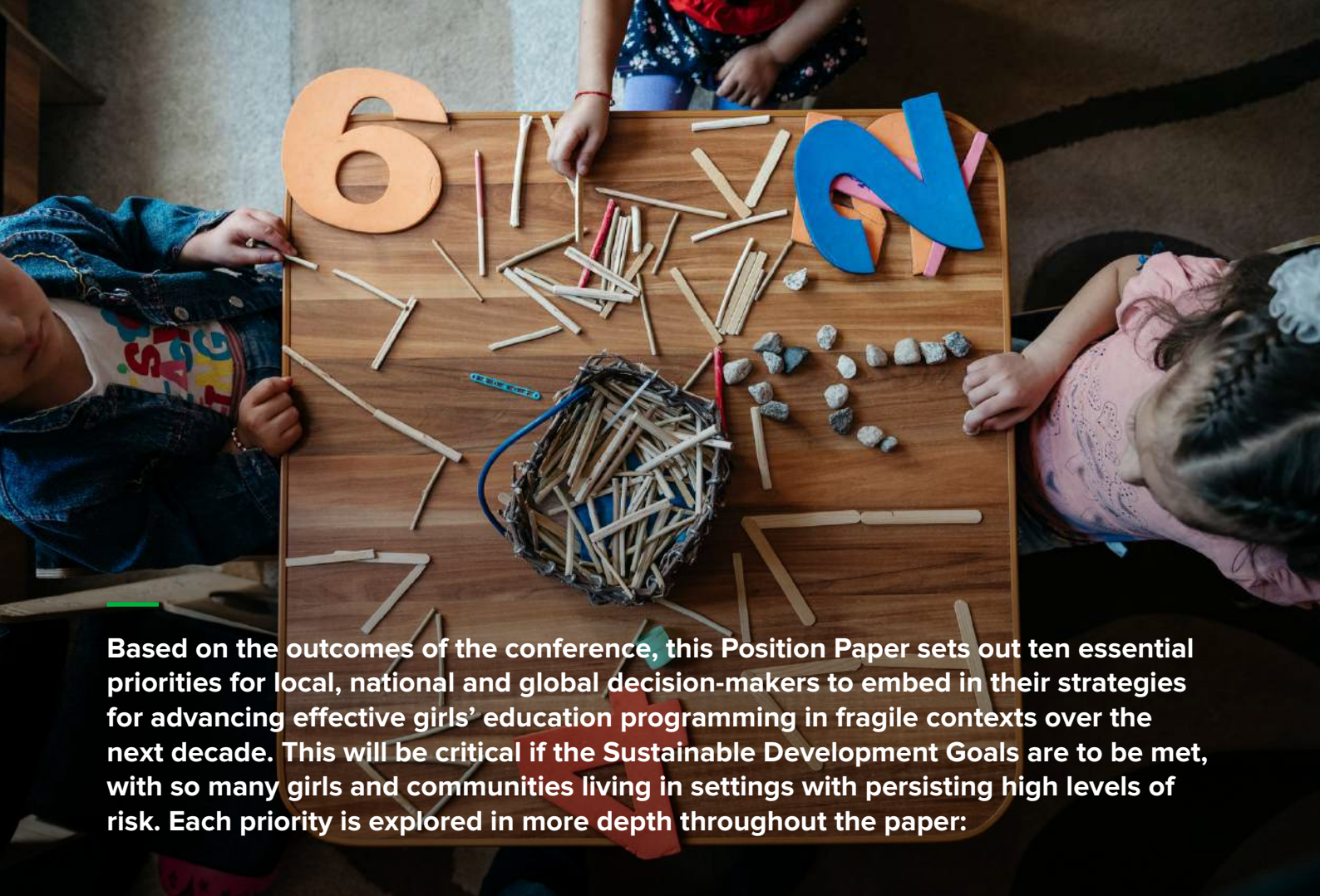> **Matt Reed, Aga Khan Foundation**

Since 2013, the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) has led a consortium of organisations to deliver the Steps Toward Afghan Girls' Education Success (STAGES) programme in Afghanistan, funded under the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and, more recently, by USAID. The consortium includes Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children, CARE, Aga Khan Education Services and Afghan Education Production Organisation. STAGES has supported over 210,000 girls and 170,000 boys to access and stay in education from primary school through to secondary and beyond. This has been achieved amidst a background of on-going conflict in Afghanistan, exacerbated by extreme seasonal weather variations caused by climate change and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. As the programme approaches its conclusion, the consortium partners sought to reflect on what has been learned over the last eight years about girls' education programming in fragile contexts[1].

In March 2021, AKF convened a two-day global virtual conference with more than 200 representatives from international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), local NGOs, researchers, funders and policy makers to reflect and deepen the sector's understanding of opportunities and challenges of 'Girls' Education in Fragile Contexts'. Through the conference, world experts in girls' education explored pathways and priorities for the future of girls' education in Afghanistan and other fragile contexts. This Position Paper summarises insights from the two-day event.

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Further information about the projects referenced in this Position Paper are provided on Page 28.

1 Note: The OECD describe five dimensions of fragility: 1) violence (peaceful societies); 2) access to justice for all; 3) effective, accountable and inclusive institutions; 4) economic foundations; 5) capacity to adapt to social, economic and environmental shocks and disasters. Available at url: https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/sfr-multidimensional-fragility-framework.html

Based on the outcomes of the conference, this Position Paper sets out ten essential priorities for local, national and global decision-makers to embed in their strategies for advancing effective girls' education programming in fragile contexts over the next decade. This will be critical if the Sustainable Development Goals are to be met, with so many girls and communities living in settings with persisting high levels of risk. Each priority is explored in more depth throughout the paper:

Ten priorities for girls' education programming in fragile contexts:

1 Move beyond the 3-year cycle: Providing predictable, long-term education funding

2 Allow space for agility: Promoting more rapid adaptation to ensure successful learning outcomes

3 Elevate her voice: Designing education programmes from the girls' perspectives

4 Place communities in the lead: Partnering with our key stakeholders to sustain education programme

5 Include the boys: Delivering education programmes for all

6 Prepare the classrooms: Supporting teachers to deliver effective gender-responsive pedagogy

7 Create more meaningful pathways: Planning with the long-term view, from education to employment

8 Collaborate and build synergy: Working in partnership at every level, across multiple sectors for quality learning

9 Safeguard and protect: Adopting a forward-looking approach to safeguarding in and through education

10 Think out of the box: Embracing complementary models of girls' education

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Move beyond the 3-year cycle: Providing predictable, long-term education funding

Fragile contexts have deep-seated challenges and change is hard to achieve. A long-term approach and commitment of funding is required. Donors should:

- Recognise that change takes time and commit to projects with long-term, predictable funding which covers the full cycle of a girl's education.

- Invest in communities over time to ensure programmes have time to shift mindsets and ensure that no girls are left behind.

- Coordinate closely amongst themselves to avoid acting in silos and encourage partnerships and consortia that bring together a range of expertise and experience in different local contexts.

- Advocate with national government partners to efficiently resource girls' education over multi-year cycles.

- Make provisions for longitudinal evaluations of impact.

- Fund the use of evaluation findings to inform further formulation and development of gender transformative education policies and plans.

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Allow space for agility: Promoting more rapid adaptation to ensure successful learning outcomes

In fragile contexts, challenges are highly localised, complex and often entrenched. They are also dynamic and unstable and require a flexible approach to respond to rapidly changing situations on the ground. Donors should:

- Allow for greater flexibility for programmes to re-forecast budgets to pivot the programme design and approach.

- Let programmes adapt at a quicker pace by reducing bureaucracy and approving adaptations quickly.

- Embrace new ways of tackling challenges that are driven locally; these should both be evidence-informed and produce new actionable guidance to inform future programming.

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Elevate her voice: Designing education programmes from the girls' perspectives

In fragile contexts and moments of crisis, contextual factors and barriers impacting girls are varied and complex. Programmes should:

- Design their approach for the context and take into account the barriers that different subgroups of girls face; this requires in-depth engagement and consultation with the girls and their communities, gender analysis, conflict-sensitive analysis and rigorous focus on evidence.

- Donors should avoid prioritising certain groups based on their own agenda without considering the local context.

- Ensure that implementers have time and resources to conduct detailed analysis to inform programming; donors must acknowledge the importance of this work and commit to funding it.

- Support both male and female teachers to actively engage with issues of gender equity and be equipped with the skills to conduct gender analyses in their own classrooms.

- Be realistic when confronting barriers and focus on what can be changed within project parameters.

- Elevate the voices of girls and women in programme design and delivery

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Place communities in the lead: Partnering with our key stakeholders to sustain education programme

In fragile contexts, power dynamics can be very fractured and highly decentralised, making it critical to work with local influencers and power holders. This is crucial for sustainability. As such, programmes should:

- Identify and leverage influencers within the community to build ownership and demand for girls' education.

- Respect local power dynamics, customs and traditions and integrate education programmes within existing systems on the ground.

- Recognise the role of women as gatekeepers of local culture and religion and enable their leadership of girls' education programming.

- Prioritise community engagement and ownership from the outset and invest time and resources in facilitating local collaboration and capacity building in relevant skills and knowledge to support girls' education

5

Include the boys: Delivering education programmes for all

In fragile contexts, barriers to educational access are heightened for both boys and girls. Programmes should:

- Include boys as beneficiaries and recognise that they also face complex and multiple barriers to accessing quality education.

- Provide dedicated spaces and interventions for both boys and girls to engage with and explore sensitive topics.

- Recognise the important role boys (and young men) can play as advocates for girls' education in their communities and families.

6

Prepare the classrooms: Supporting teachers to deliver effective gender-responsive pedagogy

In fragile contexts, girls are disproportionately affected by barriers to receiving a quality education. Programmes should:

- Ensure teaching and learning is of high quality to enable successful outcomes for girls, and can be accessed close to home.

- Embrace gender-responsive pedagogy and classroom management practices to help deliver quality learning outcomes.

- Build the capacity of teachers to improve learning in gender-responsive classrooms by providing highly targeted, specific, and practical professional development experiences; rather than experiences that are too broad, theoretical, and detached from classroom realities.

- Ensure teacher development is sustained by complementing teacher training with an additional programme of support, such as on-going coaching and teacher participation in communities of practice.

- Ensure teachers are consulted in the design of teacher professional development programmes, and have the tailored knowledge, tools and resources to support learners with diverse and complex needs.

7

Create more meaningful pathways: Planning with the long-term view, from education to employment

In fragile contexts, crisis can reinforce harmful gender norms which block pathways for girls and women. Programmes should:

- Consider girls' whole life experiences and seek to establish pathways into further education, employment for improved livelihoods and meaningful community participation.

- Build girls' confidence and levels of resilience through life and leadership skills building.

- Provide access to role models and positive mentorship to help build girls' confidence and support them to access and pursue different livelihood pathways.

- Offer training programmes linked to local employment needs, such as teaching, community health work, and midwifery as a motivator to participate in education. These are great entry points for attaining jobs close to home, especially for young women from more rural and conservative communities.

8

Collaborate and build synergy: Working in partnership at every level, across multiple sectors for quality learning

In fragile contexts, education programming sits at the nexus between humanitarian and development responses. Programmes should:

- Be owned by government and aligned to government priorities, systems and budgetary cycles.

- Involve national and local governments in the programme planning process from the outset and ensure there is a clear plan to transfer approaches, assets and knowledge to government over time.

- Support government at all levels to work together and ultimately embed approaches into the provision of local education systems.

- Recognise that girls' education in fragile contexts is an intersectional challenge and requires a cross-sector response.

9

Safeguard and protect: Adopting a forward-looking approach to safeguarding in and through education

In fragile contexts, children and vulnerable groups may be more exposed to abuse and exploitation. Programmes should:

- Engage local partners in understanding the local factors which contribute to abuse and exploitation of children and vulnerable groups and work within local system structures to address these directly.

- Work with communities and in partnership with local CSOs to co-design and put in place reporting mechanisms that beneficiaries will feel comfortable to use.

- Integrate safeguarding into the curriculum to support girls to understand how to recognise and report abuse and access resources for support.

- Engage and work with relevant government departments at all levels to promote a focus on child protection and safeguarding.

- Embed a culture of safeguarding across communities, programmes and organisations at all levels, and at all stages of programme design, implementation and monitoring. Donors must commit to upholding safeguarding best practice and ensuring that there is appropriate resourcing and investment in child protection and safeguarding at school, community and programme level.

10

Think out of the box: Embracing complementary models of girls' education

In fragile contexts, it is not always possible to consistently deliver education through public education systems. As such, governments, donors and implementers should:

- Consider evidenced-based complementary education models which address the barriers preventing girls in fragile contexts from attending and staying in school.

- Ensure that alternative education approaches have built-in adaptations to help them respond to emergency situations and extended school closures (for example, in terms of content, delivery modalities, teacher training and support). These should also include offline access to quality learning in contexts where online learning is not possible.

- Ensure that complementary education approaches are planned in collaboration with government, so that they can be sustained in the long term or even become part of mainstream provision..

Background and context

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> *In fragile contexts, girls face a triple crisis of learning, gender inequality and insecurity or displacement and that makes it more difficult for them to access and stay in school."*
>
> **Alicia Herbert OBE, Director for Education, Gender and Equality, FCDO**

Educating girls has a transformational impact on global economies, security and social equality. And yet, around the world, 132 million girls are estimated to be out of school.[2] In fragile contexts – those affected by conflict and chronic instability – girls are twice as likely to be out of school than in non-conflict-affected countries.[3]

2 - UNICEF - https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education
3 - Ibid.

Barriers to girls' education vary from context to context but typically include the following:

Barriers to girls' education

Culture, gender and social constraints

- Early marriage and pregnancy

- Inadequate community support for girls' education (especially during adolescence)

- Persistent cultural attitudes and biases about the role of women and girls

- Lack of decision-making power of females in the community

- Gender-based violence and harassment of girls at home, on the way to school and in the classroom

- Lack of access to education for children with special needs

- Long distances to government schools

- Lack of focus on child protection and safeguarding

Education system and institutional constraints

- Lack of access to education opportunities close to home

- Lack of girls friendly learning environments and gender-responsive pedagogy in the classroom

- Lack of female teachers and role models

- Poor quality of teaching and learning

- Unequal treatment of girls versus boys in the classroom and beyond

- Lack of sanitation and hygiene facilities in school

Economic constraints

- Poverty

- Lack of access to quality teaching and learning materials

- Lack of affordable transport, especially in rural areas, to school

- Overcrowded classrooms

- Prioritisation of investment in boys' education over girls' education

- Girls' domestic responsibilities in the home

- Human trafficking

- Child labour

- Lack of employment opportunities for young women

In fragile situations, new barriers present themselves and existing ones are heightened. For example, conflict can:

- Amplify existing structural inequalities that negatively impact girls; those who are most marginalised are even more likely to be affected.

- Place added pressure on families and communities which could exacerbate gender-based violence and abuse.

- Traumatise populations, which in turn has a negative impact on learning, especially when social and emotional learning approaches and psycho-social support are lacking in schools.

- Increase the threat of violence on the way to school and the threat of attacks on schools, girls and female educators; this can lead to closures and damage to school infrastructure and resources.

- Create fragile economies which results in chronic underinvestment in education and increased financial insecurity of families and communities.

- Cause food and water insecurity.

- Displace populations and separate families.

Fragile contexts are particularly vulnerable to external threats which combine to deepen existing challenges and barriers facing those communities. For example, in conflict affected situations, extreme weather events triggered by climate change can lead to further displacement of populations and further violence. The COVID-19 pandemic has added an additional layer of hardship and has had a particularly damaging impact on girls' educational progress. Contributors to the conference also observed that families are facing increased economic hardship threatening the prioritisation of girls' education which could result in increases in child labour and early marriage. There have also been reports of a rise in gender-based violence and pregnancy as girls are increasingly confined to the home, often living with those who are the perpetrators of violence towards them.

The STAGES Programme

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) has a long-standing history in improving access to quality education for girls and women, particularly in countries facing crisis and conflict, including in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Mali, Syria and Uganda. Since 2013, the Aga Khan Foundation has led a consortium of organisations including Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children, CARE, Aga Khan Educational Services and Afghan Education Production Organisation to deliver the Steps Toward Afghan Girls' Education Success (STAGES) programme in Afghanistan as part of the FCDO-funded Girls' Education Challenge. In 2010, the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan estimated that 2.5 million girls were out of school.

1 - UNICEF - https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education
2 - Ibid.
3 - UNHCR - https://www.unhcr.org/uk/climate-change-and-disasters.html

To respond to this challenge, STAGES was designed to support some of the world's most marginalised girls to access education and improve their life chances beyond school. STAGES provided a comprehensive package of interventions to ensure a sustainable ladder of learning opportunities for girls from pre-primary, primary and secondary levels, through to teacher training and adult literacy across 16 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. STAGES has supported over 210,000 girls and 170,000 boys access quality learning opportunities. Highlights of the programme's achievements include:

Access

Over 23,000 girls are now in community-based education who were previously out-of-school, including over 3,000 adolescent girls who have remained in school and successfully transitioned to the secondary level. Nearly 7,000 boys have also been given access to community-based learning opportunities. STAGES' Community-Based Education (CBE) model has been endorsed by and integrated into the Ministry of Education's strategic planning. Beyond this, STAGES has supported over 210,000 girls and 170,000 boys in government schools across Afghanistan.

Attendance

Attendance in CBE classes is on average 30% higher than in government schools.[4]

Retention

Retention in CBE classes is on average 10% higher than in government schools

Quality

Learning outcomes in both literacy and numeracy are consistently higher in intervention classes across all grades than in government control schools. STAGES also succeeds in closing the gap in learning between the most marginalised girls (who speak a language other than the language of instruction, are orphans or who are experiencing illness) and their peers.

Teaching

75% of CBE teachers have seen an improvement in their competency levels since the baseline.[6]

Class environment

760 classrooms have been built or renovated and nearly 700,000 resource items (teacher kits, student kits, educational materials for students and teachers) have been provided.

Attitude change

Over 23,000 community members have been engaged to support girls' education. School 'shuras' (school management councils) now take on the role of talking to parents to address absenteeism or harassment on the way to school; a majority of 'mullahs' (Islamic religious leaders) encourage parents to send their daughters to school, and marriages have been delayed by a few years to enable girls to complete a cycle of education.

Innovation

STAGES is piloting multi-grade CBE classes for the first time in Afghanistan. This approach has demonstrated positive learning outcomes, opening the way to a cost-effective and sustainable model to provide education to the most marginalised children in remote areas.

Girls of all ages were supported from primary through to secondary and continuing education with many graduates going on to become teachers, supporting the sustainability of this education programme. Recognising the role that local communities, religious leaders and fathers can play in the success of a girls' education programme has become central to its success. More recently, building on these firm foundations, the focus of the programme has turned to supporting girls to continue to learn whilst at home due to the restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenging circumstances, the programme was able to continue providing high quality education, by developing tailored adaptations to modes of delivery (e.g., use of technology, home learning kits), content (e.g., life skills), classroom environments (e.g., PPE, hygiene products), and support for teachers and families (e.g., remote mentoring, hygiene awareness, psychosocial support). This demonstrates the importance of strong local engagement and flexibility to adapt and respond effectively to sudden changes in context.

4   Wang, J. & McAneney, L. (2019). STAGES II Midline Evaluation.
5   Ibid.
6   Ibid. Note: Teacher competency was measured against the following teacher standards: 1) The teacher understand that children learn in different ways and have different needs and knows how to engage the interest and participation of all students in experiences that provide opportunities to learn; 2) the teacher has mastered the subject matter being taught, can teach it in ways that are compatible with Islamic values and create learning experiences and learning aids that make the subject matter meaningful and appropriate for the age and ability of students; 3) the teacher understands how children learn and develop and provides learning opportunities that promote learning how to learn, self-development and character development; 4) the teacher creates a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction and active engagement in learning; 5) the teacher is aware that there are both planned and unplanned consequences of goals, policies and practices at every level of the educational system, including national, local and classroom levels and is able to be flexible in planning and teaching to address changing circumstances; and, 6) the teacher creates a learning environment that encourages problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity.

Purpose and approach
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As the STAGES programme approaches its conclusion, consortium partners sought to reflect on what has been learned over the last eight years to identify some key recommendations which can be used to support future girls' education programming in fragile contexts. As such, AKF hosted a two-day online global conference with diverse stakeholders to share reflections on the topic.

This Position Paper summarises the key findings from the conference as well as follow-up interviews with experts. It sets out ten essential priorities for local, national and global decision-makers seeking to advance effective girls' education programming in fragile contexts over the next decade.

The 'Girls' Education in Fragile Contexts' conference

On the 30th and 31st of March 2021, the Aga Khan Foundation hosted the 'Girls' Education in Fragile Contexts' online conference, convening over 200 people dedicated to advancing girls' education. Participants included government ministers, international institutions, foundations, academics, international NGOs, and local organisations who came together to share insights, challenges and lessons learned implementing large-scale girls' education programmes in high-risk environments.

Day 1 involved six workshops, each exploring a different theme relevant to girls' education programming. These included:

1. Moving from gender accommodating to gender transformative: Reimagining gender norms through education programmes

2. Reworking the relationship between norms and girls' education: Collaborating with religious and community leaders

3. Sustainability in fragile states: Redefining the end goal

4. Innovation in education: What works and what doesn't to meet the most marginalised girls?

5. Not without the boys: Achieving gender equality through girls' education programmes

6. Safeguarding in fragile contexts

A series of short presentations were delivered by a range of implementers and researchers outlining their experiences, what has worked, and what has not worked when delivering girls' education programmes. Following the presentations, participants were invited to anonymously share their own approaches and experiences and to collaborate to identify specific priorities that they would like to see in future girls' education programmes. Anonymity was paramount in enabling participants to contribute openly and honestly.

Day 2 featured panel discussions with programme implementers and keynote speeches from Alicia Herbert OBE, Director for Education, Gender and Equality at FCDO and UK Gender Envoy and from Her Excellency Rangina Hamidi, the Acting Afghan Minister of Education. The opening address was given by Dr. Matt Reed, Global Director of Institutional Partnerships at AKF and CEO of AKF (UK).

Further consultation

Following the conference, further consultation took place with experts working on girls' education in fragile contexts, to explore key themes in more detail, and explore specific contexts and interventions. The insights from these interviews are not attributable to individuals, to ensure that those experts consulted could share their views openly and frankly.

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A list of organisations who contributed to both the conference and consultation is included on Page 50 of this paper.

Priority 1

Move beyond the 3-year cycle: Providing predictable, long-term education funding

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Building a government that can effectively deliver basic services takes time. NGO-supported services should aim to fill gaps where government cannot deliver; often, these are remote places that are difficult to access due to barriers such as security and geography. If you don't have a sustainability challenge at the end of the project, you probably weren't targeting the right communities and were possibly doing a job that the government could have done"

Joseph Ho, Catholic Relief Services

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System change and building local capacity takes time, particularly when working in fragile contexts and targeting the most marginalised communities. It requires long-term, predictable and integrated funding, and a commitment to working with communities over a sustained period of time. Fragile contexts, in particular, are vulnerable to changing dynamics on the ground, and so funding mechanisms should also allow adaptations to programme design, rapid release of funding as required, and should accommodate the need for programmes to have a broad focus and address the intersectional challenges that impact on girls' education.

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FCDO's Girls' Education Challenge

The FCDO-funded Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) was launched in 2012 as a multi-year commitment to ensure that girls in some of the poorest countries in the world receive a quality education. The GEC, now in its second phase, supports up to 41 projects in 17 countries. Many of these projects have already received eight years of continuous funding, supporting a cohort of beneficiaries through primary school and transitions into secondary education. Given its significant budget, and ability to secure match-funding, it has been able to drive real change for some of the world's most marginalised girls.

STAGES is one of the GEC-funded programmes which has benefited from eight years of funding. STAGES Phase II built on the successes and learnings from the first phase and enabled the consortium to extend support to a new cohort of community-based education (CBE) students starting at Grade 1. Critically, at the end of STAGES I there were still limitations to the human and financial capacity and commitment to CBE from national to local levels. STAGES II was able to strengthen planning, coordination, support and management of CBE at different government levels so that it is fully integrated within the education system. It enabled more time to build stronger institutional links between CBE and government schools and CBE shuras, thereby catalysing increased ownership and responsibility for CBE classes by local governance structures. In short, eight years of programming has enabled the mainstreaming and institutionalisation of CBE for increased sustainability.

Link | https://www.akf.org.uk/programme-spotlight-stages/

Shorter-term projects offer poorer value for money to donors and make it difficult to plan for sustainability, particularly in fragile contexts. Change takes time and therefore, longer-term investments have the potential to deliver much greater impact. For example, STAGES' Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) takes three years to move students from a Grade 1 level to a Grade 6 level. However, even with the option of these rapid alternative education models, more than three years are necessary if a project wants to both deliver fundamental education services, develop transition pathways, and promote sustainability through government ownership.

To secure long-term resources for girls' education, donors must coordinate closely to avoid acting in silos and encourage partnerships and consortia that bring together a range of expertise and experience in different contexts. In particular, donors must listen to, and learn from, civil society and locally rooted organisations when assembling their consortia and agreeing programming priorities. Donors must also work closely with national governments who are ultimately responsible for the allocation of education budgets to ensure knowledge transfer and adequate resourcing for girls' education in the long-term as international aid diminishes. For example, donors could fund the development and effective implementation of National Education Sector Strategic Plans that draw heavily on evidence from I/NGOs, government, corporate and community interventions and innovations that have worked in the context.

Funding must also include longitudinal evaluations that assess which components of a programme, and combinations of components, have the biggest impact on girls' learning outcomes. Longitudinal studies also provide critical information on the impact interventions have on changing mindsets and behaviours of communities and caregivers with respect to investing in and valuing girls' education. EGER's 2021 **Girls' Education Roadmap** identifies commonly used programme approaches that have a strong evidence base behind them and where further research is needed.[7] EGER calls for more investment and resources focused on improving learning outcomes for girls, and not just on access and enrolment. The GEC has a specific focus on learning outcomes and projects have measured these since inception. EGER calls for more investment and resources focused on improving learning outcomes for girls, and not just on access and enrolment. The GEC has a specific focus on learning outcomes and projects have measured these since inception.

Key recommendations:

Fragile contexts have entrenched challenges and change is hard to achieve. A long-term approach and commitment of funding is required. Donors should:

- Recognise that change takes time and commit to projects with long-term, predictable funding.

- Invest in communities over time to ensure programmes have time to shift mindsets and ensure that no girls are left behind.

- Coordinate with domestic government partners to efficiently resource girls' education over multi-year cycles.

- Make provision for long-term longitudinal evaluations of impact.

7 Psaki, S., N. Haberland, M. Kozak, and L. Woyczynski. 2021. "Girls' Education Roadmap: 2021 Report." EGER Reports. New York: Population Council.

Allow space for agility: Promoting more rapid adaptation to ensure successful learning outcomes

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Nothing prepared us for what has rightly been described as the biggest disruption to education the world has ever known… If we are to be hit by another shock, how prepared are we and what do we need to put in place now to ensure we are able to bounce back more quickly?”

Alicia Herbert OBE, Director for Education, Gender & Equality, FCDO

Often fragile situations suffer from multiple, compounding threats at one time, such as conflict, extreme weather events, and health crises; these can have a disproportionately negative impact on communities and the implementation of programmes. In these contexts, system change requires highly localised solutions which are agile and responsive to external situations. In her keynote to the 'Girls Education in Fragile Contexts' conference, Alicia Herbert (Director for Education, Gender and Equality, FCDO) described the COVID-19 pandemic as "the biggest disruption to education the world has ever known"; it exposed the vulnerability of fragile communities and highlighted the importance of being able to rapidly iterate programming in response.

As schools closed and programming in many places was put on hold, the pandemic proved how quickly gains for girls' education could be lost and the need for more resilient systems. Programmes should plan well from the beginning but maintain enough flexibility and space to innovate, localise and respond to challenges as they arise, whilst maintaining high levels of accountability. Learning from what has not worked and adapting accordingly is incredibly powerful.

Case Study

Project Lehar, India

Through Project Lehar, a girls' empowerment programme in India funded by UNFPA, AKF piloted a vocational training programme but missed creating a strong linkage to the wider labour market context while keeping in mind the mobility constraints of the girls. As such, many girls were trained as tailors and were able to increase their income marginally as well as save on traditional household expenses required for stitching clothes, but were unable to generate a continuous flow of customers and thereby secure a significant increase in their income. Learning from this experience and with the support of UNFPA, AKF piloted a mushroom cultivation project, building on a rapid market analysis that also took into consideration the market chain and the mobility of girls, which went on to be a successful innovation. Because of UNFPA's agility and support as a donor, AKF was able to shift its approach, trial a new innovation, and maximise its impact.

Link | https://www.akf.org.uk/project-lehar-empowering-out-of-school-adolescent-girls-in-india/

Critically, funders must give space for programmes to be agile. For example, donors must establish processes which encourage programmes to propose solutions to issues as they arise and adjust their approach to meet the specific needs of a context, such as ensuring rapid approval of budget changes and release of funding. More significant shifts in programming or funding can be difficult to achieve within an appropriate timeframe when there are overly onerous approval processes to go through and where decision-making is slow. This requires donors to have trust and confidence in implementing partners who have deep local experience and knowledge. Donors should consider how to create the conditions for innovation and ensure programmes can rapidly iterate and test different approaches whilst maintaining focus on the overall objectives of the programme. Having regular opportunities for programmes and donors to review and reflect together and meaningfully consider adaptations is important, but whilst also allowing for timely adaptation.

Funders also need to provide space for programmes to pilot, test and innovate, particularly in fragile contexts. It is important that new approaches build on an existing evidence-base about what is already known to work (even if this is in a different context) and new approaches are rigorously monitored and evaluated so they too produce evidence to inform future programming.

Many of the programmes that are discussed in this Position Paper demonstrate the powerful impact that can be achieved when new approaches are trialled which propose solutions to long-standing challenges; this includes trying existing ideas in new contexts as well as coming up with new ideas which are highly tailored to local communities. STAGES' Flexible Response Fund, for example, provided support to communities to design and implement ideas that get girls into schools (for example incentive payments for female teachers to relocate to remote communities, transportation for female teachers, building of new classrooms, and more). This approach was piloted with inputs from the community, tested, iterated and scaled through the STAGES programme (in both phases 1 and 2) and is now being scaled beyond Afghanistan.

Key recommendations:

In fragile contexts, challenges are highly localised, complex and often entrenched. They are also dynamic and unstable and require a long-term approach with flexibility factored in to respond to changing situations on the ground. Donors should:

- Allow for greater flexibility for programmes to re-forecast budgets to allow pivots in design and approach.

- Let programmes adapt at a quicker pace by reducing bureaucracy and approving adaptations quickly.

- Embrace new ways of tackling challenges that are driven locally; these should both be evidence-informed and produce new actionable guidance to inform future programming.

Priority 3

Elevate her voice: Designing education programmes from the girls' perspectives

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Successful girls' education programming relies on having a deep understanding of the reality that girls face and the complex barriers to their education. These can be greater and more varied in fragile contexts and for different sub-groups of girls, such as girls with disabilities, girls who do not speak the language of instruction, girls who are mothers, girls who are the head of their household, and girls who are married. They can also vary specifically by context, and what works for girls within one community or region, may not work in another as a result of local cultural or historical influences. Programmes must invest in gender and conflict analyses which look at the specific vulnerabilities and marginalisation facing different subgroups of girls, and understand the factors negatively impacting their education. ActionAid's work with out-of-school girls in Kenya illustrates this approach, as set out below.

Case Study

ACTIONAID

ActionAid's programme in Kenya targets out-of-school girls (OOSG) as part of FCDO's Leave No Girl Behind fund. The programme employs a six-step approach adapted from ActionAid's Community Led Participatory Change Plans (CLPCPs) process, which is a method of generating development plans at community level that recognise the rights of women and marginalised groups in the society. The programme included a deep analysis of the specific situation relating to OOSG in each community and the specific conditions that have led to the exclusion of particular subgroups of girls from education. Interventions are then tailored to the needs of each subgroup; for example, as part of support to girls, meals have been provided for young mothers' children to enable the mothers to attend catch-up classes. Scholastic kits have also been provided to all girls (including learning materials and 'dignity' kits) with extra additions for young mothers and girls with disabilities.

Link | https://actionaidkenya.org/ourprojects/education-for-life/
https://girlseducationchallenge.org/projects/project/education-for-life/

Stakeholders at all levels must understand the specific situations girls face, especially those facing extreme forms of marginalisation or those living amidst conflict. Governments should take these needs into account when resourcing support for girls' education; programme implementers should seek to deeply understand the context of targeted girls; and both male and female teachers should be supported to actively engage with issues of gender equity and be equipped with the skills to conduct gender analyses in their own classrooms. This involves teachers understanding the complex barriers that different sub-groups of girls face and their impact on outcomes, and requires on-going support and professional development.

Importantly, girls' education programming should place girls and women at the centre of the solution and evidence generation. Female leaders should be actively engaged in programmes and supported to play a leading role in delivery and evaluations of approaches.

Importantly, girls' education programming should place girls and women at the centre of the solution. Female leaders should be actively engaged in programmes and supported to play a leading role in delivery. Programmes should represent and elevate the views and needs of women and girls, including subgroups such as ethnic minorities, girls with disabilities and other marginalised groups. It is crucial that girls understand how to actively engage with the issues that concern them and understand their rights to education, healthy and appropriate relationships with boys and men, and be able to voice their concerns when these rights are not being met. Too often, programmes place girls as subjects of interventions, rather than giving them a voice to speak, share their experiences and build their confidence. Girl Rising have sought to address this challenge by providing a platform for girls across India and Pakistan to share their dreams and aspirations. Films are created documenting their journey and how they have broken down barriers to achieve their dreams. These videos are then used as part of a 24-week gender sensitisation programme for communities, thereby amplifying the girls' voices in these conversations.

It is imperative to establish clear roles for women and girls and to develop their ability to take a leading role in interventions. This requires leadership skills training, developing women as teachers and healthcare professionals, and specially targeting and engaging female religious leaders and shura members.

Key recommendations:

In fragile contexts and moments of crisis, contextual factors and barriers impacting on girls are more varied. Programmes must:

- Design their approach for the context and take into account the barriers that different subgroups of girls face; this requires in-depth engagement and consultations with the girls and their communities, gender analysis and rigorous focus on evidence. Donors should avoid prioritising certain groups based on their own agenda without considering the local context.

- Ensure that implementers have time and resources to conduct detailed analysis to inform programming; donors must acknowledge the importance of this work and commit to funding it.

- Support both male and female teachers to actively engage with issues of gender equity and be equipped with the skills to conduct gender analysis in their own classrooms.

- Be realistic when confronting barriers and focus on what can be changed within project parameters.

- Elevate the voices of girls and women in programme design and delivery.

Place communities in the lead: Partnering with our key stakeholders to sustain education programmes

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We focus on giving voices to communities. Communities are powerful drivers of sustainability because they initiate action at the government level

Rebecca Hiemstra, Catholic Relief Services

The most successful programming places communities in the lead from design through to delivery, and empowers communities to take responsibility for the programmes and activities that impact them. In fragile contexts, instability can impede upon the activities of programme teams which makes community partnership even more important so that interventions can be sustained through moments of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the importance of local ownership of girls' education initiatives, and the fragility of interventions when the community is not in the lead.

When face-to-face lessons stopped and schools closed during the pandemic, the critical role of communities in girls' education was thrust into clear view. Sustainability is not a linear process; it requires a bottom-up approach which takes into account local context. For programmes to be sustained, they must be closely aligned to the systems on the ground and avoid being so resource intensive such that they go beyond local capacity and means to carry them forward. STAGES provides a good example of this approach in action.

Case Study

STAGES

STAGES has adopted a highly contextualised approach by bringing together a consortium of partners who each have deep experience and expertise working in different regions of Afghanistan. Each brings a more nuanced perspective of the specific context in which they work, and often decades of experience working in those communities, and as such are able to establish local support for shared priorities. STAGES partners worked in close collaboration with communities to understand their views on girls' education, their hesitations and challenges. By working through these challenges with them, communities not only supported, but also owned the interventions. They provided their time, resources and communal spaces to establish CBE classes. To further emphasize their role in the continuation and governance of CBEs, the STAGES partners established school management committees (shuras) involving a range of trusted members of the community (including religious leaders), who were responsible for promoting girls' educational outcomes, monitoring attendance, and identifying and addressing safeguarding issues and ensuring that programming continues throughout the pandemic. This approach has ensured that the STAGES interventions were owned by communities and ensured the continuation of learning even during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures.

Link | https://www.akf.org.uk/programme-spotlight-stages/

There is a risk with donor-funded programmes that they can feel 'done to' communities rather than engaging communities deeply in their design and delivery from the outset. Local culture and context must be respected and integrated into programming.

In many of the world's most fragile contexts, discriminatory and harmful gender norms, such as those relating to female genital mutilation (FGM), early marriage, violence against children are persistent, deep-rooted and reinforced at all levels of society. These cumulatively shape and form individual, family, clan and community beliefs, knowledge, attitudes and perceptions over time and are both internalised and reinforced in religious and political structures and systems. In highly patriarchal societies gatekeepers of such beliefs and transmit them from generation to generation. Furthermore, issues around child marriage, gender-based violence, and sexuality are highly sensitive and considered private 'family matters' which can make them harder to confront. Addressing this requires careful sensitisation and engagement of community stakeholders and influencers to encourage behaviours that promote equality, justice and diversity. Indeed, during her address to the 'Girls Education in Fragile Contexts' conference, Her Excellency Rangina Hamidi, Acting Minister of Education in Afghanistan, acknowledged the need to work with the cultural realities in communities when designing solutions. Interventions should be pragmatic and focused on what is realistic to achieve within a specific context whilst remaining committed to longer-term system change.

This must start with understanding local culture and norms (including gendered practises, biases, and misconceptions) to establish the entry points to addressing these issues. Programmes should have local staff and identify and target those with personal and professional influence on girls' education. These could include religious and cultural leaders, families, school leadership, girls and boys themselves, as well as other role models and girls' education champions.

Religious and cultural leaders play a critical role in communities and their involvement is central to changing attitudes. Religious leaders can be instrumental in promoting positive messages about girls' education. Within the STAGES programme, CARE worked with religious scholars to encourage them to be champions for girls' education.

As they are highly respected within communities, they were able to talk with families about the importance of girls' education from a religious perspective, emphasising Islamic values related to education for both boys and girls, stressing the importance of girls reaching adulthood before marrying, and supporting enrolment drives for both boys and girls. Religious leaders should be engaged from the design stage of programmes and help frame the goals and language to inspire long-term support for girls' education. It is also critical to understand the boundaries when engaging with matters of religious or cultural sensitivity. Building and facilitating effective collaboration with religious leaders takes time and programmes need to establish the right entry points, for example, demonstrating the complementarity between girls' education and religious values.

Families are also an important influence on girls' education and programmes should seek to build support from mothers, grandmothers, fathers, husbands (and other extended family). In patriarchal societies, male caregivers (fathers and husbands) largely have responsibility for decision making regarding schooling and transition into further education and employment, as well as for sexual and reproductive health, including contraceptive use. Engagement with men on the importance of girls' education and gender-inclusive values should start with boys (see Priority 5), and should target men in the spaces they occupy. In Tanzania, Grassroot Soccer harnesses soccer clubs to initiate boys in conversations about SRH and gender-related issues, such as intimate partner violence.

Whilst promising practices exist, more evidence needs to be generated about how programmes can effectively navigate cultural and religious barriers and sensitivities in different contexts. Engaging communities and placing them in the lead is time intensive and requires concerted effort. Programmes should seek to understand local communities and assess their strengths and capacities before embarking upon community engagement or training efforts.

Key recommendations:

In fragile contexts, power dynamics can be very fractured and highly decentralised, making it critical to work with local influencers and power holders. This is crucial for sustainability. As such, programmes should:

- Identify and leverage influencers within the community to build ownership and demand for girls' education.

- Respect local power dynamics, customs and traditions and integrate education programmes within existing systems on the ground.

- Recognise the role of women as gatekeepers of local culture and religion and enable their leadership of girls' education programming.

- Prioritise community engagement and ownership from the outset and invest time and resources in facilitating local collaboration and capacity building in relevant skills and knowledge to support girls' education.

Include the boys: Delivering education programmes for all

Many strides have been made in girls' education reflecting the important link between girls' education and global development goals, as well as high level commitments to girls' education in recent years. Whilst it is undeniable that in many contexts, girls do not stay in school as long or receive the same quality of education opportunities as boys, in other contexts the reverse is true. Excluding boys and men from programmes risks perpetuating inequity, increasing tensions and reinforcing harmful practices. For true gender parity to be achieved, programmes must take into account the needs of both girls and boys, and ensure opportunities are open to all. Indeed recent evidence reviews indicate that the most effective way to reach girls it to reach both girls and boys together.[8]

In fragile contexts and remote communities, both boys and girls lack access to quality education. Many of the barriers to educational access and learning are shared by boys and girls, while others differ by gender. In conflict situations, boys may be more susceptible to being recruited by armed groups, for example, or more likely to be embroiled in localised clan conflicts and border disputes around land and resources.

Historically, boys have been excluded as a key beneficiary within girls' education programmes. In the first phase of the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC), for example, the focus of many interventions was solely on girls' outcomes (STAGES was an exception to this and included boys from the outset).

8   Evans, D. and Yuan, F. 2019. "What we learn about girls' education from interventions that do not focus on girls." CGD Working paper 513.

Save the Children in the DRC have reported the impact of not including boys and the propagation of negative feelings towards girls' education. The GEC has since shifted towards a model focused more on gender equality and social inclusion and, importantly, the second phase of the GEC (GEC-T) includes boys too.

Case Study

REALISE, DRC

In the first phase of this GEC project, the activities were only provided for girls. This created jealousy in mixed-sex schools with boys being physically and verbally violent towards girls, attacking girls and their property and refusing to support girls in classroom activities. In the second phase of the project, measures have been taken to include boys proactively. These include:

- Publishing 'puberty' books for boys and girls, which challenged gender norms and presented positive characteristics of both boys and girls

- Replacing girls' kits with class kits (including textbooks) to be used by both boys and girls

- Targeting both boys and girls in Learning Clubs and including boys and girls in sexual and reproductive health (SRH) clubs

- Creating a sexual and reproductive health (SRH) hotline for boys and girls to ask questions

- Providing bursaries through a whole school approach as opposed to providing these individually to girls to mitigate backlash

- Delivering teacher training which promotes gender inclusion

The inclusion of boys has resulted in improved learning outcomes for boys and girls, greater levels of wellbeing, reduction of violence, enhanced mutual support, increased confidence of girls to participate in classroom activities, and levelling between boys and girls in reading and maths in many classes.

Link | https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/16844/pdf/drc_realise_2_pager_v2km.pdf

Including boys in programmes gives them access to much needed support and quality schooling but also helps to shift their attitudes towards girls and develop boys as champions of girls' education more broadly. Boys need to engage in conversations about gender norms and healthy relationships between girls and boys. In Tanzania, Grassroot Soccer harnesses soccer clubs to initiate boys in conversations about SRH and gender-related issues, such as intimate partner violence. This has led to a decrease in sexual activity and intimate partner violence. Boys can also have an influential role on the girls in their families who may be out of school, for example by passing on information learned in sexual and reproductive health (SRH) clubs.

CARE's adolescent empowerment work in Somalia

To promote a shift in social norms, CARE utilises a synchronised approach to adolescent empowerment through leadership clubs in two of its FCDO-funded initiatives in Somalia (Adolescent Girls Education in Somalia (AGES) and Somali Girls' Education Promotion Project – Transition (SOMGEP-T)) in all communities where accelerated education programmes are being implemented (except in those areas where doing so poses a security risk to participants, particularly girls). These leadership clubs, called Girls' and Boys' Empowerment Fora (GEF/BEF), are gender-segregated groups of adolescents supported by a trained local facilitator. GEFs and BEFs seek to equip girls and boys with the skills, behaviours, and attitudes linked with social and emotional learning competencies needed to address the often-hidden challenges and needs they face in and out of school. For girls, GEFs seek to develop their voice and ability to work together in a safe space to explore new gender roles in a fast-changing society, including their potential for a different future after completing school. For boys, BEFs support them to envision different perspectives related to masculine roles in society and to have a safe space to discuss the risks they are exposed to when forced to prove themselves to the community as 'men'. These include being recruited by militant groups, illegal migration in search of economic and learning opportunities, and drug use (khat).

Link | https://www.care.org/our-work/education-and-work/education/somali-girls-education-promotion-programme-transition/

Engaging boys is not without its challenges. Often adolescent boys fail to take girls' education interventions seriously and can shift attention away from girls. They may also engage in programme activities for the wrong reasons, such as to meet girls. To help mitigate these risks, mixed gender clubs (including those focused on SRH) should have clear codes of conduct and, in addition to mixed spaces, boys and girls should each have their own boys-only and girls-only spaces to discuss sensitive issues. Programmes should also use male facilitators, or para-counsellors, to lead boys' activities around health and hygiene, psycho-social issues, adolescent changes, attitudes to girls, respect and consent.

Boys should be engaged with sensitisation activities from an early age and be considered as active stakeholders in the design and development of girls' education programmes.

Key recommendations:

In fragile contexts, barriers to access are heightened for both boys and girls. Programmes should:

- Include boys as beneficiaries and recognise that they also face complex and multiple barriers to accessing quality education.

- Provide dedicated spaces and interventions for both boys and girls to engage with and explore sensitive topics.

- Recognise the important role boys (and young men) play as advocates for girls' education in their communities and families.

Priority 6

Prepare the classrooms: Supporting teachers to deliver effective gender-responsive pedagogy

Girls' education outcomes are often constrained by poor classroom practice and a lack of gender-responsive pedagogy, as a result of inadequately trained and skilled teachers, and lack of ongoing quality professional development. Delivering quality educational experiences is the main goal of girls' education programmes; as such, programming should maintain a rigorous focus on ensuring that teaching and learning is of high quality, contextually relevant and delivers clear benefits to communities. Being successful in improving learning outcomes gives programmes legitimacy with local communities and government and increases buy-in. In contexts where there is scepticism about the importance of girls' education, this is even more critical as successful interventions play an important role in creating local demand for education. EGER has identified pedagogical approaches that are proven to have an impact on learning in their 2021 Girls' Education Roadmap.[9] These include structured pedagogy interventions, use of instructional technologies and competency grouping.

In many contexts, curricula, resources, pedagogy and classroom management practices are not sensitive to the specific needs of girls and can reinforce harmful gender biases. In girls' education programming, gender responsive approaches and quality teaching should be synonymous, in order to meet the diverse needs of girls in school. However, training and support for teachers is often inadequate: when it needs to be more targeted, specific, and practical, what is often delivered is too broad, theoretical, and detached from classroom realities. For example, teachers need tools, methods, and resources about how to advance child protection and safeguarding in and through their classroom practices, how to support children with disabilities, and how to address biases and gender-based violence and other forms of abuse within learning environments.

Teacher professional development workshops should be complemented by peer-to-peer support, such as ongoing coaching or participation in communities of practice to facilitate exchange of practical solutions and ensure lasting effects of training inputs.[10]

Observations of classroom practice should include a focus on how teachers interact with children and invite critical reflection on how they can better notice and act on their own biases and attitudes relating to gender equality in education.

School leaders and teachers need to model gender-inclusive values and be equipped to support as critical stakeholders and enablers of effective girls' education at all stages of programming. School leaders, for example, may be supportive of girls' education in principle, but fail to establish inclusive environments for pregnant and parenting girls. The Population Council in Kenya engages school leaders and communities in policy dialogue to provide time and space for them to learn about existing policies that support school re-entry for girls and reflect on successes, challenges and the support they need to create a more inclusive environment for girls.

Case Study

AKF's 'Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment' guide course for educators

AKF recognises the importance of students developing broader learning outcomes in addition to knowledge and skills, such as positive attitudes and values. In light of this, AKF developed an 'inclusive classroom environment' guide and associated training courses that help teachers to reduce biases and create more inclusive teaching and learning environment by integrating ethics and pluralism in their classrooms through emotional climate and instructional strategies. The guide is complemented by localised, video-based and blended learning courses on a range of different topics.

Link | https://www.akf.org.uk/akf-launches-inclusive-learning-environment-video-courses-for-educators/

Teachers should also have the knowledge and skills to support children's social and emotional development, and address issues relating to trauma which are exacerbated in moments of crisis, as well as understanding the additional services they can access for more specialist support. During the COVID-19 pandemic, STAGES provided additional support to teachers by training them in mental health first aid to help with the provision of psycho-social support to students experiencing high levels of anxiety. The shift to remote learning also presented additional challenges for teachers. Remote learning approaches should be localised and responsive to the needs of the communities that they serve, and teachers need specific support in how to deliver education effectively in a remote environment.

Key recommendations:

In fragile contexts, girls are disproportionately affected by barriers to receiving a quality education. Programmes should:

- Ensure teaching and learning is of high quality to enable successful outcomes for girls, and can be accessed close to home.

- Embrace gender-responsive pedagogy and classroom management practices to help deliver quality learning outcomes.

- Build the capacity of teachers to improve learning in gender-responsive classrooms by providing highly targeted, specific, and practical professional development experiences; rather than experiences that are too broad, theoretical, and detached from classroom realities.

- Ensure teacher development is sustained by complementing teacher training with an additional programme of support, such as on-going coaching and teacher participation in communities of practice.

- Ensure teachers are consulted in the design of teacher professional development programmes, and have the tailored knowledge, tools and resourcesto support learners with diverse and complex needs.

9   Psaki, S., N. Haberland, M. Kozak, and L. Woyczynski. 2021. "Girls' Education Roadmap: 2021 Report." EGER Reports. New York: Population Council.

10 Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel (2020). Cost-effective approaches to improve global learning: What does recent evidence tell us are "Smart Buys" for improving learning in low- and middle-income countries? url: http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/719211603835247448/pdf/Cost-Effective-Approaches-to-Improve-Global-Learning-What-Does-Recent-Evidence-Tell-Us-Are-Smart-Buys-for-Improving-Learning-in-Low-and-Middle-Income-Countries.pdf

Create more meaningful pathways: Planning with the long-term view, from education to employment

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> *Pathways to work – including teaching – builds ambition, gives girls credibility and standing in their families, and creates the female role models that so many girls lack*
>
> **Matt Reed, Aga Khan Foundation**

Pathways to further education and employment can be hindered by cost, cultural expectations about the role of women in society, security challenges and concerns about girls and women leaving their homes and communities. In addition, in many contexts, there is a perception that employment or further education is not compatible with motherhood or marriage. Girls' education programmes should plan pathways for girls to successfully transition and succeed in further education, employment or personal livelihoods, and meaningful participation in community life. Girls should be empowered with knowledge and information about the importance of their education and the pathways open to them. It is critical to demonstrate to girls, and to their families, how education and community development can lead to income generation. Building girls' confidence is also an important part of enabling them to pursue different pathways and girls need positive mentoring to empower them to choose and pursue such opportunities.

Exposing girls to positive female role models is beneficial to both girls and their families as a way of exploring successful participation in further education, employment, and family and community life. Female teachers have an important position in communities as role models for girls; a lack of qualified female teachers is both a cause and an effect of low levels of girls' education.

Shortages of female teachers can be particularly acute in remote areas. Save the Children has piloted and evaluated the Girls Learning to Teach programme in Afghanistan, as part of STAGES, and is working with the Ministry of Education to accredit the programme so graduates can go on to become government-school teachers.

Attaching training to job opportunities in this way can be particularly motivating for girls. Community-based job opportunities mean that girls in challenging contexts can pursue pathways close to home, which is less of a challenge both to cultural expectations of women to stay home and to concerns about how to ensure women's safety.

Case Study

STAGES (Girls Learning to Teach Afghanistan)

The Girls Learning to Teach programme seeks to shift attitudes towards women working and support the provision of quality education for girls by training young women in the last year of secondary school to qualify as a teacher. Training is delivered during non-school hours and includes modules on teaching methodologies, child development, lesson planning, and the teaching of reading and mathematics. The programme has trained 265 teachers, giving young women much needed skills and knowledge. The programme has been well received locally, with communities applying for funding to incentivise female teachers and pay for their transport; this signals the importance of the initiative to local communities.

Link | https://www.akf.org.uk/programme-spotlight-stages/

Extra-curricular and leadership training often help build girls' confidence and levels of resilience. Curricula, therefore, should prioritise more leadership skills training, SRH, and offer greater support in financial literacy and entrepreneurship. The STAGES project has found that the development of life and leadership skills has multiple positive impacts on girls, including contributing significantly to improved literacy and numeracy outcomes and successful educational transition outcomes. Participating girls were better able to confidently discuss education pathways with their caregivers. The STAGES endline evaluation recommends that this should continue to be a core component of life skills related activities in the future, particularly as a means of supporting successful transition pathways.

Key recommendations:

In fragile contexts, crisis can reinforce harmful gender norms which block pathways for girls and women. Programmes should:

- Consider girls' whole life experiences and seek to establish pathways into further education, employment for improved livelihoods and meaningful community participation.

- Offer opportunities to build girls' confidence and levels of resilience through life and leadership skills building.

- Provide access to role models and positive mentorship to help build girls' confidence and support them to access and pursue different livelihood pathways.

- Offer training programmes linked to local employment needs, such as teaching, ICT support, community health work, and midwifery as a motivator to participate in education. These are great entry points for attaining jobs close to home, especially for young women from more rural and conservative communities.

Collaborate and build synergy: Working in partnership at every level, across multiple sectors for quality learning

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We must implement services in a holistic manner that is inclusive of the community. We need to engage all actors, especially the government, who has the mandate to provide quality services. Decision making should be based on robust data and in-depth analysis

Mariella Ruiz-Rodriguez, USAID Afghanistan

National and local governments are ultimately responsible for the funding and delivery of education for girls and, therefore, for interventions to be sustained, approaches need to be embedded into the schools and education ecosystems of Ministries of Education. Solutions must not be imposed on governments and should be designed in line with other government priorities, initiatives, policies and budgetary cycles. Solutions should also not be driven in a top-down way, from a central government level, as different levels of government (national, state/provincial, district) can be highly disconnected and fractured. As such, national and local governments should be a key part of the programme planning process, involved from the outset and throughout, to ensure there is a clear pathway to adoption and scale. This approach takes time and resources, as programmes need to work at all levels, helping to bridge the gaps and ensuring an active and meaningful partnership with government.

Partnership with government, at all levels, gives programmes legitimacy in local communities and also gives donors confidence in the success of the intervention. Programmes should therefore ensure that government officials are a core part of programme governance and play a key role in the monitoring of programme outcomes. Programmatic handover to the government should be gradual, and partial handovers may be required in the short-term. A broad spectrum of actors should be engaged across government departments, political parties, and civil society, in order to sustain impact despite changes in government. Decentralising solutions and ensuring that decision-making and planning is informed by locals who understand the context helps to ensure programmes are locally led and sustainable.

Achieving shared perspectives and priorities between government, donors and NGOs is not always straightforward and requires policy dialogue to encourage a recognition of efforts and achievements, and to drive the integration of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) practices into government structures and policies. It is also important to build a common understanding of the different realities facing girls, and resource support appropriately for different subgroups of girls. Programmes can use data for advocacy with government and to help governments see the impact of larger budgetary allocations towards girls' education work.

Case Study

CARE, SOMALIA

CARE embeds program units within education ministries to support the design and implementation of activities to increase equitable access to education and to improve learning quality, including within emergency settings. In the Puntland State of Somalia, since 2013 CARE has been working with the Ministry of Education to build the capacity of staff to develop and implement policies to increase equitable access for girls and other marginalised groups, boost quality of education, and enable decentralised quality assurance processes.[10] Programmes should factor in the costs, resources, and challenges to ensure sustainability of efforts associated with government engagement and capacity building.

Link | https://www.careinternational.org.uk/countries/somalia

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10 CARE (2020). CARE Capacity Statement Nexus Programming, pp. 1-2.

The STAGES programme team engaged government at all levels in highly specific and granular conversations about what will happen with every class once the programme ends. This level of detailed planning is required as well as regular follow-up to ensure commitments are adhered to. As a result of its efforts engaging government, STAGES has achieved recognition for CBE as an alternative education approach and it is now part of the Ministry of Education's National Education Strategic Plan (NESP).

Some governments in fragile contexts also require technical support to own and replicate solutions, as well as evidence about what has worked both within their country as well as within other countries facing similar challenges. When working in fragile contexts, building the capacity of existing and emerging local government leaders is critical to facilitate the transition into more stable conditions.

Finally, girls' education in fragile contexts is an intersectional challenge and therefore requires a coordinated response between different government departments and sectors. A range of factors affects girls' participation and attainment, including poverty and the high cost of education, lack of infrastructure, lack of sanitation facilities, lack of protection and security, prevalence of child labour, and early marriage and pregnancy, to name a few. These multiple challenges fall under the remit of different sectors and government departments, not just the Ministry of Education. As such, collaboration is required across government departments (such as Ministries of Labour and Health) to address multi-faceted barriers and provide an integrated package of support for girls. In addition to providing quality schooling, wider barriers need to be addressed including those related to poverty, health and conflict issues. Social protection schemes are required which support girls' holistic well-being including personal physical health, nutrition, mental health, confidence and economic security.

Key recommendations:

In fragile contexts, education programming sits at the nexus between humanitarian and development responses. Programmes should:

- Be owned by government and aligned to government priorities, systems and budgetary cycles.

- Involve national and local governments in the programme planning process from the outset and ensure there is a clear plan to transfer approaches, assets and knowledge to government over time.

- Support government at all levels to work together and ultimately embed approaches into the provision of local education systems.

- Recognise that girls' education in fragile contexts is an intersectional challenge and requires a cross-sector response.

Priority 9

Safeguard and protect: Adopting a forward-looking approach to safeguarding in and through education

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Solutions to sexual exploitation and abuse are found locally"

Tina Tinde, PSEAH Advisor

Child-protection and safeguarding issues are rife across conflict-affected countries where aggressors have easier access to children and often operate with impunity. Abusers often target girls, and other marginalised groups, such as those with disabilities, who are particularly susceptible to abuse as a result of harmful cultural norms and traditions. Child protection and safeguarding needs, therefore, need to be understood through the lens of the realities that children face.

It is critical that safeguarding goes further than being a box-ticking exercise for the sector and instead becomes a shared responsibility across society to protect one another from harm. This begins at home, in communities and in classrooms where young people must be taught what is acceptable behaviour and be empowered to safely report complaints and cases of abuse without backlash via trusted and safe mechanisms.

The education sector could take a leading role when it comes to safeguarding, but this promise has not yet been realised. Implementers must:

- Promote a culture of zero tolerance and integrate safeguarding across all organisational functions.

- Work with local police, courts, women's associations and other CSOs in the community to identify the most effective way to hold perpetrators accountable.

- Ensure there is clear and consistent management support for gender equality and safeguarding.

- Subject all individuals to a duty of care and provide continuous capacity and awareness building.

- Clearly communicate the importance of implementing safeguarding.

- Ensure reporting protocols are clear to all.

Programmes must engage with local people in the community – women's associations, and local CSOs representing children, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups – to understand how to identify and address the risks children face. Capacity building and training should be provided locally, and, where possible, child protection efforts should be aligned with local law and referral systems on the ground to ensure they are sustained at community level. At the least, programmes should work with communities to build awareness of their rights and what safeguarding misconduct involves, and work together to co-design reporting mechanisms which they will feel comfortable and safe to use. Bond, through its 'Safeguarding in Successful Partnerships'

Change Statement, is calling for a shift in mindset to regard local partners as equal partners – recognising the value of their voices, ideas and solutions in the mitigation of safeguarding risks. It also recognises that unrealistic and immediate compliance requirements imposed on local partners without planning, capacity building and ongoing monitoring and support can lead to under-reporting, lack of learning, and increased risk. Power dynamics between donors, INGOs and local partners can amplify this effect. In practical terms, the development of policies, processes and training should be done in the spirit of two-way learning, and partner due diligence should be holistic, involve staff, set realistic timeframes for compliance and be regularly reviewed and evaluated.

Programmes and organisations should plan mechanisms to protect children and safeguard vulnerable groups from the beginning of programme planning and all the way through implementation. Gender responsiveness should be planned for at all levels and stages of the programme. Policies and processes should be lived and breathed by everyone involved in programmes, with all stakeholders understanding the important role they have to play in upholding safeguarding values; this requires appropriate resourcing and investment.

Case Study

STAGES

In Afghanistan, communities are very private and averse to sharing issues outside the home. This can pose a challenge when it comes to child protection and safeguarding. The STAGES experience has highlighted the need to need to bring safeguarding policies to the centre of programme delivery and also to work closely with local communities to bring policy in line with local law and custom and to get buy-in at local level. Shurahs are trained to identify and address safeguarding issues ensuring a community-wide adoption of safeguarding principles. Teachers undergo reference checks and are trained and subject to a clear code of conduct. Safeguarding is reinforced throughout programme interactions with key stakeholders. When teachers are observed, for example, they are not only assessed on the quality of teaching and learning, but on their behaviour with children.

Link | https://www.akf.org.uk/programme-spotlight-stages/

Defining child protection and safeguarding

Save the Children defines child safeguarding as *"the set of policies, procedures and practices that mitigate and manage risk to ensure no child is harmed in the course of delivering organisational programmes or activities, and for effectively reporting and responding if harm does occur. It includes practices that protect children from deliberate or unintentional harm and reduce the risk of or actual harm that may result from organisational activities or the behaviours of its staff, partners, volunteers and others who work for or represent the organisation. Child safeguarding focuses on the protection from child abuse and other risk factors, introduced through an organisation's programming."*

UNICEF uses the term child protection to refer to "preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children – including commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking, child labour and harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation/cutting and child marriage."

Sources:

- https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/19086/pdf/disability_inclusive_child_safeguarding_guidelines_able_child_africa_save_the_children_2021_-full.pdf
- www.unicef.org

In the international development sector, the last few years have brought a strong focus on child protection and safeguarding, triggered by high profile incidents of abuse of children and vulnerable adults perpetrated by employees or associates of leading charities in the sector. In particular, this caused FCDO and other donors to energetically review standards and processes and hold the sector to account in new ways. Organisations working in girls' education programming therefore face a more scrutinised set of requirements in a complex landscape. There is also a "virtuous circular relationship between the education and protection of girls" and education programmes have a critical role to play in ensuring that robust safeguarding frameworks exist to protect children and vulnerable populations.[11] While there are several organisations doing good work, it remains an area which requires more investment, learning and an on-going commitment to improving organisational cultures and not reducing safeguarding efforts to a box-ticking exercise.

Tackling sexual misconduct in organisations

Some of the root causes of sexual misconduct in the aid sector have been identified as follows:
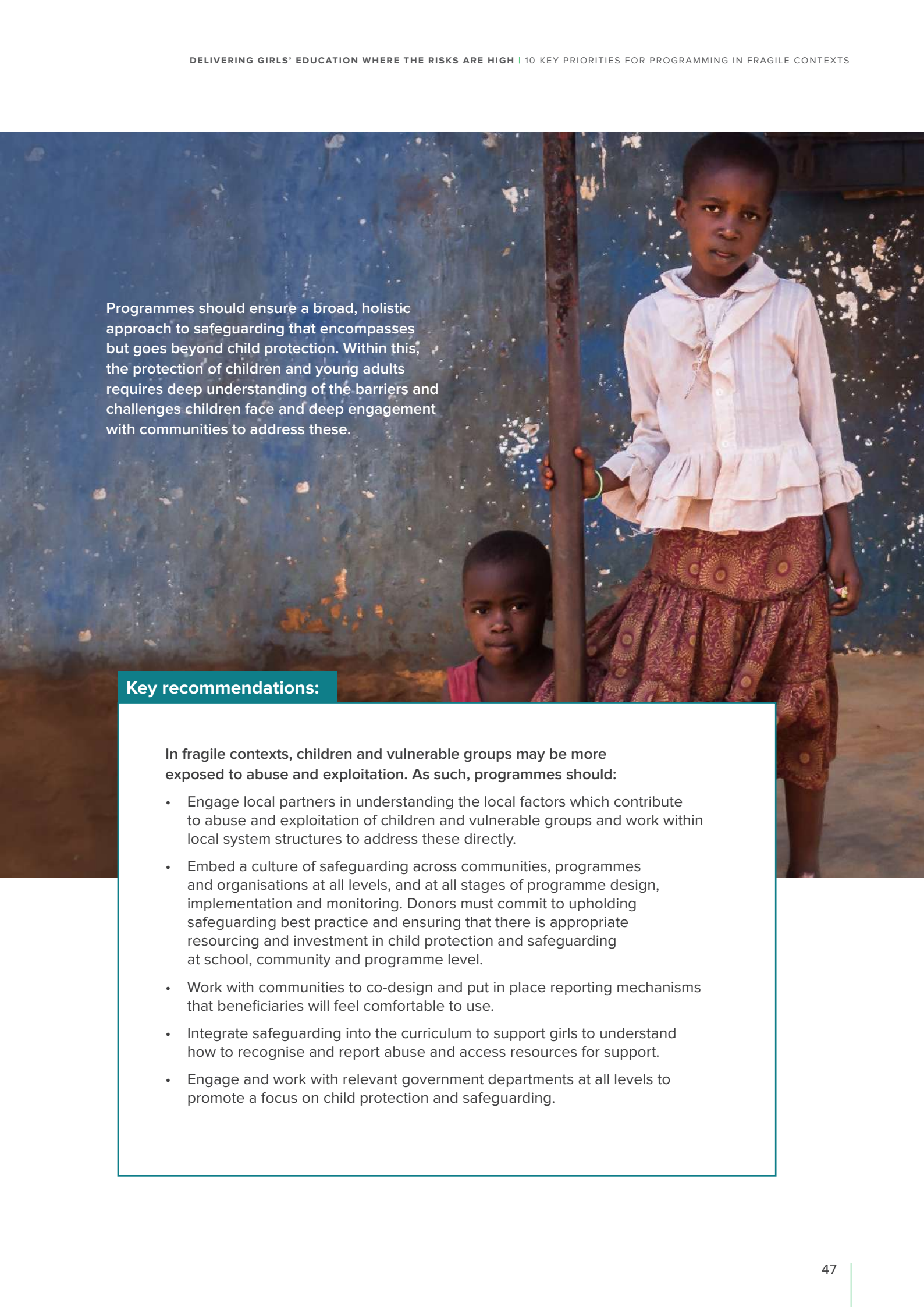
- Aid organisations globally often have patriarchal structures and male-dominated leadership.

- Organisations have to a large degree failed to budget for expertise and programmes on prevention of gender-based violence at work (and in operations)

- There is often a lack of prioritisation for prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence in organisations' systems and processes.

- Sexual abuse is seen as a taboo topic, and survivors may not feel safe and supported to disclose incidents.

- Victim-blaming is common.

- Women and children have lower status in society.

- Organisations often lack accountability structures and impunity in court systems prevail.

To address these root causes, organisations must ensure there is leadership commitment to tackling misconduct, that they have specialist sexual and gender-based violence experts within them, and that they take a survivor-centred and trauma-informed approach.

Organisations can take the following actions:

- Ask local associations representing women, children, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups what sexual exploitation and abuse risks they face and how to prevent these.

- Ask female staff and volunteers and members of marginalised groups how to address sexual misconduct in the workplace.

- Meet with local authorities and actors to discuss reporting channels and referrals (for example, medical and legal institutions and settings).

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11 Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (2021). Mind the Gap: The State of Girls' Education in Crisis and Conflict. New York, NY.

Programmes should ensure a broad, holistic approach to safeguarding that encompasses but goes beyond child protection. Within this, the protection of children and young adults requires deep understanding of the barriers and challenges children face and deep engagement with communities to address these.

Key recommendations:

In fragile contexts, children and vulnerable groups may be more exposed to abuse and exploitation. As such, programmes should:

- Engage local partners in understanding the local factors which contribute to abuse and exploitation of children and vulnerable groups and work within local system structures to address these directly.

- Embed a culture of safeguarding across communities, programmes and organisations at all levels, and at all stages of programme design, implementation and monitoring. Donors must commit to upholding safeguarding best practice and ensuring that there is appropriate resourcing and investment in child protection and safeguarding at school, community and programme level.

- Work with communities to co-design and put in place reporting mechanisms that beneficiaries will feel comfortable to use.

- Integrate safeguarding into the curriculum to support girls to understand how to recognise and report abuse and access resources for support.

- Engage and work with relevant government departments at all levels to promote a focus on child protection and safeguarding.

Think out of the box: Embracing complementary models of girls' education

In fragile and conflict-affected situations, it is not always possible to consistently deliver education through conventional schooling alone, and therefore alternative, complementary models can provide a solution. The experience of STAGES in Afghanistan has demonstrated the acute importance of providing alternative education models that cater to young people and address the specific barriers they face. Community Based Education (CBE), for example, provides a way of reaching and supporting the most marginalised young people who are unable to attend government schools because of insecurity, distance, extreme weather or for other reasons.

CBE models provide classes for girls where they live in their own communities. Because education opportunities are offered closer to home, girls are more likely to attend, to stay in school and to transition to further educational opportunities. CBE has consistently been proven to be an effective model in some of the most fragile contexts. The evaluation of STAGES has demonstrated that parents are more likely to allow their daughters (including adolescent girls) to attend classes closer to home through CBE, and that CBE students were less likely to drop out than in government schools located further from their communities. Furthermore, the CBE model has been embraced by the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan and even created a new Directorate of Alternative Education Methodologies designed to improve opportunities for girls that do not have access to formal education.

When planning alternative education models, it is critical that this is done in alignment with government systems so that the classes can be sustained, and to ensure girls attain properly recognised educational qualifications and credentials. The STAGES programme has tested the efficacy of different iterations of the CBE model to great success, including multi-grade CBE classes and an Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP). In Afghanistan, multi-grade CBE and ALP classes have enabled girls who have never attended school, or who are underserved by the government education system, to access quality education for the very first time. STAGES has been able to demonstrate that such approaches can deliver the same learning gains as mainstream approaches. In West Africa, Plan International and the Strømme Foundation, in partnership with Educate A Child, a global program of the Education Above All Foundation, also use alternative education models to support out-of-school children to transition back into formal education.

Case Study

49

Primary (School) Access through Speed Schools + (PASS+) Project

The PASS+ Project provides access to gender responsive, safe, inclusive, conflict sensitive and child friendly learning to out-of-school children in 15 regions in West Africa (in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger). The 'Speed School' model, developed by the Strømme Foundation and West African education experts, offers a pathway for out-of-school girls and boys aged 8-12 facing deep-rooted and gender-related barriers to (re)-integrate into primary school. The program is designed to accelerate education for children so that they can cover up to three years of learning in nine months. The program begins with two months of local language teaching, before switching to learning in French language with ongoing support from instructors. At the end of the program, students are assessed to determine grade placement in primary school. Families and communities are engaged throughout the program to help out-of-school girls and boys to overcome obstacles to education. Over 115,000 children (50% girls) have participated in the program. On average, 90% of Speed School students complete the programme and 87% of those students transfer to primary school.

This community-based model has been institutionalized and integrated as part of the strategy of the Ministries of Education of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger to accelerate the enrolment of out of school children.

Link | https://educateachild.org/our-partners-projects/projects/primary-school-access-through-speed-schools-pass-project

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted learners across the globe and further emphasised the importance of considering alternative education models to provide continuous education opportunities in moments of crisis.

As a result of the pandemic, ministries of education worldwide have grappled with the challenge of providing quality learning opportunities remotely, especially when children had little to no connectivity to the internet or access to digital resources. The world's response to COVID-19 demonstrates the urgent need to further invest in community-driven and community-based education models that do not depend on digital connectivity alone.

Key recommendations:

In fragile contexts, it is not always possible to consistently deliver education through public education systems. As such, governments, donors and implementers should:

- Consider evidenced-based alternative education models which address the barriers preventing girls in fragile contexts from attending and staying in school.

- Ensure that alternative education approaches have built in adaptations to help them respond to emergency situations and extended school closures (for example, in terms of content, delivery modalities, teacher training and support). These should also include offline access to quality learning in contexts where online learning is not possible.

- Ensure that alternative education approaches are planned in collaboration with government, so that they can be sustained in the long term or even become part of mainstream provision.

References and acknowledgements
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- Girl Rising
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- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
- Madrasa Early Childhood Programme, East Africa
- Ministry of Education, Afghanistan
- Plan Canada
- Plan International
- Population Council
- Save the Children
- USAID

ℹ Please note that this paper does not represent the view of these organisations.

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