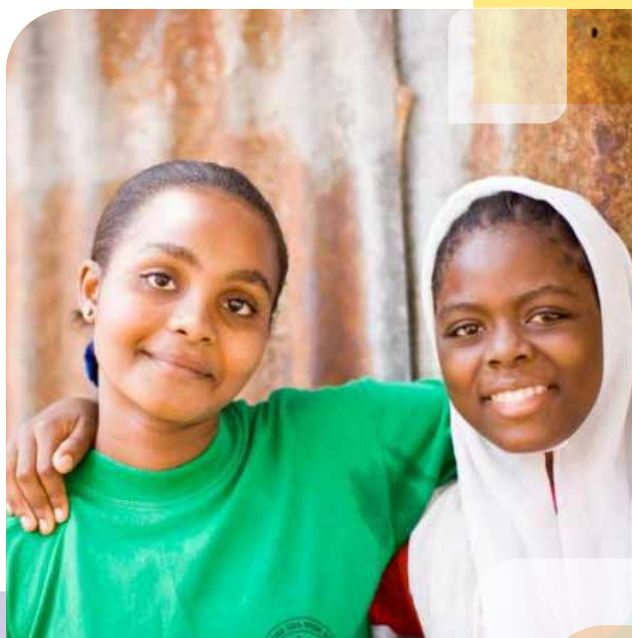# Girls' education and empowerment:
Exploring the potential of English language and digital skills.

Contents

Acknowledgements

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1 Introduction

This report presents summaries of 11 scoping studies conducted in early 2021 to assess the need for a British Council programme designed for adolescent girls in communities that are remote and/or socio-economically marginalised. While the focus of the studies is on how the existing programme English and Digital for Girls' Education (EDGE) could be expanded to new countries and contexts, the resulting report also gives valuable insights for other organisations working in the sphere. The studies examine the role and future potential for:

- Non-formal education in marginalised communities
- The need for digital literacy and effective skills development
- The role of English language and how to most effectively develop communication skills
- Opportunities for empowerment and changing social norms through a peer-led approach

2 English and Digital for Girls' Education (EDGE)

Programme objectives

The English and Digital for Girls' Education (EDGE) programme aims to improve the life prospects of adolescent girls (aged 13–19) in socio-economically marginalised communities in Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Nepal. These girls can be either attending formal education or be out of school. The programme focuses on enhancing participants' English proficiency, digital skills and awareness of social issues. As a result, they will be better able to make informed and independent life choices, as is their right, in order to contribute more fully to the family, the economy and society. In addition, EDGE aims to improve the leadership skills of a smaller group of peer group leaders drawn from the same communities of adolescent girls.

These objectives will be achieved through six interlinked strands of activity:

- Providing adolescent girls with opportunities and resources to develop their English proficiency, digital skills and awareness of social issues in peer-led after-school clubs

- Developing a cadre of Peer Group Leaders (PGLs) and building their leadership skills and confidence to facilitate English and digital training in these clubs

- Developing the capacity of a cohort of trainers to train and support the peer leaders

- Developing age- and level-appropriate materials for the development of the target skills, and suitable materials for the training and support of the peer group leaders and their trainers

- Building trust within the communities to change and develop the perception of the value of girls in the community

- Monitoring and evaluating all stages of the project, including independent baseline and endline studies

See Appendix for further information.

3 Scoping studies

3.1 Background

Completing scoping studies in Pakistan and Afghanistan led to successful programme implementation in new contexts in South Asia. Subsequently, the EDGE team sought to explore the potential for project implementation in new regions through a series of scoping studies in 2020/21. Studies were completed in the following countries with the following research partners.

Region	Country	Research partner	Notes
Americas			
	Brazil		
	Mexico	Overseas Development Institute (ODI)	
	Colombia		
Sub Saharan Africa			
	Nigeria	Oxford Policy Management	
	Ethiopia	Tayah Consulting	
	Sierra Leone	Education Partnerships Group	
	Sudan	Elanor Jackson/ Kanwal Ahluwalia/British Council Sudan.	UK consultants in collaboration with MoE and British Council Sudan team
South East Asia			
	Myanmar	Sinzar Consulting	Only desk review was completed due to Myanmar crisis
	Indonesia	Solidaritas	
	Viet Nam	Viet Nam Institute of Educational Science	
Middle East and North Africa			
	Syria	Syria Centre for Policy Research	Only desk review was completed to date due to logistical issues – this research is ongoing

3.2 Questions addressed and methodology

The research in each country addresses a core set of questions related to adolescent girls in communities perceived to be marginalised:

- How are they impacted by gender inequalities and what opportunities are available to them to enable them to make informed and independent life choices?

- What is their level of digital literacy and what access do they have to digital technology and platforms?

- How can marginalisation be defined in each specific context?

- What are the key priorities and concerns of adolescent girls (both in and out of school)?

- What is the relevance of a programme like EDGE and what adaptations would be required to the current programme model to respond to girls' key priorities?

- What is the appetite for / interest in the EDGE programme from key stakeholders, and what barriers need addressing?

- How could EDGE be implemented in practice and what are the possible risks (contextual, delivery, safeguarding, operational, financial)?

Each report consists of two main sections:
A desk review of secondary data to inform a gender analysis and evaluation of educational and digital landscapes

Primary data collection methodology and analysis – this is qualitative and may include responses from:

- Adolescent girls (i.e. through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) or participatory learning approaches)

- Parents/caregivers through FGDs or group interviews

- Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with community/ religious leaders, education stakeholders, experts from the digital sector, and civil society actors and women's rights organisations involved in similar work

3.3 The scoping study summaries

A summary was completed for each country seeking to highlight the most important findings. Each summary covers the following:

- How primary data was collected and in what regions

- Gender analysis – examining the status of women and girls in society

- The role of English in adolescent girls' lives

- The role of digital in adolescent girls' lives

- Recommendations for future projects

The data for each report was collected by different research agencies and consultancies, so each report follows a slightly different style and data was collected in different ways.

4 What have we learned from the studies?

These studies represent a unique insight into the lives of adolescent girls in 11 diverse countries. They give voice to adolescent girls in communities that are marginalised or disadvantaged for a variety of reasons, representing the voices of over 900 girls from all over the world.

When we look at the hopes and aspirations of the girls who were part of this research, we see a rich variety of viewpoints, aspirations and ideas for the future, and we see a lot of hope for change. Importantly, the studies also examine the attitudes of boys who have similar aspirations not only for themselves but also for the girls in their communities.

Despite the rich variety of contexts and cultures represented in these reports, there are similarities between all 11 countries. The countries in this study have mostly patriarchal societies, where males are the heads of households. Women have fewer employment opportunities and experience more barriers to education, with many lacking access to basic education, or being prevented from studying certain subjects and less likely to progress to higher education. Those in countries where conflict is rife have additional issues with access: women and girls seem to be disproportionately shouldering the burden of displacement and poverty. In addition, social isolation caused by, for example, child marriage or the threat of gender-based violence, means that girls can't access the same opportunities as boys and men.

A lot of discussion was also generated in designing these studies about what exactly marginalisation means especially when looking at such a variety of contexts. The initial stage of each study was to define marginalisation in each country. The studies focus on groups who are disadvantaged in different ways:

- Those living in rural areas, disadvantaged urban areas or remote, mountainous areas
- Those living in geographical areas with low educational and employment outcomes
- Those lacking access to technological infrastructure including electricity, internet and hardware

- Out-of-school girls; girls with special needs; girls from ethnic minorities; refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons or nomadic families, working girls; married girls

These studies were carried out in the context of Covid-19, which has exacerbated marginalisation, as highlighted by development and humanitarian agencies studying the impact of Covid.[1] Our findings confirm that, due to the pandemic:

- Women and girls are at higher risk of gender-based violence
- Women's overrepresentation in the informal sector heightens their vulnerabilities during crises and negatively affects their economic conditions
- Women and adolescent girls take on a disproportionate share of caregiving burdens, negatively impacting their economic empowerment
- Adolescent girls are twice as likely as boys to be out of school in crisis situations

In current EDGE projects in South Asia, we have seen the negative impact of Covid-19, with large increases in the number of child marriages.

During Covid-19, access has made the difference between students' ability to continue in education or not, with students in the target communities for a programme like EDGE often being left behind. On the other hand, it has also meant that digital solutions have been much more readily accepted as a means of providing education, highlighting the importance of digital literacy for all.

Digital has obviously become more important, with the reasons varying for the different contexts. Some see the most pressing need as high-level digital skills like coding, while others are interested in more foundational skills for work or study. Interestingly, there seems to be a distinct lack of training or input on digital literacy across all the counties, and with increasing worries about safety online, this is an area which needs to be explored further.

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[1]   https://reliefweb.int/report/world/gender-implications-covid-19-outbreaks-development-and-humanitarian-settings

The gender digital divide was also clear in many countries, with parents viewing the digital sphere as an unsafe place for their teenage girls, as well as girls not necessarily using digital to its full potential. There also seems to be a generational digital divide, with many parents surveyed feeling they did not have sufficient knowledge of the digital sphere to be able to protect their children from harm online, or even understand the dangers.

The need for English across the different countries was also varied but was often tied to the ability to use the internet, with many girls highlighting how useful it was to understand the language in order to access information online. English fulfils many different roles in the eyes of those surveyed, but for all it provides access to employment opportunities be it in tourism or international companies. In some countries it provides access or acts as a barrier to access to higher education, while in others, where English is the medium of instruction, it can serve as a huge barrier to people being able to achieve educational outcomes.

We also saw that, for some groups, English serves as an important tool in the struggle for rights and the ability to communicate with the outside world. In several countries, English was also seen as a passport to study and employment in other countries.

What does it mean for programmes like EDGE which work in the non-formal education sphere at community level? The recommendations are varied but, again, common themes emerge.

Social issues are complex and varied for adolescent girls

The reports show a variety of social issues which impact on the lives of adolescent girls in each country. These issues are culturally sensitive and the most appropriate ways that they can be highlighted and discussed are specific to each country. This means that materials must be contextualised for each country while keeping the ethos and overall objectives of the programme.

We need to find new ways to challenge gender roles and stereotypes in the world, as no matter where we look, the roles of women and girls, and men and boys are still beset by stereotypes.

More safe spaces at community level are needed

Some of the biggest barriers to education for adolescent girls in many of the countries studied are the time required to travel to school, safety issues, and time pressures presented by the need to fulfil household duties. Clubs that offer educational opportunities in safe and suitable locations within communities offer an effective way to overcome those barriers.

The need for safe spaces is more pronounced than ever – girls need a space to convene, and they need socially enabling environments where they can meet peers, talk and support each other.

The role of English language learning

As mentioned above, English plays various roles, including providing access to the internet, higher education and employment opportunities. However, in some countries, the most urgent need is perhaps not for English, but foundational literacy in young people's home language.

As the role of English is so varied, the English curriculum of any project focusing on this skill needs to take this into account. English language learning must be tailored to different contexts and needs such as employability, education, etc.
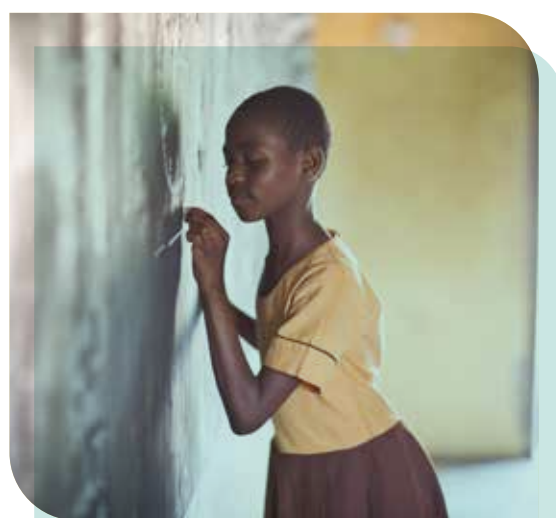
Boys and men are also part of the solution

Some interesting perspectives emerged from the boys interviewed, and there is huge potential in engaging them as drivers of social change. For example, boys interviewed often expressed the opinion that girls have equal or better ability than boys in English and digital. Thus, there is a need to speak more to boys.

Digital literacy is constantly evolving

We need to find ways to help adolescent girls stay safe online, at the same time as being able to explore all the opportunities which the digital space can provide in terms of education and employment.

We need to help parents to understand the digital sphere. The views of parents range from not knowing what their children do online and/or not knowing enough to provide guidance and support, to simply refusing permission to use digital tools.

We don't know enough about what digital competencies adolescents need in different contexts. Digital literacy frameworks are often produced in Western countries and don't take into consideration the variety of needs. ICT as taught in schools seems to be focused on how to use computers, with very little input on aspects such as safety online.

Access to mobile phones is generally far greater than to laptops and computers, but the use of computers develops skills that are more applicable to employment opportunities, indicating the importance of providing computer skills. We need to find a balanced approach that includes both mobile phone and computer technology.

Perceptions of peer-led learning

The concept of peer-led learning, particularly in contexts where a very strong teacher-led school environment exists, is not one that people easily understand. Peer-led approaches involve participants working together to learn, discuss and provide support to each other without an adult or teacher present. This is something which is seen as particularly effective when working with adolescents as peers play such a crucial role in the psychological development of this age group. Although we have substantial evidence that girls do gain skills through the clubs that use this methodology, many people who were part of these studies remain skeptical of teenage girls' ability to run a club. We need to help people understand the benefits of the methodology, as it has been shown to be extremely empowering for this age group.

The shape of future projects

There were varied opinions on what would be the most effective project design to reach adolescent girls in each country. In some countries, it was recommended that a peer-led methodology could be used to design interventions for both boys and girls. In many countries, there was also a recommendation to implement these types of projects in formal systems. We have seen in South Asia that teachers are interested to know more about this way of approaching learning, indicating a lot of potential for getting teachers involved in empowering learners through peer-led approaches.

Next steps

Many of the findings of these reports require more unpacking and research to continue to develop understanding of how best to meet the diverse needs of this audience. For example, more work is clearly needed in the field of digital literacy to understand how best to develop girls' skills and address the gender digital divide beyond merely access to devices.

We hope the content of the summaries will serve as a springboard for further conversations and discussions on the topic of non-formal education for adolescent girls and will be useful for a diverse range of stakeholders working in this field.

The rest of this report consists of 11 country summaries. To access the full reports for any of the countries covered, please contact your local British Council office.

Each country summary provides

- A short overview of where the studies took place, what research methods were used and who participated
- Gender Inequality Index (GII) scores and rankings

Gender Inequality Index (GII)

For each country, a GII score and ranking has been added to the summary as this gives a succinct overview of the position of women in each country. In total, 162 countries are part of the GII and it shows where gaps exist in each country.

Although GII data used for this report comes from 2019, it does give an overview of some of the key issues in each country.

The GII score is quite a broad-brush overview of the situation in each country, it aggregates data on the following:

- Maternal mortality ratio
- Adolescent birth rate
- Share of seats in parliament
- Population with at least some secondary education
- Labour force participation rate

Each country receives a GII value between 0 and 1. The higher the GII value the more disparities between females and males and the more potential loss to human development.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

It is also important to note that all of the countries in this report have ratified CEDAW. The convention was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. It defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.

The Convention defines discrimination against women as '... any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.'

By accepting the Convention, states commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms, including:

- Incorporating the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolishing all discriminatory laws and adopting appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women
- Establishing tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination
- Ensuring the elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organisations or enterprises

Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also committed to submit national reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations.

189 UN-recognised states (out of 193) have ratified the treaty, and some 50 of those have done so with some amendments, i.e. opting out of certain articles of the treaty. The United States has signed the treaty but not ratified it.

Country summaries
Syria

GII score	GII ranking (out of 189)
0.482	122

Due to the challenging conditions in Syria causing delays in the collection of primary data, this report only reflects the desktop review.

Status of women and girls

Syria has been devastated by over ten years of conflict. 'More than 400,000 deaths have been directly attributed to the conflict so far, with millions more non-lethal casualties known to have occurred. More than half of Syria's pre-conflict population (of over 21 million) has been displaced' (World Bank, 2021).

Secondary data on the living circumstances of female adolescents in Syria during the last decade reveals the severe violations of their rights and deprivation of opportunities resulting from:

- Lack of safety and security
- Increased poverty
- Fragmentation and weakened resources of the education system
- Poor access to many services including access to communication and ICT

The *Social institutions and gender index country report* (OECD, 2019) reveals that while Syrian women seem to have fair access to land ownership and financial services, they are subjected to highly discriminatory laws relating to family affairs, physical integrity, working rights and civil rights (ibid.). For example, child marriage is prohibited by the Personal Status Law, yet there are no accountability or penalty processes for violating this law (World Bank, 2015, cited in OECD, 2019). While the 2010 Labour Law mandates non-discrimination in employment on the basis of sex, married women are only allowed to work outside the home with their husbands' permission. Moreover, women who are employed in agriculture or other informal sectors have no regular salary, employment protection or social security benefits (OECD, 2019). In addition, there is no legislation protecting women against domestic violence, and while rape is criminalised by law, it is loosely enforced and very weak in protecting women from harm, alienation and social stigma.

Educational barriers and opportunities for girls

Fear of gender-based violence has a direct impact on girls' dropout from school, particularly before they transition to secondary school, making girls 2.5 times more likely to drop out than boys, and leading to an increase of child marriage as a negative coping mechanism that is exacerbated by financial hardship and vulnerability.

Child marriage continues to be one of the main gender-based concerns affecting girls. Married girls and child mothers have limited power to make decisions, are generally less able to earn an income, and are vulnerable to multiple health risks, violence, abuse and exploitation. Young married girls are often required to perform large amounts of domestic work, are under pressure to demonstrate their fertility by having many children and are responsible for raising children while they are still children themselves.

UNFPA's study, *When caged birds sing* (2018), shows that Syrian adolescent girls continue to face gender-based violence (e.g. family and domestic violence, child marriage, and sexual assault) due to the ongoing

conflict which continues to enforce restrictions that profoundly affect their lives. The study also shows that young girls have started voicing their disapproval of gender-based inequalities and denouncing boys' exclusive privileges, such as having access to sporting activities while girls are bound to 'women types of activities' like sewing and knitting. Others expressed their interest in robotics, engineering and IT subjects which were typically offered to men.

What stands out in the stories of the adolescent girls who endured some of the harshest experiences is their determination and strong belief in a better world and future.

'After the war came, we thought we would have to worry about fighter planes and bullets, but instead we found ourselves worrying about harassment, kidnapping and rape. We don't leave our houses anymore. Some girls cannot even go to school because their families won't let them.'
**Adolescent girl,
Syria**

'Despite the pain that I and many like me have been through, I still believe in the possibility of a better world, where young girls can live out their childhoods in peace and freedom. This is why I decided to volunteer to help those who have suffered as I have, to make sure that my generation will not make the same mistakes.'
**Adolescent girl,
Syria**

Role of English in girls' lives

Arabic is the sole official language in Syria and the mother tongue for the majority of the population (Khojaand & Mohapatra, 2017).

Syrian teachers' main aim seems to be for students to pass examinations, rather than learning to communicate in English. Although the curriculum is based on the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, it is taught through the grammar translation method, which focuses on teaching vocabulary and grammar (ibid.)

Students' lack of exposure and practice in listening and speaking at high school means that they are often under-prepared for university courses where English is used exclusively as a means of instruction and communication, resulting in them feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope (ibid.)

Role of digital in girls' lives

The ongoing conflict in Syria, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, has made accessing education very challenging for Syrian children, including girls. Several studies examine the possible role of digital learning modalities to mitigate education disruptions resulting from the crisis. However, there is still a significant lack of knowledge and evidence on the effectiveness of ICT in education during such emergencies.

Recent primary data indicates that Syrians have low-quality and relatively costly access to the internet while also facing many difficulties in using it, including poor access to electricity and a drop in income (SCPR, 2021).

Opportunities and challenges for future projects

The inspiring stories of the adolescent girls in United Nations Population Fund's (UNPFA) study reveal their underlying potential, which can be unlocked through well designed programmes that meet their specific needs and ambitions through meaningful support mechanisms, learning empowerment and creative pathways. The study highlights the important role that women's and girls' safe spaces and young mothers clubs have played in providing instrumental support and safety nets that have proved life-saving or transformative in many cases.

The key value of such programmes is not limited to providing safe, collaborative environments that offer life skills learning opportunities. They also create an environment that enables meaningful social interaction, and demonstrate that social networks and relationship-building in contexts of crisis are paramount in helping adolescent girls – some of whom are young mothers or

sexual assault survivors – overcome their traumatic experiences, fears and lack of confidence and purpose.

Recommendations for future projects

In addressing Syrian adolescent girls' challenges and aspirations in a situation of protracted conflicts and crises, the following recommendations should be considered:

1. **Engage adolescent girls** in the design of any programmes that target them. **Take a holistic and multi-sectoral approach** that includes protection, health, education, water and sanitation, and livelihoods.

2. **Pursue opportunities for change** by sensitively challenging discriminatory norms, advancing girls' rights and peacebuilding, and tapping the potential of technology to help overcome restrictions through online forums and digital platforms.

3. **Expand research on adolescent girls during the conflict** to identify the specific challenges facing this age group and better inform effective learning solutions that can help them overcome these challenges. Primary research could include focus on access to relevant education opportunities and the use of digital learning platforms.

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Africa

Sierra Leone

Sudan

Nigeria

Ethiopia

Ethiopia

GII score	**GII ranking (out of 189)**	
0.517	125	

Primary data collection – no. of participants, research methods and locations

	No. of girls	72
	No. of boys	12
	Parents, community influencers and NGO leaders	33
	Data collection methods	• Focus group discussions • Key informant interviews
	Locations	Addis Ababa City Administration and Chacha in Amhara
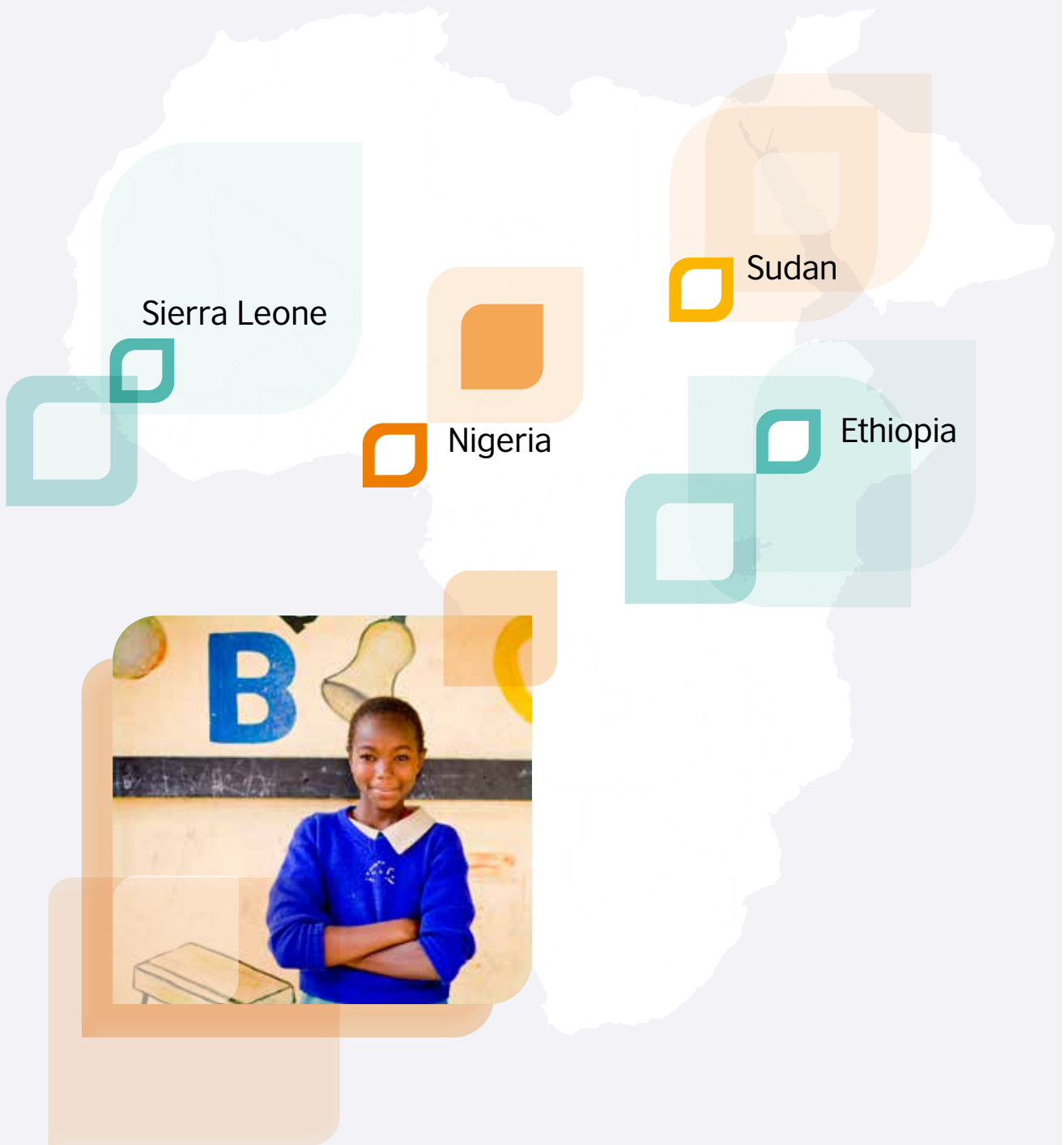
Status of women and girls

Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa with a population of over 118 million. The country is identified as a young nation since the median age of the population is 19.8 years (20.1 for females; 19.6 for males). A quarter of Ethiopians are adolescents aged 10–19, and more than 53 per cent of the population are under the age of 20 (MoH, 2017; Worldometers, 2021).

A typical Ethiopian girl experiences significant pressure from within her family and the wider community. Girls in both Addis Ababa and Amhara stated that they felt they were expected to do the following:

- Excel in their education
- Help their family with household chores
- Serve their community
- Refrain from peer pressure and addictions
- Get married after finishing school
- Mediate when their parents quarrel
- Be loyal to their parents
- Learn behaviours deemed acceptable by the community
- Respect their parents and the community

- Dress properly/not in revealing clothes
- Respect community traditions

Most girls find it difficult to live up to the expectations of their families and communities, and some feel they need to break free from these if they want to reach their full potential. Girls believe that these high expectations, as well as the restrictions placed on them by their families and communities, make life difficult for them. However, younger girls from one region (Amhara) believe their parents place restrictions on them in order to protect them from dangerous circumstances. Community members pointed out that young girls in their community were generally vulnerable to different types of harm, mainly sexual abuse.

'It is difficult. I lead my life in my own way although I don't want to go against the norms of the society.' **Schoolgirl, 13–15, Chacha**

'The community will not allow you to be yourself and you cannot be successful if you aren't yourself.'
Out-of-school girl, 13–19, Chacha

'In our neighbourhood, for instance, we are the ones responsible for cooking breakfast for the boys before they leave for school. We pack their lunches as well. After school, we again prepare supper for them while they go outside to play football. He is allowed to leave the house at night to have fun. Boys are regarded as brave even if they get into fights and cause trouble. There isn't that much pressure on boy.'
Schoolgirl, 16–19, Addis Ababa

Girls have more responsibilities than boys in the home, as they are responsible for helping their mothers and doing household chores. The roles and responsibilities of girls identified by girls and their parents are: cooking, making coffee, cleaning the house, washing dishes and clothes, making injera (flat bread), studying, herding cattle, fetching water, harvesting, going to the market, taking care of younger siblings or ill parents, weaving, and pottery.

In two regions (Addis Ababa and Amhara), girls expressed a desire to play but felt they did not have much time to do so due to having too many household chores after school. Older girls believed that restrictions on their time were only placed on girls while boys of their age group were given a lot of freedom.

Educational barriers and opportunities for girls

Adolescents' educational aspirations and parental support for education is growing in Ethiopia, but for girls this is tempered by families needing their services at home. The heavy burden of domestic work on girls hinders their ability to attend and perform well in school. Girls' aspirations for 'finishing' their education are further hindered by a lack of secondary and tertiary education options in a country where families have to allow girls to leave their communities in order to continue their schooling. All of this has resulted in modest learning outcomes for girls, who have much lower literacy rates than boys.

Girls are disadvantaged with regard to education due to discriminatory gender norms. For instance, household chores are unfairly allocated to girls, affecting their school attendance. Access to school is a challenge for rural female and male adolescents, such as those who come from pastoral communities and those with disabilities, and attendance is poor among adolescents engaged in paid and unpaid work, for girls usually household chores, resulting in poor learning outcomes in rural areas (Jones et al., 2019).

Adolescents' educational aspirations are growing, with the majority wanting to attend secondary education and aspiring to have a professional career. There is also an increase in parental support for education. However, this reality varies for girls and boys. Bolton (2019) suggested that families prefer to use girls' services at home and are concerned that school will spoil them culturally. Parents also fear sending their daughters to secondary school due to the threat of gender-based violence. Students in rural areas face the additional barriers of having to travel long distances to school and a lack of sanitary facilities.

Additionally, girls' access to primary and secondary education is highly influenced by early marriage, living in rural areas, the burden of domestic duties, financial and cultural barriers, a gender-insensitive school environment, and lack of political will by education authorities to implement existing equity policies (Bolton, 2019).

Despite these barriers, interviewed girls stated that they could achieve their dreams if they studied hard and respected their parents' and teachers' advice as this was the key to achieving their aspirations and life goals.

> 'Young girls should be strong and not let the opinion of others get to them. As you've (one of the participants) said anyone can achieve anything they have set their mind. All it takes it to convince yourself that you are capable.'
> **Schoolgirl, 16–19,**
> **Addis Ababa**

Most girls aspire to finish university. They feel success in their studies is the only way to support their aspirations to have a good job and to be economically stable. The few out-of-school girls that didn't aspire to continue their education wanted to start or own a small business and be financially independent.

> 'I work as a janitor by day. I cannot focus on my education (in the evening) because I get tired. I want to have my own business and to have that I need somebody that can give me support.'
> **Working girl, 16–19,**
> **Addis Ababa**

> 'Learning is knowledge and knowledge is power. If we don't educate ourselves, we can't do anything.'
> **Schoolgirl,16-19,**
> **Addis Ababa**

Role of English in girls' lives

Girls and boys learn English as a class subject, but all other subjects are also provided in English (except for Amharic or local language lessons) from grade seven. All respondents mentioned that they only study English at school, and most stated that they face difficulties understanding subjects taught in English since they do not have strong enough English language skills.

All girls and boys believe that learning English and digital skills is beneficial to their future lives and employment prospects. Girl respondents felt that these skills would also be beneficial for communicating with foreigners, accessing information, understanding lessons and content on any platform, and that digital skills are important in today's job market or if they want to manage their own business. They also mentioned that their parents would allow them to do so if they had the opportunity, the only barrier being the cost of learning these skills.

All adult respondents expressed the importance of learning English and digital skills as Ethiopia moves into the digital era. English was seen as the key to understanding other subjects and accessing digital technologies.

> 'I haven't taken English classes apart from the ones provided at school. I was not able to read in English until I was in 8th grade. I started to try learning because of a teacher who forced us to present in English, but I still don't understand words properly.'
> **Schoolgirl, 16–19,**
> **Addis Ababa**

'The biggest challenge is that they don't know English and not knowing this important international language limits Ethiopian girls from the networks they can build and the information that they can access and therefore the confidence that they can build.'
Expert (female), Malala Fund

'English is an international language, so it is very helpful to learn it. If someone talks to you in English and you cannot even write your name in that language it is hard.'
Schoolgirl, 16–19, Addis Ababa

'Usually, parents restrict their children from having phones … so that I don't become friends with ill-behaved people or the fear of getting into relationships. I would say my parents are right because I have experienced it first-hand.'
Out-of-school girl, 16–19, Addis Ababa

'If we count the number of students who have a smartphone in this school, I will say not more than one per cent. Even if students have the phone, because of the high cost they will not use it to Google..'**Adult (male), Amhara**

Role of digital in girls' lives

Access to technology is lacking in Ethiopia, particularly for rural, adolescent girls. Ethiopia has ongoing internet infrastructure issues. This means that data is extremely expensive, internet speeds are often low and large areas of the country have no connectivity.The digital divide appears between urban/rural, boys/girls and different socio-economic groups. Those in school are not necessarily better off than those out of school as only 27 per cent of the 3,739 secondary schools in the country had access to the internet as of 2017. Covid-19 has brought a renewed interest in the role of digital technology in contributing to access to education. However, there are significant challenges to overcome when rolling out digital technology solutions to locations that lack electricity and internet.

Parents and community members indicated that a majority of girls across both locations do not own mobile phones and that access to digital devices is rare. When available, girls can ask the permission of parents to use them in their homes and during their spare time. According to all girls and boys in both locations, they use mobile phones for the following purposes: making phone calls, listening to music, watching videos, taking pictures, using the calculator and dictionary, browsing the internet, using social media (e.g. Telegram, YouTube, Facebook, Tik-Tok and WhatsApp).

As a result of Covid-19, parents are more willing for their children to use their mobile phones because teachers are sending them assignments via Telegram. Most girls felt that their parents did not like it when they spent too much time on their mobile phones, but they felt the benefits of a mobile phone outweighed the harm.

Most girls and boys from Addis Ababa and Amhara mentioned that they do not have tablets and computers of their own. It is more common to use computers at school, but these are only available during ICT classes and, even then, some computers do not work. Most students do not have enough time practising on computers as these are shared during ICT classes and students don't even get to touch the computer during a 40-minute session.

Recommendations for future projects

1. **Focus on urban or peri-urban locations.**
   - Projects should be piloted in locations where there are marginalised girls who would benefit from it.
   - Rural locations risk failure due to lack of electricity and internet connectivity, whereas urban or peri-urban locations have the necessary infrastructure.

2. **Work with established NGOs (e.g. FAWE and CHADET) that have:**
   - Existing programme delivery infrastructure in urban, peri-urban and rural areas
   - Local relationships (e.g. with schools, bureaus of education, woredas/districts)
   - Experience with girl-focused programming within their communities

3. **Use schools as locations.**
   - They are considered safe spaces.
   - Parents are more inclined to support extra-curricular activities that are conducted in school.
   - Some secondary schools have infrastructure in place such as computers and internet (though this might need to be supplemented).
   - Female teachers can be strong advocates for projects which focus on girls and can support identified peer leaders if required.

4. **Negotiate access to schools locally via implementing partners,** rather than integrating with the Ministry of Education's digital education offer. Experts suggest that projects should pilot the curriculum before attempting to go to scale with the Ministry of Education.

5. **Approach existing programmes to expand the offering to out-of-school girls:** FAWE and CHADET have such programmes that can easily integrate with new projects.

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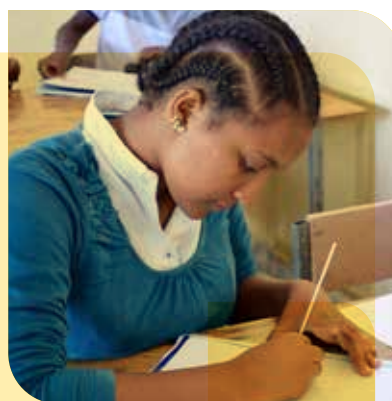
Nigeria

GII score	GII ranking (out of 189)
No data	No data

Primary data collection – no. of participants, research methods and locations

	No. of girls	224
	No. of boys	112
	Parents and community leaders	30
	Data collection methods	• Focus group discussions • Key informant interviews
	Locations	Ikeja LGA (local government area), Lagos Dutse LGA, Jigawa Port Harcourt, Rivers

Status of women and girls

Nigeria, with a population of almost 200 million people, has a significantly large adolescent and youth population, with about a quarter of the population aged between 10 and 19 years.

The general perception in Nigeria is that the responsibilities of women in society are to take care of the home, prepare meals, care for the children's needs and upbringing, and manage the finances of the home, while men go out to work and provide for the family.

Girls are deeply involved in household chores and caring for their siblings or their own children (especially the out-of-school girls). In addition, girls in the rural areas also engage in street hawking to generate income to support their education and family. Tasks performed by adolescent boys, while more physically demanding than household chores, are fewer and more easily completed on time, leaving room for them to be able to study and play more frequently than the girls.

Women and girls are allowed to engage in communal group activities and can set up groups within the community. For girls in Lagos and Rivers, there are no restrictions to attending these activities once

permission has been sought from their parents. However, girls in Jigawa do not participate in most of these group activities, as they are considered to be for older women.

Educational barriers and opportunities for girls

The pervasive cultural and religious practices in Nigeria play a significant part in the education of girls in the country. In most Nigerian communities, girls are relegated to the background. While boys have a choice to attend school, girls are often discouraged from pursuing even primary elementary education (NBS & UNICEF, 2017). Household responsibilities often leave no time for school activities or to pursue post-secondary education, regardless of their desire to progress to this next level.

A reason given for this restrictive position on education for adolescent girls (particularly in northern Nigeria) is to avoid exposing the girls to behaviour or lifestyles perceived as negative by the community. However, in southern Nigeria, the inability to access post-secondary education was mostly due to lack of funds, with adolescent girls being more likely to proceed to tertiary institutions than their male counterparts.

Girls from Jigawa, particularly in the rural areas and poor households, are severely affected by cultural norms and perceptions that impede their chances of reaching secondary and tertiary education. Moreover, they experience more restrictions in mobility, access to opportunities (education, safe spaces for girls, and communal activities).

'Honestly if a girl wants to further her education sometimes parents do deprive it, because they see a girl like if she furthers her education beyond senior secondary school class 3, she can meet bad friends and get spoilt. If a girl is spoilt, it is more problematic, parents feel it more than when it happens to boys.'
Rural out-of-school girl, 13–15, Jigawa

Role of English in girls' lives

The National Policy on Education provides for students to be taught in their mother tongue until primary 3 and then switch to English. English is important for increasing employment opportunities for young Nigerians with international companies and NGOs. The rise of the digital sector has the potential to create jobs and reduce the rate of unemployment amongst Nigerian youth. Since English is the main digital language, English proficiency is key to entering this sector and supporting youth out of poverty.

Findings show that girls are interested in acquiring English literacy skills in order to boost their ability to communicate outside of their immediate environment. In addition, they see English literacy and computing skills as a means to acquire much-needed income generating skills such as making snacks, soaps or cosmetics, tailoring, tattooing, hairdressing or event decoration.

In Jigawa, the girls noted that they need to understand English to communicate adequately outside of the north.

'There are places that you'll go, if you don't know English you'll just be looking because they don't understand what you are saying in Hausa.'
Urban schoolgirl, 16–19, Jigawa

Role of digital in girls' lives

Access to digital technology, particularly mobile phones, is widespread across all the surveyed states in both urban and rural communities. Mobile phones are often internet enabled and used to access social media platforms like WhatsApp, YouTube and Facebook. Adolescents mainly rely on mobile phones to connect with friends and peers, meet new people, do school assignments and find information. However, very few adolescents own or have access to personal computers. There is unequal access and use of digital skills between the poor and rich, rural and urban communities, as well as communities in the North and South (Ifijeh et al., 2016; Girl Effect, 2016).

Across the states, the girls expressed enthusiasm to learn, believing that it is important to develop their English and computing skills (including the use of computer applications like Microsoft Excel and Word) in order to interact effectively, boost their productivity and generate additional income.

Parents believe their children will benefit and become better people if they can develop digital literacy and digital skills. Another motivation is to be able to complete digital forms themselves, without having to travel far to get help to do so.

Providing digital and literacy skills can help curb the high state of prostitution and teenage pregnancy in the target states, the second most common cause of school dropout after a lack of funds.

'I would like to learn computer because the world is advanced. I want to learn how to edit pictures on system and Excel.'
Urban out-of-school girl, 16–19, Lagos

'But if such a programme is available here, and we teach some youth in this community, we can pay less for digital jobs like filling online forms and no need to travel to the main town to get such task done.'
Urban mother, Jigawa

'We are expecting even much more than that because in this society that we are, everybody is supposed to be computer literate. So, for an NGO to provide such opportunity, it is a welcome idea and when doing the programme, they should be able to empower them so that what they have learnt will not leave them.'
Rural mother, Rivers

Recommendations for future projects

1. **Collaborate with other partners in the space, as well as with digital technology companies.** In the absence of the necessary digital infrastructure and technologies, it is important to extend collaboration to other partners in the digital literacy space, including digital technology companies in the private sector, who can supply the hardware required to ensure effective implementation.

2. **Engage with parents, school authorities, traditional and community leaders to better circumvent restrictive social and cultural norms.** There is a need to tailor the programme to accommodate the current cultural restrictions facing girls, particularly in the north. Community leaders need to be engaged at some level during programme implementation to encourage acceptance by parents.

3. **Tailor programmes to provide a clear pathway to employment or economic empowerment.** Girls need to be provided with access to alternative economic activities, ensuring an improvement in their digital skills and potential income while not obstructing their existing studies.

4. **Engage with the state governments to build links that foster greater sustainability.** This will help the recipients once activities come to an end.

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Sierra Leone

GII score	GII ranking (out of 189)
0.644	155

Status of women and girls

Sierra Leone is a small country in West Africa with a population of 7.8 million. It has a young population, with eight in ten people below age 35 and adolescents aged 10–19 years making up nearly one quarter (24 per cent) of the population (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2017; UNFPA, n.d.).

The desk review revealed that traditional cultural norms and beliefs in Sierra Leone perpetuate gendered discrimination and obstruct women from accessing equal social, economic, and political opportunities. In particular, the findings highlighted that:

- Women's voices, visibility, participation and representation in political positions remains very low compared to men

- Gender-based violence perpetrated against women and girls remains a pervasive problem in post-conflict Sierra Leone

- Gender stereotyping negatively impacts parental attitudes to girls' education opportunities

- Prevailing attitudes of 'acceptable' roles for women in society influence decisions around subject choice in

Primary data collection – no. of participants, research methods and locations		
No. of girls	58	
No. of boys	8	
Parents, Ministry of Education, NGO leaders community leaders, headteachers parents and teachers	20	
Data collection methods	• Focus group discussions • Key informant interviews	
Locations	Kroo Bay (Western urban community), Tombo (Western rural community), and Kambia District (North-western rural community)	

school, which are highly gendered (i.e. different roles are deemed acceptable for girls and boys)

- Financial power and decision making remain limited for girls due to underlying factors like lack of education, child marriage and early childbearing

- Child marriage heightens exposure to domestic violence and certain harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C)

- Natural disaster and disease outbreaks have been shown to increase teen pregnancy, resulting in girls losing access to education

Educational barriers and opportunities for girls

The primary research findings confirm the above findings. Adult respondents demonstrated noticeable gendered perceptions of women, revealing deep-rooted ideas about female identity and 'acceptable' roles for girls in society and their suitability for certain types of work.

The majority of girls ranked teenage pregnancy as the most difficult cause of school dropout to overcome, followed by finances (including poverty) and parental care (including the death of a parent and maltreatment from parents).

'Older out-of-school adolescents dislike being mixed with younger adolescent girls in the same classes ... there are issues of mockery and community perceptions of being a dropout that they must contend with.'
Civil society actor (female)

'Girls can't do hard work like boys, the only way they can make a living is through education. As for boys they are strong. They can learn skills such as driving, carpentry, mechanical jobs, and construction and at the end of the day they can make a living.'
Religious leader (male)

'Debunking the idea that girls are meant for the kitchen motivates me to send girls to school. It is proven now that what men can do, women can do it better, as empowerment is key. Another reason for such motivation is to avoid girls being at a disadvantage and to give them equal opportunities.' **Head teacher (male)**

A positive finding was that while women's voices, visibility, participation and representation in political positions remains very low compared to men, this did not seem to impact community perceptions of girls' ability to hold political positions. Community leaders, teachers and parents expressed strong support and motivations for girls' right to education, with many underscoring the importance of girls' education for national development as well as individual social and economic empowerment.

'I am motivated to send adolescent girls to school to stop them from engaging in sexual activities. You know girls are people with weak cells; they are quick to give in if their minds are not engaged and they will be tempted to engage in sexual activities and at the end of the day they will get pregnant.'
Religious leader (male)

'The motivation for sending adolescent girls to school is because we know education eradicates poverty. When a girl is educated, that girl will be in a better position to provide financially for her family, and she can contribute to the development of the country.'
Community leader (male)

While there is gender parity for school attendance in primary and junior secondary school, girls' attendance and completion rates lag behind those of boys in senior secondary school. School outcomes vary greatly depending on factors such as geographic location and household wealth. Girls are also more likely to be out of school due to discriminatory social norms and attitudes, with teenage pregnancy and motherhood also impeding young women's progression through tertiary education and into high-skilled work.

'When I was going to school, my parents were so poor that they could not give me money to buy food during lunch and they could not give me money to pay transport fares to and from school, so I decided to have a boyfriend. My boyfriend was a bike rider, and he took me to school every morning and dropped me home after school. He also gave me money to buy food for lunch, so I decided to have sex with him in exchange for all what he was doing for me. After some time, I got pregnant, and I dropped out of school. Even when I delivered my baby I did not return to school.'
Out-of-school girl, 16–19

Girls from linguistic and ethnic minorities and those whose mother tongue is different from the language taught at school are even more likely to be over-represented among those out of school and not learning (GEC, 2018).

For schoolgirls, the school is an environment with its own set of concerns, including their teachers' ability, sexual harassment and negotiating requests for fees from teachers and community stakeholders. At home, schoolgirls' challenges include finding the necessary time and peace to study.

For out-of-school girls, many girls have to balance the competing priorities of raising children, finding enough financial support to provide for themselves, and aspiring to return to school.

The most popular professional careers among adolescent girls, whether in or out of school, were medicine (doctor or nurse), law, finance and politics. To achieve their aspirations, girls identified three major steps: education, abstaining from sex with men or boyfriends, and the role of parents in supporting them to do schoolwork. For programmes to serve the needs of these groups, finding ways to adapt the curriculum delivery model may be necessary to respond to the priorities, concerns and perspectives of adolescent girls.

Role of English in girls' lives

The language policy in Sierra Leone is for English to be used as the medium of instruction throughout the education system, with 'home languages' being mandated for use in the first three years of primary education. Although English, as the official language, is spoken in schools, government administration and the media, Krio (an English-based creole language) is spoken as the lingua franca in virtually all parts of Sierra Leone. Krio is the mother tongue of 10.5 per cent of the population but is spoken by 90 per cent of Sierra Leoneans (Wikipedia, 2021).

For both teachers and learners in Sierra Leone, English is a second, or even third language. Learners acquire other languages before beginning to learn English, resulting in their use of English being influenced by the vocabulary and structure of their first language. Moreover, teachers have a poor grasp of the language and inadequate methodology. In addition, there is a gap in achievement among learners from different socio-economic and ethnic groups, which widens as the learners progress to higher grades (Osho, n.d.)

The aim of teaching English (or Language Arts) as a subject is to produce highly skilled users of the language who are able to use it for work, social interactions internationally and further study.

Role of digital in girls' lives

Overall levels of technological infrastructure are relatively low in the sampled communities. While mobile phone access is relatively high, other forms of hardware such as computers and tablets are only available to a small minority of respondents. The vast majority of girls

aged 13–19 report primarily using technology for social media use, communicating with friends and family, and for their education.

At the national level, there is a commitment from the government to invest in the development of digital skills and infrastructure. However, high levels of illiteracy, unreliable electricity and the cost of hardware and data packages persist as major barriers to technology usage and the development of digital skills. To achieve impact in this area, any digital skills development project would need to supply relevant ICT equipment that is maintained and serviced regularly.

There is some access to technology at the school level, but coverage remains low overall. Despite several ongoing education technology initiatives in Sierra Leone, access to hardware in schools remains low.

'We have access to both basic and smart phones because these are the phones owned by our parents. Some girls don't own phones, but they use the phones owned by their parents.'
Schoolgirl, 13–15

'Girls are always with their phones; when walking on the street they have phones, when they in the toilets they have phones and when they are cooking in the kitchen they are with their phones.'
Out-of-school girl, 13–15

'These devices are always with them, and they use it every chance they have.'
Teacher (female)

'On the whole, most girls in the community always use their phones. In fact, some have already bought power banks to charge the phones as soon as they run out of battery.'
Schoolgirl, 13–15

Recommendations for future projects

1. Target groups most likely to benefit from the intervention include the following:

- Group age of 13–19 years
- Out-of-school girls
- Rural areas or disadvantaged urban areas
- Living in geographical areas with low educational and employment outcomes
- Girls with functional disabilities

2. Implement projects in relatively less disadvantaged areas such as the Western Area (i.e. where girls are not the most marginalised in Sierra Leone, but are significantly marginalised in a global context).

3. Deliver aspects of the project that are not dependent on technology infrastructure in the most disadvantaged areas in the southern region. For example, the English learning, leadership, social and core skills components of the programme.

4. Adapt the projects to focus on digital skills development for mobile phones. This may be more sustainable in the long term but risks the possible loss of the 'employability aspect' of the project.

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Sudan

GII score	GII ranking (out of 189)
0.545	138

Primary data collection – no. of participants, research methods and locations	
No. of girls	211
No. of boys	77
NGO leaders, community leaders and parents	56
Data collection methods	• Focus group discussions • Key informant interviews
Locations	Atbara, River Nile State, Aldamar, River Nile State, Jabal Awliya, Khartoum State, East Nile, Haifa, Kassala State, Kassala, Kassala State, Kadogli, South Kordofan

Status of women and girls

Sudan is a country with a rich cultural history, largely due to its location at the crossroads of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, with a coastline on the Red Sea. The current population of Sudan is 45,054,201 (UN Women, 2021). For most of its independent history, the country has been beset by internal conflicts and impacted by conflicts in the surrounding region. As a result, the country currently hosts and estimated 763,000 South Sudanese refugees and 159,000 refugees and asylum seekers from Eritrea, Syria, Yemen and Chad.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the various conflicts and security situations across the country, yet their involvement in leadership and participation in peace talks, conflict resolution and peace building continues to reflect only token involvement of women (UN Women, 2021).

Women and girls have been subjected to extremely high levels of violence and continue to shoulder the burden of the displacement and poverty associated with conflict. In rural areas, less than a third of women have access to any form of education (OECD, 2021).

The transitional government of Sudan, in power since 2019, has committed to gender equality for women and men, girls and boys, and to protect women and girls from harmful social norms. It has pledged to end FGM and child marriage, and prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

Despite this, violence against women and girls remains common in most parts of Sudan. Though beatings and violation of women is strongly prohibited in the Islamic religion, women continue to be violated; for example, stoning of women for offenses as small as 'immodest dress', and FGM are still widely practised.

Gender roles in Sudan tend to be traditional, with men being the 'heads' and 'leaders' while women and girls' rights (including education, reproductive, political and economic rights) are often ignored. In addition, they are heavily burdened by domestic responsibilities.

Domestic violence is widespread, and remains largely invisible, due to the absence of reporting mechanisms,

as well as a lack of adequate policies and programmes. Women who are subjected to domestic violence are generally encouraged to seek reconciliation because violence against women is largely viewed as a private matter that should be resolved within the family.

Educational barriers and opportunities for girls

As per government policy, schooling is technically free and compulsory for children aged 6–13 in Sudan. Along with decades of effort in the area of girls' education, this has resulted in near-parity in access to primary education. However, the inability to pay school fees, despite government policy, prevents many poor families from sending their children to school. Primary research findings confirm that the main barriers to girls achieving their aspirations are poverty related, and that this, combined with a lack of wider support, restricts access to quality education and work opportunities.

'School books, uniforms and meals usually cost a fortune, especially when a family has more than one student at school and college. Some girls and boys tend to drop out of school and do manual work to support their poor or parentless families.'
Sheikh, Jabil Awliya, Khartoum

Social norms and traditions, such as child labour (household chores) and child marriage, often resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, prevent girls from pursuing educational and vocational training opportunities.

'I don't go to school because my Dad said no, and I don't know why.'
Out-of-school girl, 13–14, Kadogli, South Kordofan

'People here look at girls as future mothers only, whose role is to bear and rear.'
Arabic teacher (female) of girls aged 13–19, Jabal Awilya, Khartoum

'Girls have to take care of all the house chores, while boys are able to go out and work. Society views girls in an incorrect light, they are not allowed to leave the house except with a male guardian.'
Schoolgirl, 13, East Nile, Khartoum

'Before I go to school, I make breakfast, help my mother, and take my sisters to school.'
Primary schoolgirl, 13, with a child of her own, Al Damar, River Nile

Other barriers to girls attending school in Sudan include:

- Lack of classrooms, resulting in overcrowded classrooms, classes under trees, unsafe temporary classrooms
- Lack of electricity
- Unhealthy sanitation facilities, often without water
- Prevalence of gender-based violence, bullying, abuse

and corporal punishment

- Curricula that are not gender-sensitive and perpetuate the idea that marriage is the ultimate goal for girls
- Lack of female teachers, resulting in a learning environment that is not welcoming to girls

"It's different for girls in that their education is not necessary; they are only supposed to get married and stay inside their homes."
**Schoolboy, 14–17,
East Nile, Khartoum**

'Boys go freely to any safe place without restrictions. As for girls, they go out with tight restrictions, and this varies according to the nature of the families.'
**Schoolboy, 14–17,
East Nile, Khartoum**

'Girls only go out of necessity, boys go out as they please.'
**Schoolgirl, 13–15,
Al Damar, River Nile**

'Girls don't go out, but boys go out anywhere.'
**Schoolgirl, 13–15,
Al Damar, River Nile**

In addition, discriminatory gender norms significantly constrain girls' life choices and mobility, and shape expectations about their roles and futures. Security concerns are an added barrier to girls' movement and participation in educational and employment opportunities.

Role of English in girls' lives

Adolescent girls (aged 13–19) have access to English language education in schools, but teachers in Sudan are often poorly trained and the quality of English language education is often very low, with out-dated curricula and a lack of teacher guidelines.

English was seen by respondents as a 'global language' and one that would help open doors to jobs in the public, private and government sectors. Even for out-of-school girls, having English language skills could enable girls to secure better local jobs (e.g. the lack of English language teachers in rural areas provides potential job opportunities).

'Second to Arabic, English is very important, especially for communication with everyone. It facilitates learning from many websites with content written in English.' **Computer engineer (male), Atbara, River Nile**

'Learning English language needs money and people are held back from this by poverty. In addition, there is a lack of qualified teachers or English language institutes in Kadogli.' **Community leader, Kadogli, South Kordofan**

'Vocational schools and private schools, are the only ones that give priority to English language teaching. In state schools, staff are often not adequately qualified in English.' **Boys' high school principal, Atbara, River Nile**

'A key challenge that students face when learning English, is that they do not have a strong foundation in the language.' **Teacher of English and Arabic (female), Atbara, River Nile**

Role of digital in girls' lives

In Sudan, girls and women often have less access to technology and the internet compared to boys and men, due to lack of affordable access, as well as stereotypes around technology being 'for boys' stopping girls from using digital tools (Plan International, 2021).

Girls feel safer and more connected when they have a mobile phone, which they use to save time and money, and access educational opportunities. However, girls and women are, on average, less likely than men to own a mobile phone, use mobile data, social media apps or SMS.

During the interviews, digital skills were seen as essential for girls' lives for communication and job opportunities. Digital learning has become more important during the pandemic, and girls' confidence is increased through being able to connect to others online. More work is needed in this area to overcome the infrastructural and logistical challenges.

Respondents highlighted the challenges around poor quality education and lack of access to digital skills and devices, indicating that educational materials would need to cater for this low level of digital literacy. Girls' lack of access to digital devices, and poor internet connectivity and uneven access to electricity, particularly in rural areas, were cited as potential barriers to projects focusing on development of digital literacy.

'I wish…
… to be given equal opportunities, like boys
… to be able to discover our hidden talents
… to be able to go out and work, and depend on myself in the future
… to help the less fortunate, working on community development'
Focus group comments from schoolgirls, 15–19, East Nile, Khartoum

Recommendations for future projects

1. **Work with different groups of most marginalised girls.** The research shows that these are likely to include out-of-school girls; girls with special needs; those from refugee, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons or nomadic families, working girls; and married girls.

2. **Pilot the programme. Test working with different** groups of girls (e.g. with girls in camps as well as peri-urban areas), alongside a mapping of existing services and NGO activity.

3. **Use an adaptable approach to supervision of teh clubs.** From the findings, a peer education model is more likely to encourage participation of adolescent girls. However, also working with some skilled and trained teachers, particularly if clubs take place on school premises, is likely to help with parental approval and sustainability of projects.

4. **Link the focus of digital skills content to income generation opportunities.** This may include topics such as financial management and marketable skills. Prior to starting, establish which types of income generating activities are viable and which organisations/private sector entities to collaborate with.

5. **Investigate the relevance of English language skills further.** Insufficient information on this has emerged from the research, and further investigation is needed, particularly for girls who are out-of-school or working/living in rural areas where English may be less relevant. In addition, the programme should consider including Arabic and maths teaching, given that Arabic literacy levels and numeracy skills are low.

6. **Ensure safe spaces for girls.** Venues, for example in women's centres in communities or schools, must be made safe for girls and trusted by parents. Engage parents in some of the activities to ensure that they feel comfortable allowing their daughters to attend. It is essential that girls be given space to realise their potential through critical thinking, and that they are encouraged to participate in collective action in solidarity with other girls.

7. **Use existing girls' clubs.** The desk review revealed that girls' and children's clubs exist in a number of schools through the work of UNICEF, the Ministry of Education and Save the Children. Two possible options are to:

   - Build on the UNICEF/MoE initiatives within schools, bringing in English language and digital skills alongside broader work on girls' empowerment and gender equality
   - Work with community-based clubs to reach out-of-school girls, drawing on insights from programmes such as the work of the Saleema movement, which uses community dialogues to inform programme implementation

8. **Consider including the programme for violence against women and girls (VAWG).** Given the prevalence of VAWG in the country, Partner with humanitarian actors in camps to gain access to psychosocial services and adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services.

9. **Take a holistic approach to programming.** This would include outreach to parents and communities from the start of the programme, as well as advocacy work with duty bearers such as imams, schools and government education officials, and stakeholders working on forced marriage prevention.

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The Americas

Mexico

Colombia

Brazil

Brazil

GII score	GII ranking (out of 189)
0.408	95

Primary data collection – no. of participants, research methods and locations		
	No. of girls	110
	No. of boys	31
	NGO leaders and government leaders and parents	19
	Data collection methods	• Key informant interviews • Survey
	Locations	Piauí, Teresina and Rio de Janeiro, Rio (Maré favela)

Status of women and girls

Brazil is the world's fifth-largest country with the eighth-largest economy by nominal GDP and is the 85th country in the Human Development Index, 2013 (UNFPA, 2020). Despite being a middle-income country, it continues to face inequalities in income distribution and disparities associated to gender, race, and generational and regional disparities (ibid.). According to UN-Habitat (2021) 87 per cent of people in Brazil live in cities.

Brazil has many legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality, with a focus on violence against women. For example, in 2007, 89 per cent of women of reproductive age (15–49) were able to access modern methods of family planning legally.

However, work still needs to be done in Brazil to achieve gender equality; for example, 26.2 per cent of women aged 20–24 were married or in a union before age 18, and as of February 2021, only 15.2 per cent of seats in parliament were held by women. In addition, women and girls aged 15 or over spend 11.6 per cent of their time on unpaid care and domestic work, compared to 5.1 per cent spent by men (UN Women, 2021).

Adolescents and young adults in the online survey carried out for the scoping study, identified the most common challenges faced by adolescent girls in Brazil as:

- Violence against women and girls
- Adolescent pregnancy
- Lack of job opportunities
- Sex work and domestic work
- Drug trafficking
- Child marriage
- Sexually transmitted infections

Girls in the study expressed that they have less job opportunities and a greater burden of domestic work than boys. This is probably due to cultural norms which associate women with domestic and care work.

'I certainly see differences in opportunities between boys and girls. For some years, I have worked odd jobs in theatre. If I were the protagonist in a play, people would ask me if I was sleeping with the director ... Even nowadays, working in an NGO, I feel men think I am smart and capable, but there is a lot of male gaze. It can be very awkward and uncomfortable, even in places where people are fighting inequalities. And I can only identify this type of sexualisation because I have always been exposed to it as an indigenous woman.'
Young woman, 19, Rio de Janeiro

Educational barriers and opportunities for girls

Educational trends in Brazil are similar to those in other Latin American countries: on the surface, data indicates that girls generally have higher rates of participation when compared to boys, but school completion does not always lead to increased opportunities in the employment sector or better livelihoods. High dropout rates – especially at the secondary level – also lead to many girls not completing school or attending university. Girls from poorer households, Afro-descendent and indigenous communities, have less opportunities to study, and often attend lower-performing schools, thus entrenching cycles of poverty.

In addition, deeply rooted gender norms that shape the roles of adolescent girls and young women influence their engagement with school and labour markets. Paid work or unpaid domestic work; adolescent pregnancy; child, early and forced marriage; and gender-based violence are among the challenges that girls face.

Adolescent girls and young women face particular risks because of gender and social norms around motherhood and marriage. Latin America and the Caribbean have the second-highest regional rates of early marriage and co-habitation in the world, with Brazil fifth in the world in terms of absolute numbers of women and girls in a union (formally or informally married) by age 18 (Girls Not Brides, 2020). Adolescent pregnancy is a risk to the education of adolescent girls and young women, since the likelihood of dropping out of school increases as adolescent girls marry or become pregnant.

According to the respondents of the scoping study survey, the main reasons for girls dropping out of school are:

- Teenage pregnancy
- Taking on domestic and care work to enable parents to engage in paid work

Role of English in girls' lives

English has been formally integrated into basic education in Brazil since 2018. A review of ten Latin American countries' policy frameworks for learning English at the basic education level (K-12) found that Brazil had one of the least-developed language policies in the region (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017). This is due to the fact that Brazil previously only required the study of a foreign language from sixth grade on, and many students chose to learn Spanish. After revision of the legislation in 2016, it was determined that English would be a required language. Due to Brazil's recent inclusion of English in the national curriculum, the country still lacks a national strategy for English instruction or learning standards for measuring students' English language skills (ibid.).

Although access to schooling is, in principle, universal in Brazil, the issue of quality remains. Public schools have lower standards than private schools and are faced with many structural challenges e.g. lack of teachers and/or lengthy leaves of absence. Another challenge is that teaching methodologies are not stimulating for young students.

'School activities are not dynamic and they are not relevant to young people's lives.'
Social leader, Rio de Janiero

In the online survey, 61 per cent of young people reported not knowing how to speak English, 35 per cent reported knowing 'a little bit' and only 4 per cent said they did speak English. Boys expressed twice as much confidence in their ability to speak English as girls, who showed greater interest than boys in improving their English.

Reasons given for wanting to learn English among surveyed adolescent participants were:

- To travel or live abroad
- Better chances to secure employment
- Fondness of the language
- Communicating with foreigners and
- Access to entertainment and media content

Role of digital in girls' lives

Nearly all survey respondents reported having access to the internet at home. The large majority (84 per cent) reported having access to Wi-Fi at home. The most common devices that young people have access to at home are smart phones and televisions. However, less than one in four have their own laptop computers.

Young people most commonly used the internet for social media, to do schoolwork, to watch videos, movies or TV series, and to communicate with friends. It was less common for them to read the news or look for information. Girls are more likely than boys to use the internet for schoolwork, while boys are more likely than girls to use the internet for recreational activities, such as playing video games.

'I want to learn English to expand my knowledge, travel the world, learn more about English culture and share the knowledge I have cultivated about women's rights with the world.'

'I intend to travel to the whole world!'
Adolescent girls

'Many of the girls in our programme do not know how to create and access emails. They usually ask a friend to set up an account for them so that they can create social media profiles and they then forget their password or even their own email address.'
Social leader, Teresina

'I don't know how to do anything IT-related. I had to ask my friend to help me print out a form.'
Adolescent girl, 14, Rio de Janeiro

Recommendations for future projects

1. **Frequency:** The recommended frequency is three sessions a week at approximately three hours per session. This recommendation is based on the fact that other commitments and responsibilities can prevent beneficiaries from joining more than three sessions a week. Based on key informants' responses, two sessions a week is the minimum to achieve results. The timing of these sessions should be decided upon after assessing the needs of beneficiaries.

2. **Location:** Several decentralised hubs are preferred to one central hub. Location and transportation were mentioned in all interviews as major deterrents for participation. Venues can be organised through existing partnerships with NGOs/CBOs.

3. **Incentives for participation:** Especially in poorer areas, transportation fees and snacks or meals would incentivise participation. Data packages for internet access are also provided by some NGOs.

4. **Curricula:** The teaching objectives for both the English and ICT curricula, particularly for the older groups, should focus on employability.

   English programmes should use innovative, participatory methodologies, moving away from many schools' old-fashioned approach.

ICT: To accommodate varying levels of ICT proficiency consider including two options:

   i. Basic module on basic ICT skills

   ii. Advanced module (e.g. developing apps, websites, creating PowerPoint presentations and spreadsheets)

Life skills, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (e.g. menstruation, family planning); skills identification and development; financial education; prevention of violence against women. One Win Leads to Another, developed by UN Women and NGO Empodera, is a useful resource for adapting the life skills component of any project for Brazil.

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Colombia

GII score	GII ranking (out of 189)
0.428	101

Status of women and girls

Colombia has made progress in gender equality over the past 20 years and has risen to a ranking of 22nd out of 154 countries in the World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Gender Gap Index, up from 40th out of 149 countries in 2018 (WEF, 2020, cited in OECD, 2021). However, progress is still required to improve gender equality in certain areas; for example, 23.4 per cent of women aged 20–24 years were married or in a union before age 18, and as of February 2021, only 18.8 per cent of seats in parliament were held by women (UN Women, 2021). Women in Colombia participate in unpaid work – including housework and family care – at greater rates than men do.

Civil armed conflict has had a pronounced impact on women in Colombia in recent decades, with large numbers of people in the country being forced to uproot from their homes. This has disproportionately affected women and children, who make up 80 per cent of this group (Verdad Abierta, 2016, cited in OECD, 2021).

Educational barriers and opportunities for girls

The following conditions in Colombia negatively affect the schooling of adolescent girls, leading to dropout:

- Poverty, especially in rural areas, with adolescent girls from the poorest rural households 40 per cent less likely to complete lower secondary education, and less than half as likely to complete upper secondary education compared to their peers in urban communities

- Adolescent pregnancy is much higher in rural areas and among the poorest groups, with less than 10 per cent of married 15–17-year-old girls being formally married (Girls Not Brides, 2020)

- Paid and unpaid labour, with over half of working children and adolescents classified as unpaid family workers

- Physical and sexual violence, with the protracted conflict in Colombia resulting in 8.3 million people affected, nearly one third of whom are children and adolescents (UNICEF, 2017)

- Organised crime and illegal drug-related activities,

with girls and young women recruited to take part in the drug trade and human trafficking systems

- Ethnic groups more prone to experiencing violence, especially in rural towns along the Colombian–Venezuela border where most of Colombia's internal armed conflict has taken place (OCHA, 2019)

- Internal displacement and refugees, with over two million children and adolescents being displaced in Colombia, as well as Venezuelan refugees, who often lack the necessary documentation to enrol in schools and are subjected to discrimination, human trafficking, and sexual abuse and exploitation

Role of English in girls' lives

In 2016, the Colombian government launched its new national English language strategy, a multi-sectoral approach aimed at improving English language skills throughout the entire education system and adopting the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The 2019 exam results suggest that public school students perform better than their private school peers, likely due to the fact that English has been embedded in the public school curricula for several years.

In the online survey conducted as part of the scoping study, the most popular reasons for wanting to learn English overall were to improve employment possibilities and earn more money.

'Learning English makes you competitive in the eyes of others.'
**Young woman, 19,
Tumaco**

'For me, it would be very important to learn English because I love English and if I want to get a job, and I know how to speak English, they [employers] value it more and I would have more opportunities just because I know how to speak it.'
**Adolescent girl, 13,
Tumaco**

Survey respondents expressed a desire to live, work or travel abroad.

'I want to travel to other countries, so I need to be able to speak English so that I can communicate with others.'
**Adolescent girl, 15,
Cartagena**

'I would like to travel to other countries where they speak English and be able to communicate. Or if I work in a clothing store, and someone from another country comes, I can assist them.'
**Adolescent girl, 15,
Cartagena**

Role of digital in girls' lives

In 2000, the Colombian government launched the programme Computers for Teaching, focusing on providing low-resourced schools with computers and training for teachers on integrating ICT in their pedagogy (Radinger et al., 2018). Data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2015) shows that Colombia had one of the highest computer–student ratios in schools among countries with available data in Latin America (ibid.). However, nearly three quarters of principals in Colombia still report insufficient internet access as a barrier to the provision of quality digital instruction, and nearly half also complain about the shortage or inadequacy of digital technology for instruction (OECD, 2020). Moreover, there remains a clear rural–urban gap in access to ICT at the school level. Only one in five rural students in Colombia report having access to a desktop, laptop or tablet at school.

All interview participants expressed the view that the implementation of programmes that include ICT training would contribute to the development of skills and competencies necessary for young people to secure work.

'Here in this neighbourhood, there are young people who are entrepreneurs and want to start a clothing brand. they've already finished school but they do not know how to present a proposal, a good proposal, properly. They don;t know how to use Excel to make a budget. If you don;t know how to do these kinds of basic things to present to a company, this might be a problem. I know, because there are many young people who do not aspire to look for a job, but perhaps they are focused on their own entrepreneurship. It would be good then to give them tools so that they can better organise their business ventures.'
Social leader (female), Cartagena

The issue of internet safety, particularly the safe use of social media websites, is particularly relevant in Cartagena where it is common for networks of sex traders to use social media to recruit young girls and boys.

'It happened to me once. Someone was writing to me and I didn't want to respond to him at all. I had to make everything private, my photos, my profile, everything. And later we looked into it and that guy had been in jail … But many people have that, like a 'sugar' that gives them money. That happens a lot here.'
Adolescent boy, 15, Cartagena

A female social leader in Cartagena described how internet safety is becoming a more relevant issue since the pandemic and school closures. Many young people aren't able to go out to see their friends, and instead, they use the internet and navigate social networks to entertain themselves and 'de-stress'.

'But many adolescents don't know what they will find online, or they don't know how to handle a situation if someone they don't know speaks to them. Some may easily give away their personal information, putting them more at risk.'
Social leader (female), Cartagena

Challenges for future projects

Informants from both communities identified the following key challenges:

- Limited access to technological devices and the internet
- Lack of time due to the need to fulfil other responsibilities, such as taking care of younger siblings and participating in domestic work, working to earn extra income for the family
- Cost of transportation, especially in Tumaco, since most families cannot afford to travel outside the community (where the internet is largely unavailable)

Adolescent girls and boys identified the following challenges:

- Safety
- Transportation costs
- Getting parental permission (especially for girls)
- Lack of time due to school work
- Need to undertake domestic chores

Recommendations for future projects

1. Strategies:
- Leverage support from local stakeholders
- Create holistic or multidisciplinary teams
- Explore partnerships with private internet providers to extend access in communities without internet

2. Target audience: It is recommended that adolescent girls be divided into two groups, 13–15 and 16–19, as their needs and interests are different.

3. Frequency: The programme should support adolescent girls in their 'off period'. For example, for those studying in the morning, the programme can be run in the afternoon. Before finalising the schedule, engage with parents and young people to collaboratively decide on the best approach.

4. Location: Transport costs, access to the internet and safety are key considerations in selecting the location. Important considerations for project design:

- Procuring internet access in Tumaco at a reasonable cost
- Paying for transportation to and from venues in poorer areas as an incentive for young people to participate
- Locating venues near the centre of communities to avoid the risk of violence

5. Curricula: Programme curricula should develop both cognitive knowledge and young people's life skills through:

- English and digital skills, including basic skills (e.g. using the internet to find information, online safety)
- Catch-up classes or homework to help address educational inequalities
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights to address adolescent pregnancy and gender-based violence, including opportunities to reflect on their future aspirations and current contexts to make safer and healthier decisions
- Extracurricular activities, such as sports, arts or music to break up the monotony of academic activities

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Mexico

GII score	GII ranking (out of 189)
0.322	71

Primary data collection – no. of participants, research methods and locations		
	No. of girls	48
	No. of boys	16
	NGO leaders Government leaders and parents	18
	Data collection methods	• Focus group discussions • Key informant interviews • Survey
	Locations	Piauí, Teresina and Rio de Janeiro, Rio (Maré favela)

Status of women and girls

Of the three South and Central American countries studied, Mexico has seen the most progress towards gender equity. According to the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report, Mexico ranked 25 out of 153 countries globally and fourth in Latin America and the Caribbean. The country has almost completely closed both its educational attainment and health and survival gaps. Most of Mexico's progress is due to a large increase in the number of women in ministerial positions and holding seats in the country's parliament.

Economically, however, women are still disadvantaged. Significant gaps in both wages (50 per cent) and income (54 per cent) show how women are less valued than men in the workplace. At the same time, women struggle to attain senior positions and are not very active in the labour market. Only 47 per cent of women are in the labour force, 26.4 per cent work part-time, and women spend three times as long as men on unpaid household care.

Educational barriers and opportunities for girls

Educational marginalisation in Mexico is largely shaped by geographic location and socio-economic level. Only a quarter of Mexican girls from the poorest rural households complete upper secondary schooling, compared to 90 per cent of girls from the richest urban households.

Adolescent pregnancy and child, early and forced marriage affect adolescent girls' educational participation in Mexico. As of 2018, Mexico had the highest adolescent pregnancy rate among OECD countries (UNICEF, 2018). Approximately one in four girls in Mexico (26 per cent) marry or enter unions before the age of 18 (UNFPA, 2018), and this figure rises for girls who have not finished primary school. Marriage comes with certain economic and legal benefits, encouraging girls to marry young. Girls in informal unions may therefore experience more disadvantages and vulnerabilities than those who are formally married.

Indigenous communities are particularly marginalised in Mexico. Gender norms within many indigenous households result in families reserving limited economic resources available for attending school primarily for

boys, while indigenous women and girls are more likely to be excluded from educational and employment opportunities. As of 2018, 65 per cent of indigenous adolescent girls and women (12 years and older) participated in unpaid work (UNESCO, 2020). National survey data suggests that adolescent girls and women in indigenous households do, on average, nearly 70 hours of unpaid work at home each week. This diminishes their school performance, as overwork affects their concentration and stamina (Osorio Vázquez, 2017: 4).

Role of English in girls' lives

Mexico has a long history of English language teaching. English was made mandatory at the secondary level as far back as 1926, and in 2011, the Department of Education expanded mandatory English classes to the primary and pre-primary levels (SEP, 2011a). Yet English is still not mastered by a large majority of the population. A survey found that, although 80 per cent of employment positions require mastery of the English language, only 20 per cent of professionals have the required skills (Latin Business Today, 2016, cited in Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).

'English will be useful down the line, for example for a job. Some jobs require knowing English and if you don't know any, you won't be able to work. For instance, in order to be a tour guide you need to know English. Here in town, there have been some foreigners come to see us and I haven't been able to communicate with them. English opens many doors for work, even to look for better work opportunities.'
**Mother,
Yucatan**

Research participants in both communities generally agreed that English would be an important skill for adolescent girls to develop because it would extend their educational and employment opportunities. Research participants in Yucatan described English as relevant due to the surrounding tourist economy. Mothers interviewed in Jalisco agreed that both girls and boys need to access programmes that teach English skills as they will be useful for their future development.

Most of the adolescent girls interviewed recognised English language learning as relevant.

'Even telephones tell you things in English.'
**Adolescent girl, 16,
Jalisco**

'Knowing English will help me to use the internet because the internet has many things in English. Using internet can also help you learn more English. Both things are important and are linked to each other.'
**Adolescent girl, 17,
Yucatan**

Half the adolescents surveyed reported not knowing any English, with 49 per cent knowing 'some' English, and only two adolescent girls reported that they already know English. Despite varying levels of exposure to English, most adolescent survey respondents and interviewees recognised that English proficiency provides young people with more educational, professional, social and cultural opportunities. Their reasons included:

- Gaining access to better work opportunities
- Getting a good degree at university
- Understanding and communicating with others
- Travelling
- English is the most widely used language in the world

> 'I want to learn English because I've seen that it is a necessary language, and in my school, we're only taught the basics, and teachers don't have a grasp on the language.'
> **Adolescent girl, 14, Yucatan**

> "I see that there is a big challenge with English. They are not teaching English at school and not everybody has the possibility of paying a private tutor."
> **Mother, Yucatan**

Role of digital in girls' lives

As of May 2019, the Mexican government put the Digital Educational Agenda into effect to ensure that digital education is included in the General Education Law and the National Education Agreement. This demonstrates a recognition of the importance of embedding digital technologies into the national education system. However, available data on digital skills development in Mexico (based on SDG4 monitoring) shows clear gender differences on all skills examined. More in-depth research is needed to analyse the impact of programmes, the goals achieved and how to improve the future incorporation of ICT into the National Educational System (SEP, 2020).

The most common use of the internet by adolescent survey respondents was to look for information, do homework or to send messages to friends and family, while just over a third said they normally used it to connect to social media. No significant gender differences were observed. The most common ICT skill adolescents wanted to develop was their ability to look up information for school or work, create digital presentations and use Microsoft Word or Excel.

Those interviewed believed that Covid-19 caused many to realise the importance of the digital skills necessary to help adolescent girls participate in online classes and seek out additional

learning opportunities. In Jalisco, key informants from two NGOs working with adolescents and youth agreed that teaching digital skills was essential, particularly given the lack of technology-oriented classes for adolescents in primary and lower secondary school. They pointed out that adolescents had very low digital literacy, although those who had access to phones during the pandemic had increased their skills. They noted that there would likely be a very high demand for technology related courses because young people would find them interesting and useful.

Recommendations for future projects

1. Seek out interdisciplinary partnerships with organisations that have specific expertise in adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights.

> 'Spaces are needed where children can be heard. Many of them come from violent families and no one listens to them. We need someone that can help them and give them advice on what to do … so that they don't end up using drugs and things like that … Learning new things would help change the way children think and their attitudes and behaviours. Us students like to learn new things, open our minds. Many children want to, but they don't have the possibility to learn.'
> **Young man, 18, Jalisco**

2. Involve parents and families. These stakeholders should be engaged where possible from the start and in project design.

3. Use stakeholder support and engagement to reach adolescents and build trust.

4. Target adolescent girls from two age groups, similar to the ones in the study (13–16 and 17–19). Younger girls (13–16) could be provided with more extracurricular and recreational activities to build life skills, while older girls (17–19) should have opportunities and support to develop their employability prospects and secure jobs.

5. Curricula and teaching approach:

- **Peer-led model:** Due to the dearth of adolescent girls in some areas with good enough English and digital skills to be peer group leaders, the programme may need to explore other formats for engaging girls in learning English and digital skills in a comfortable and familiar environment.

- **English skills:** English sessions should be basic and provide young people with opportunities to use their skills. In Yucatan, due to the tourism industry, field trips or community projects could involve the use of English. Virtual or online opportunities to connect young people with peers in different parts of the world may serve as a viable option given the dearth of local peers with sufficient knowledge of English.

- **Digital skills:** Adolescent girls of all ages would benefit from developing basic digital skills, such as using Microsoft Office to create documents, spreadsheets, and digital presentations. However, given that there are very few computers and laptops in these communities, any digital skills project would need to provide these. Otherwise, digital skills would need to be smartphone-based. Internet safety should also be prioritised, especially in relation to social networks.

- **Sexual and reproductive health and rights:** Adolescent pregnancy and early marriage could be integrated into a comprehensive sex education programme that addresses issues of gendered power dynamics.

- **Life skills:** For adolescent girls in Yucatan and Jalisco, developing their life skills, building their confidence and introducing them to ideas and concepts beyond what they see in their everyday lives seem of particular relevance.

'We should talk about pregnancy. Explore the problems faced by adolescents in our community and try to warn them about the risks they face and their consequences. It is important to support adolescents in this regard given how common the problem is.'
Adolescent girl, 17, Jalisco

6. Resources and infrastructure: Increased access to smartphones by adolescent girls in the context of Covid-19 favours the possibility of participation in future projects. However, access to other technologies such as computers remains rare and the cost of internet connectivity could exclude many from participating, particularly given the dearth of free Wi-Fi spaces in these communities.

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South East Asia

Myanmar

Viet Nam

Indonesia

Indonesia

Primary data collection – no. of participants, research methods and locations		
No. of girls	22	
No. of boys	0	
Parents, teachers, community leaders, national and local experts	24	
Data collection methods	• Focus group discussions • Key informant interviews	
Locations	South Central Timor District (TTS), NTT, Sorong, West Papua, Pangkep, South Sulawesi, North Lombok, NTB	

	GII score	GII ranking (out of 189)
	0.48	121

Status of women and girls

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world and the largest economy in South East Asia. In the last few decades, Indonesia has made impressive progress in terms of development: reducing the poverty rate by more than half since 1999 and reaching upper middle-income status prior to the Covid-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2020).

Gender inequality data for Indonesia (UNICEF 2020)

- 11 per cent of women aged 20–24 were married before age 18

- Indonesia is one of the ten countries with the highest populations of married girls in the world

- One in three (33 per cent) women and adolescent girls experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime

- Almost one in ten girls experience adolescent pregnancy

Although Indonesia has joined global efforts towards promoting gender equality, such as ratifying CEDAW, the country remains a largely patriarchal society, with laws still in place that reinforce stereotypical gender roles for men and women, supported by social norms and attitudes.

Indonesian results from the World Values Survey (2017–2020); (World Bank 2020):

- 76 per cent of participants agreed with the statement 'when jobs are scarce, men have more right to a job than women'

- 72 per cent of participants agreed/strongly agreed with the statement that 'on the whole, men make better political leaders than women do'

- 63 per cent of participants agreed/strongly agreed that on the whole, men make better business executives than women do'

Men are considered to be head of the household, while women are seen mainly as mothers and housewives, leading to an assumption that they are not suited for more skilled jobs or leadership roles. As a result, girls have few women role models in leadership positions,

which perpetuates stereotypical perceptions about women's roles and capabilities.

In addition, many girls are subjected to gender-based violence within their own homes and are socialised to believe that they deserve to be treated like this.

Available data indicates that rates of disability appear to be higher for females than for males, and higher for rural residents than for urban residents (OECD, 2019). Women who identify as LGBTQI may face exclusion from their families and wider society.

Although Indonesia is a signatory to the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, girls from Indonesia's large and diverse indigenous populations may face stigma from some parts of society (The Asia Foundation, 2016).

Educational barriers and opportunities for girls

The patriarchal social norms mentioned above restrict girls' decision-making power and their ability to seek further education and work. Moreover, girls from low socio-economic backgrounds and rural areas face a number of additional barriers to their education and job opportunities:

- Greater risk of leaving education early than their urban and wealthier peers

- Greater risk of early marriage

- Lack of access to quality job opportunities in the formal sector, resulting in poorer pay and conditions

- Additional social discrimination towards girls from ethnic, religious or indigenous minorities; those who have disabilities; those who identify as LGBTQI or have parents or siblings who identify in this way

Girls in all research locations attend school and in their spare time attend school or community clubs, assist their parents at home or with the family business, and watch TV or use social media. Their main activities consist of sport, dance and art/culture provided by community organisations and schools.

All the girls have ambitions to continue education at least until senior high school and then work, but they are concerned about the costs associated with education and lack of support from their parents.

The girls expressed concerns about early marriage and unequal treatment of boys and girls. Parents and community leaders shared the girls' concerns about early marriage and relationships with the opposite sex, as well as about school dropouts, girls' safety online and offline, and the negative influence of social media on teenagers.

'In my area there are lots of girls that married aged 17–18 because it was their wish.'
Adolescent girl, 14, Sorong

'There was a younger girl in my school that got married because she wanted to. She came back to school at one point, but people made fun of her saying she was divorced, so she didn't want to go to school anymore.'
Adolescent girl, 15, North Lombok

'There are still groups that think women are minority, weak, helpless … lots that think what is the point of girls getting higher education, for what? There are even people that think the maximum level for women is senior high school. In Lombok there is a lot of early marriage, married off by their parents because of these opinions.'
Regional civil society organiser, North Lombok

Role of English in girls' lives

Following independence in 1945, the founding fathers of Indonesia chose English as the main foreign language to be taught in the secondary school curricula. There were strong ideological sentiments against Dutch and Japanese, which were seen as the languages of the colonials, whereas English was seen as the language of the global future. Ever since then, English has been a compulsory subject in secondary education.

The literature and key stakeholders highlighted the need for transferable skills, including English and digital literacy, to increase job opportunities, yet the girls themselves only appreciated the relevance of English in locations where there was a clear local need.

'Based on feedback from youngsters, we know that English is a subject that they usually dislike, so we try and make our classes as enjoyable as possible ... by using games and in one hour of class up to 45 minutes of it might be games, and around 10–15 minutes for reflection. We don't make it longer than an hour, so we leave them wanting more ... and it works, it turns out the kids are interested in these kinds of methods.'
Regional civil society organiser, TTS

'English is really useful. If my friends can speak English, I am envious.'
Adolescent girl, 15, North Lombok

'Learning English is good – we can introduce our local culture to others using English.'
Adolescent girl, 16, TTS

All the girls learn English at school, but they usually dislike the subject and have limited ability to communicate in English.

Role of digital in girls' lives

All participating adolescent girls have access to a device (most commonly a smartphone) that can connect to the internet, but those who live in rural areas have poor internet connection. Those with their own smartphones do not need to seek permission to use the internet; however, the girls who share a gadget with other family members must ask to borrow the device, with a further barrier being the cost of data packages.

The girls in this study use the internet for remote learning tasks and entertainment, with few examples of use for wider learning or skills development. They have limited computer skills, though most have some experience using a computer or laptop and are somewhat familiar with Microsoft Word. Only a few have previously used Microsoft PowerPoint, and none have used Excel or ever written an email.

'I use Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, but I don't post on TikTok. In a month I use about IDR 35,000. But we also use our neighbour's wifi.'
Adolescent girl, 15, North Lombok

Since the onset of Covid-19 restrictions in March 2020, schools have been implementing online learning. The Finance Ministry has allocated IDR 7.21 trillion in grants to provide free broadband internet connectivity for students throughout Indonesia, yet barriers such as poor internet signal and the high cost of data remain.

'[The internet] is useful but not essential [to support our ambitions]. I mostly use the internet for Google Meet and then we are given our school tasks and told to search for the answer online. So I don't know how to use the internet for other things.'
Adolescent girl, 14, Sorong

'On YouTube I like listening to what good English sounds like, finding new vocabulary, because later when I go to university, I want to study international relations. Who knows, maybe I might work abroad.'
Adolescent girl, 15, North Lombok

Opportunities and challenges for future projects

Most girls participating in the study, especially those who are members of regional CSOs, expressed interest in projects which focus on English, digital and life skills but those who are most marginalised were hardest to engage. Marginalised girls who are not yet part of a community group may need encouragement to join and clubs and this will take time to establish.

The main reasons for their interest were:

- Learning English
- Learning and making friends in a group
- Learning digital skills
- Space to talk openly with each other about issues that girls face

Some potential cahllenges were idetified but parents and stakeholders. The challenged are listed in the table below along with solutions suggested by local civil society organisers.

'A girls-only learning group is interesting because it's really rare and if there are boys there we are not as free to speak.'
Adolescent girl, 17, NTB

'Here, there is space for girls to learn and express how they feel. When we speak with boys, sometimes we feel inferior, afraid of being bullied. So, if we're learning with other girls the sessions will be more enjoyable.'
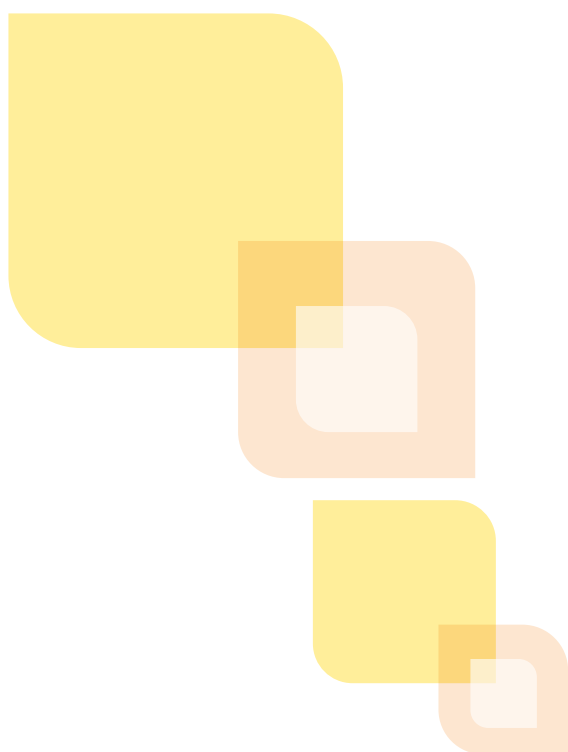**Adolescent girl, 17, TTS**

'I think this girl's learning group is good and important. The materials, how to be a leader, speaking English, digital skills and dealing with women's issues, this is what we need. I would be very happy if my daughter got this opportunity.'
Mother, Sorong

Potential challenges	Suggested solutions
The peer-led model, as children might not be motivated to attend if groups were run by their peers	Select older girls (17–19) as peer group leaders and ensure they receive regular mentoring
The time required to obtain buy-in from local communities	Work with organisations that have existing networks in the selected areas
The cost of participation due to the distance that girls would have to travel to attend clubs	Subsidise travel
Lack of access to devices and the internet	Work in locations where internet is available Build in a budget for devices pre-loaded with content and internet data packages
Girls in TTS and North Lambok not having time to join activities, due to household chores and their schoolwork	Limit activities to a maximum of two hours and seek permission to avoid issues with parents

Recommendations for future projects

1. Who to target, how and where to find them

- Target economically marginalised adolescent girls by focusing on those who live in districts or cities with higher-than-average poverty rates or in rural locations. Additional targeting (potentially for peer group leaders) could include girls from families who receive government assistance.

- Work in locations where the internet is available locally, households have at least one tool that can access the internet, and local stakeholders are able to clearly identify the relevance of the project in their area, such as having jobs in specific sectors (e.g. tourism) or for further study.

2. How to adapt the programme to the target groups

- Content should focus on English at A1 level and above, digital skills for study and work, as well as social media skills and online safety. It should also make use of games and other non-traditional learning methods. Include topics like increasing confidence, the world of work and careers, and equal treatment of boys and girls. Topics like delaying marriage and personal health are also relevant but lesson plans should be checked with implementing partners to ensure they are appropriate.

- Build in a budget for devices pre-loaded with content and internet data packages to overcome cost and access barriers.

- Consider hosting online webinars and discussions as part of the proejct, use existing networks in Indonesia to enable participants to engage with other groups across the country and gain inspiration from women activists, artists and leaders.

3. Which modality to use

- As an immediate next step, select one of three modalities – location-based, CSO-based, or platform-based – or a combination of one face-to-face modality (location-based or CSO-based) with an online modality (platform-based), considering the risks and available resources.

- Select partner organisations based on the descriptions of suitable partners and the relevant functions from the selected modality.

4. Additional recommendations

- Co-design the curriculum and operational aspects of the delivery model with implementing partners, local stakeholders and adolescent girls to reduce risk and increase buy-in.

- Conduct a pilot of one or two of the modalities to test key assumptions and identify and areas that require further adaptation.

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Myanmar

GII score	GII ranking (out of 189)
0.478	118

Due to the situation in Myanmar, we have been unable to collect primary data, but we hope this will be possible in the future.

Status of women and girls

Myanmar is a signatory to CEDAW, and the 2008 Constitution guarantees all people equal rights before the law and equal legal protection, the right to vote and run for public office, and no discrimination on the basis of sex. However, the Constitution also reinforces gender stereotypes, for example, reserving jobs for men 'that are naturally suitable for men only', and referring to women as 'mothers'. These ingrained gendered norms influence power relations, and impact adolescent girls' access to opportunities, choice and control over decisions that affect their lives. They constantly have to weigh their productive and reproductive roles against the benefits of potential educational and digital opportunities (Scott, 2017).

Norms that prohibit women and girls from travelling or working alone lead women to choosing jobs in offices, rather than jobs where they would be required to move around. Expectations that women will provide unpaid household labour restrict women's options and choices for training and employment (ADB et al., 2016).

'An idealized division of labor … assigns to men and women different productive roles (work for "capital", i.e. cash or goods/services) and reproductive roles (unpaid work for "human capital", i.e. childbearing and rearing, cooking, cleaning). This division affects individuals' agency and opportunities, particularly their time available to acquire new skills and assets.' (Scott, 2017)

Employment outcomes

Women (50.5 per cent) are significantly less economically active than men (85 per cent), are more likely to be unemployed, are paid less and make up only a quarter of 'employers' (MoLIP, 2017b).

- 37.7 per cent of employed women are self-employed, compared to 47.3 per cent of men (MoLIP, 2017a)

- Women make up 81 per cent of those employed in education, and men dominate sectors that require physical strength or are perceived to be 'hard work' (GEN, 2015)

- Only 55.3 per cent of young women are employed compared to 74.8 per cent of young men (Bartholomew & Calder, 2018)

- Legislation in Myanmar guarantees women and men equal pay, but women generally receive 70–80 per cent of the rate paid to men (ibid.)

- Most out-of-school girls start to work between the ages of 13 and 15 (ibid.)

Educational barriers and opportunities for girls

Myanmar's legal and regulatory framework is being reformed to support a digital economy. However, it has been criticised for being gender blind, ignoring important differences between men and women in access, skills, and real and perceived benefits that affect consumers (Scott, 2017).

Labour is also gendered, affecting women's and girls' choices of work, the value of their work and their time for learning. Girls do all the housework in preparation for marriage and boys are only required to perform occasional physical labour, such as carrying water

(Bartholomew & Calder, 2018). In addition, women's income-generating activities tend to be smaller in scale and located closer to home than men's, restricting women's mobility (Scott, 2017).

Women's and girls' educational needs and priorities

- Gender norms influence adolescent girls' choices and opportunities in vocational training and employment (ADB et al., 2016; Bartholomew & Calder, 2018; GEN, 2015)

- 28 per cent of married women aged 15–19 experienced spousal violence (physical, sexual, or emotional) (DHS, 2015)

- 13 per cent of women aged 15–17 and 19 per cent of women aged 18–19 have experienced sexual violence (ibid.)

- Sexual and gender-based violence affects adolescent girls' educational and employment options (ADB et al., 2016)

- Career aspirations of adolescent girls are affected by social norms, parental wishes and the immediacy of needing to earn money (Bartholomew & Calder, 2018)

- Unlike rural adolescent girls, urban girls demonstrate a demand for extra-curricular learning in languages, management, accounting and computer skills (ibid.)

Myanmar's gender challenges in education: What boys have to say

'My sister dropped out of school in 4th grade when she was 10. She sells fish our father catches to help make money so I can go to school. She wanted to go to school but our parents could not afford it. I feel sad that my sister has fewer opportunities than I do just because she is a girl.'
Schoolboy, 13, Myanmar

'My sister dropped out when she was 12 to support the family, but she could only find odd jobs because of her lack of education. Although she never showed regret, I feel sad when I hear her talk about her memories of her school and classmates because I know she wants to go to school.'
Schoolboy, 13, Myanmar

The real and perceived threat of violence against women and girls affects their choices and opportunities. Examples of situations that threaten girls' safety include:

- Adolescent girls face increased risk of violence when water, sanitation and hygiene facilities are not available at schools (GEN, 2015)

- Girls and women living near conflict areas face greater risks of human trafficking (Bartholomew & Calder, 2018)

- Adolescent girls in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps experience the potential threat of rape, sexual assault and trafficking (Scott, 2017)

Girls with disabilities are more likely to be excluded from education than boys with disabilities (Griffiths et al., 2016 in Livingstone, 2017).

Children who work have limited access to learning opportunities, and the proportion of working children and type of employment varies in different areas. Rural girls are more likely to be in vulnerable employment, and girls are paid less than boys.

In Muslim areas, girls tend to stop going to school after puberty as a result of social and cultural norms around girls' roles, restrictions to freedom of movement, early marriage, or because the madrasa does not allow girls to continue their schooling (GEN, 2015).

People, especially women, who live in rural areas are less likely to be literate, to complete secondary school or to study beyond secondary school. Moreover, rural women aged 20–24 with higher education have a particularly high level of unemployment (MoLIP, 2017a).

As Myanmar is the official language of instruction, it can be difficult for children from different ethno-linguistic backgrounds to learn in Myanmar, which can lead them to drop out (ADB et al., 2016). For example, children from non-Bamar ethnic groups educated in their mother tongue face barriers to employment in the private sector because they did not attend government schools.

Role of English in girls' lives

English in education is taught as a subject in primary and lower secondary, then used as a medium of instruction in a limited number of subjects in upper secondary and at university. However, due to a boycott of the education system following the military coup, followed by a devastating third wave of Covid-19, most education institutions are presently closed. Leaving over 12 million children and young people in Myanmar without access to organised learning.

The situation of women and girls has deteriorated markedly in the context of the military takeover, not least due to the use of rape and sexual violence towards civilians by the military. As of 19 March 2021, security forces have reportedly occupied more than 60 schools and university campuses in 13 states and regions. In at least one incident, security forces reportedly beat two teachers while entering premises and left several others injured.

Prior to the coup, opportunities for work with international companies had been opening up, but many international companies have pulled out of Myanmar since it began.

However, in spite of this, English is very important for purposes other than employment, including engagement with the outside world to organise resistance and activism (e.g. the Milk Tea Alliance linking activists in Myanmar, Hong Kong and Thailand through the medium of English).

There has also been a marked increase in Myanmar nationals accessing opportunities for learning outside Myanmar and wishing to pursue studies overseas, with English being important to support this.

Role of digital in girls' lives

Women in Myanmar are 14 per cent less likely to own a mobile phone than men despite improvements in access and affordability (GSMA, 2020). This gender gap is likely a result of a combination of low household income and traditional gender roles that prioritise men for mobile ownership (Scott, 2017).

Rural and ethnic-minority women lack accessible and relevant online content due to higher rates of female illiteracy and the language of the content.

Women's digital skills are limited, they have less time to explore digital technologies, and they often rely on men to learn 'how' to do things on mobiles (GSMA & LIRNE Asia, 2016). Reasons suggested for women and girls' lack of digital skills include:

- Most girls in rural areas do not know how to use the phone to access the internet or send text messages
- Women work longer hours of unpaid household work and have less time to explore digital technologies than men
- Women's opportunities for skills training and employment are hampered by restricted mobility, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas
- The threat of online violence and the dangers of online dating can lead to parents censoring adolescent girls' access to digital technologies

Adolescent girls tend to use a family member's phone, with their access often restricted by fathers who believe that they are protecting them from drugs, being trafficked or being distracted from their studies (Bartholomew & Calder, 2018). For girls who do own a

phone, they use them mainly to access Facebook. The lack of control over phones as assets has an impact on women's access to markets, employment opportunities and resilience to climate change, and is more likely to affect women in rural and remote areas and areas affected by natural hazards (Scott, 2017).

Men tend to do longer-term courses on ICT hardware, while women tend to do shorter courses, e.g. on graphic design (Scott 2017).

Where adolescent girls have had access to digital and leadership skills, they report being competitive in the job market and having increased confidence to continue their education (IREX, 2017). The IREX project Tech Age Girls promotes digital and leadership skills development for adolescent girls through a peer network that supports them to apply these skills in outreach to their communities.

Opportunities and challenges for future projects

The data provides a complex picture of gender equalities and marginalisation within the education and digital landscape, compounded by the magnifying effects of Covid-19. Understanding how gender inequalities and social exclusion affect adolescent girls in the specific project implementation localities will be key to effective project design and delivery. High quality local context / political economy analysis will support this.

Specific groups of adolescent girls – those with disabilities; from poorer households, ethnic and religious minorities; LGBTQI individuals; and girls in remote and rural areas, conflict affected areas, and places affected by climate change – are more likely to experience inequality and educational and digital marginalisation. Programmes that focus on the above groups and places are most likely to reach the adolescent girls most in need of support; however, these are also the places with the least access to digital opportunities and may pose operational challenges, for example in conflict-affected areas.

Myanmar's policy, legislation and plans on gender equality support girls' education and economic empowerment and are generally supportive of programmes like EDGE. However, they do not consider girls' access to the digital economy specifically. Existing programmes, such as the Connected Women's Programme and the Ooredoo Geek Girls Myanmar

Project, aim to close the ICT skills gender gap and accelerate the growth of women's digital economy by increasing their confidence, employability and desire to learn.

Gendered roles, power dynamics and social norms limit adolescent girls' access to digital and employment opportunities, and prevents them from making life choices or talking about their concerns and aspirations within the family and community. The existence of peer support networks, such as those run by Tech Age Girls, indicate that a model such as EDGE would be appropriate in this context.

Questions for further research

While the gender analysis reveals where some of the opportunities and barriers for adolescent girls are in education and digital, the following questions could usefully be explored in the main research:

- What are the digital employment opportunities available to adolescent girls?

- What are adolescent girls' aspirations? What networks support these?

- How could interventions challenge gendered social norms and power dynamics that limit adolescent girls' aspirations and opportunities?

- How can adolescent girls be supported during and after Covid-19 to ensure they do not drop out of school or avoid taking training or employment opportunities as a result of limited resources or caring responsibilities?

- How can interventions reach the adolescent girls who most need support with training and employment opportunities when the digital infrastructure in the areas where they live is so underdeveloped?

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Viet Nam

Primary data collection – no. of participants, research methods and locations		
No. of girls	100	
No. of boys	50	
Parents, school managers, IT experts and government officials.	41	
Data collection methods	• Focus group discussions • Surveys	
Locations	Lao Cai, Quang Ninh, Quang Nam, Lam Dong, Kien Giang	

GII score	GII ranking (out of 189)
0.296	65

Status of women and girls

With over 97 million people (2020), Viet Nam is currently the 15th most populous country in the world. A developing country with a lower-middle-income economy (since 2010), Viet Nam is one of the fastest growing economies of the 21st century. In the last few decades, Viet Nam has made impressive progress in terms of development, reducing the poverty rate from over 50 per cent in 1990 to less than 2 per cent in 2020, significantly increasing life expectancy and expanding GDP from USD 31 billion in 2000 to USD 270 billion in 2020 (World Bank, 2020).

There are gender equality guarantees in the Constitution, with milestone legislation introduced including a law on gender equality from 2006 and the law on the prevention and control of domestic violence from 2007.

However, while women's labour force participation is one of the highest in the region at 73 per cent (World Bank, 2019), women have limited access to formal employment and are disproportionately engaged in vulnerable employment (52 per cent in 2019) that do not provide social security. Prevalence of domestic violence is high, with three in five ever married women experiencing some form of violence in their lifetime by their intimate partner. The harmful practice of son preference also results in a highly skewed sex ratio at birth: 112 boys to 100 girls between 2015 and 2020 (Statista.com, 2020). This is a result of weak enforcement of the law, as well as deep-rooted gender stereotypes and social norms that limit opportunities for women and girls (UN Women Viet Nam, 2016).

Although Viet Nam's 2014 law on marriage and family stipulates equal rights and obligations between husband and wife and parents, patriarchal attitudes still exist in reality. In many families, the man is the head of the household, while the wife must take responsibility for the housework and care of the children, and at the same time be submissive to her husband. Moreover, wives are traditionally required to live with their husband's family (Social Institution & Gender Index, 2019).

Educational barriers and opportunities for girls

Statistics indicate no difference in the attendance of girls and boys in primary and secondary school. However, in tertiary and vocational training institutions,

men still outnumber women, with the percentage of men holding college and university degrees being higher than that of women.

Gender differences are also reflected in the segregation of fields of study: female students are concentrated in social sciences, education, humanities and the arts, while male students are concentrated in engineering, manufacturing and construction. Furthermore, women undertake vocational training in traditionally women-dominated occupations. This limits women's future career development, especially in non-traditional and emerging jobs and other income-generating opportunities.

Gender gaps in educational access are particularly evident among young people from ethnic minorities and poor households who live in remote and mountainous areas, as well as people with disabilities. Another issue is common stereotypical portrayals of men and women in traditional roles. For example, men and boys are portrayed as strong, intelligent and able to carry out complicated and physically challenging tasks, while girls and women are typically portrayed as caring, clean and orderly, emotional and lacking in physical strength (UNESCO & MoET, 2011).

Early marriage is also linked to the prevalence of girls dropping out of school early due to social discrimination. This still occurs in rural and mountainous regions, but rates are low and gradually decreasing.

Role of English in girls' lives

Most of the adolescent schoolgirls and out-of-school girls surveyed said English was essential for their lives and their future, and they had all learnt English since elementary school; however, they still lacked the skills to communicate fluently in English, and out-of-school girls have mostly forgotten the knowledge and skills they learned at school.

'English is very important, it gives me confidence and helps me find a good job.'
Lower secondary schoolgirl, Quang Ninh

'English is important, because if you are good at English, you will have many opportunities to study and work abroad.'
Lower secondary schoolgirl, Kien Giang

'If I can speak English, I will help foreigners when they are in trouble. I can also use English for entertainment and study. English is increasingly important to integrate with the current world.'
Upper secondary schoolboy, Quang Nam

Most of the participants said their family supports their children's learning of English to varying degrees. In addition to learning in the classroom, many children, both boys and girls, are supported by their families to attend private English tuition. However, for out-of-school girls, this support is almost non-existent.

All schools support students' English education by organising activities and competitions that use English, in addition to regular English classes. However, in the students' opinion, English education at school offers limited opportunities to communicate in English, and there is too much emphasis on testing instead of

"I am 19 years old and I dropped out of school after Grade 9. I dropped out because my family did not have money for me to pay for tuition and buy clothes. My parents forced me to drop out of school. I recently got married."
Out-of-school girl, 19, Lam Dong

'At school, teachers often focus on teaching English grammar, not on communication.'
Upper secondary schoolgirl, Kien Giang

'I only use English when I study in class, I do not use English outside of school. My English is not good.'
Upper secondary schoolgirl, Quang Nam

'The English teaching at the school is not effective. Students cannot learn through communicating with foreigners, so their communication skills are limited.'
Social worker (female), Kien Giang

creating opportunities to use English in class.

There is a need for free online English learning programmes for children in and outside of school and training teachers in teaching English effectively.

The majority of male and female students are interested in developing their English and digital skills as well as communication skills.

When asked about their future needs, most of the male and female students said they wanted to develop their English communication skills, and saw support from their families and schools as crucial in achieving this.

Many out-of-school girls wished to return to school to receive more vocational training, including improving their English skills. However, for those who are most marginalised, this is difficult to achieve because of financial and family barriers.

Role of digital in girls' lives

All the girls study informatics at school, but they have limited application and practical lessons.

In all locations the schoolgirls interviewed were negative about the content of these informatics lessons in school, which they felt were difficult to understand and apply to their lives. In addition, they complained about too much time being spent studying the theory of informatics, leaving insufficient time for practice, and not being able to practise consistently due to two or three students sharing a computer.

'I do not see any difficulty with IT subject at all, just that the teaching method of my IT teacher is very boring, and I find it difficult to understand, and I do not often go to IT practical lab because we spend too many hours on theory lessons, so I found this subject not interesting.'
Schoolgirl, Quang Ninh

Schoolgirls use smart devices for both learning and entertainment, with limited use for broadening their own learning or updating their skills. None of them intend to follow a digital-related career in future.

All participating schoolgirls had access to the informatics curriculum and a device that could connect to the internet (computer, laptop or smartphone). However, the number of computers with internet connection in the school does not meet the current number of students, resulting in students being unable to gain sufficient practice.

Most out-of-school girls use the internet for entertainment only, while use for gaining wider

> 'My mom allows me to use her smartphone to study online.'
> **Lower secondary schoolgirl, Lao Cai**

knowledge and skills improvement is limited. As with schoolgirls, they have no plans for an IT-related career in future.

Most out-of-school girls and schoolgirls with their own smart devices (computer, smartphone) do not ask their parents and caregivers for permission to use them; however, those who share a smartphone with their parents or siblings must ask to borrow the phone when they want to use it for learning purposes.

The out-of-school girls interviewed did not want to return to school, even if encouraged by the schools and social activists. They have not received any encouragement to go back to school from their parents.

> 'I will continue my current job: farming, working, working as a nail technician ...'
> **Out-of-school girl, Kien Giang**

It seems that most of today's parents are not able or willing to monitor the online content accessed by their children.

> 'I only buy smartphones for my children; I am not qualified to check or dare to see what my children are doing with their own smart devices.'
> **Parent, Quang Nam**

The school leaders expressed their wish to get more support from government stakeholders, as well as outsiders, to implement programmes to enable students to gain wider access to digital literacy education.

> 'Support from outsiders is very necessary; the school needs help from organisations and individuals, parents and business to organise more ICT learning activities. Provision of ICT education is an area that needs further attention.'
> **School principal, Kien Giang**

Recommendations for future projects

1. While the study itself gives an in-depth view of girls in school in Viet Nam, further scoping research should be undertaken to gather more information from girls in communities that are perceived to be marginalised. Initially, this should be done through building connections with organisations that are working with adolescent girls and young women in these areas.

2. To address the challenge of a lack of IT equipment and internet coverage, Projects could consider establishing partnerships with internet providers such as Viettel.

3. There is scope to extend this research to look in more depth at the labour force needs in more marginalised communities in Viet Nam. This could include partnerships with local companies and organisations to create programmes which could lead directly to formal employment opportunities.

4. Projects could be organised in a variety of forms to meet the needs of all adolescent girls in school as well as out-of-school girls:

- **For schoolgirls:** Design learning programmes aimed at increasing face-to-face interaction. Form a partnership with schoolteachers, with support from the MoET.

- **For out-of-school girls:** Programmes should emphasise communication skills while at the same time providing professional English appropriate for each group of learners.

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Appendix: EDGE programme overview

EDGE outcomes

The EDGE programme and other similar 'club-based' skills programmes have proven to contribute to the following outcomes.

- Increased knowledge and skills in the following:
  - English skills include the ability to talk about oneself and familiar things in daily life, and to express feelings and opinions.
  - Digital skills include the ability to access, and proficiency in using, computers or digital media, including television and mobile phones.
  - 21st century skills are core skills and competencies that relate to the world in which we live, including ways of making more informed and independent life choices, contributing to family and community, and to society and the economy.
  - Skills for social interaction such as confidence, expressing opinions and leadership, alongside awareness and understanding of social issues and how they impact in particular on adolescent girls from poor socio-economic backgrounds who are often no longer engaged in education.

- Increase in self efficacy – the confidence in their ability to exert control over their own behaviour and social environment.

- Increase in personal agency – the ability to make personal and public choices for the improvement of their lives and their world for example continue in education, delay marriage, get a job, start a business.

- Increase in the perceived value of girls – within both the family and the community.

- Increase in the value of education – increased perception by girls and their families that formal education could be useful for them.

- Increased opportunities – within the family, community and economic, for example opportunities to continue attending either formal or non-formal education, opportunities to work and earn money.

- Continued provision of safe spaces – community-based locations that are easily accessible by users, supported by community leaders and families, where girls are free to socialise and learn with others. Girls can express themselves without judgement or harm, which may not be the case in other public environments.

How EDGE works

The EDGE programme has a number of key features:

A peer-led model

Peer group leaders (PGLs) are participants from within the group, and EDGE clubs are led by these peer group leaders. The British Council trains the PGLs to manage the clubs in their community. The PGLs provide positive role models which helps to build the confidence and leadership skills of all the participants. The PGL model also ensures that EDGE is sustainable and scalable as it builds local capacity to run the clubs in the future.

Safe spaces for girls to learn

EDGE clubs provide a safe space for girls to interact and learn because:

- Clubs are community-based and supported by community leaders and families

- Girls do not need to commute in environments where even travel to school can be long and potentially dangerous

- The peer-led model means these safe spaces are places where girls can express themselves without judgement or harm, which may not be the case in other public environments

Child safeguarding

The programme is underpinned and informed by our child safeguarding policies and practices:

- Policies and plans are agreed with partners and put in place to keep all children safe from harm

- All project staff and trainers receive training in child protection and are required to provide police clearance to participate in the clubs

- Training for peer group leaders and girls includes child protection modules

The British Council child safeguarding policy is available at https://www.britishcouncil.org/about-us/how-we-work/policies/safeguarding

Learning is integrated and contextualised

The EDGE programme brings together English, digital and life skills development. These are mediated through high-quality learning materials specially designed by the British Council for this programme and its target audience. The three strands are underpinned by a structured syllabus.

The life skills element centres around UNICEF's Meena comics and videos. These help participants to understand and reflect on a variety of social and health issues, while at the same time practising their English skills.

Parents and community members are actively involved

EDGE involves mothers and fathers as well as local community members throughout the programme, by holding sharing meetings and inviting observation of club sessions. In addition, community events are held with partners to demonstrate the skills developed by girls who have attended the club sessions.

Clear alignment with the global and regional development agenda

The theory of change for the EDGE programme is clearly aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the particular country's plans for developing digital literacy and English skills.

Results are achieved in partnership

The EDGE programme works in partnership with funding, implementing (non-government and private sector) and government agencies, drawing on local expertise, strengthening existing networks and systems, and sharing knowledge, to ensure maximum impact for beneficiaries.

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