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Final Evaluation of Girls' Education Project Phase 3 (GEP3) 2012-2022 in Northern Nigeria

Executive Summary

November 2022



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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, with over 206 million people¹ living in 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. Despite efforts by the government to make basic education free and compulsory within the framework of the 2014 National Policy on Education, at least 10.2 million children at the primary level and 8.1 million children at the junior secondary school (JSS) level are reported to be out-of-school in Nigeria.² Most of these children were girls and primary school-aged children from the northern states. In addition, the gender parity index (GPI) in basic education in the North Central, North East and North West geopolitical zones were 0.89, 0.77 and 0.73, respectively.³ Studies have indicated that about 50 per cent of children attending school were not learning as expected. As such, 63 per cent of children in rural areas and 84 per cent of children in the lowest economic quintile could not read.⁴

In response to this situation, UNICEF developed and implemented the Girls' Education Project Phase 3 (GEP3) from 2012–2022 in partnership with the Government of Nigeria and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) of the United Kingdom. With an investment of GBP79 million (approximately US\$109.1 million), GEP3 aimed to improve basic education, increase social and economic opportunities for girls and reduce disparities in learning outcomes between girls and boys in northern Nigeria. The programme focused on addressing the barriers to girls' education, including sociocultural and gender norms, economic and socio-political contexts and constraints related to local governance, educational material, staff capacity and low financing in the education sector.

To fulfil UNICEF's commitment to generate sound evidence on the results achieved for children, a final evaluation was conducted to generate lessons learned and ensure the sustainability of these efforts. This final evaluation presents the findings of the independent evaluation of GEP3 undertaken by the Overseas Advising Group.

¹United Nations Population Division, 2019 Revision of World Population Prospects, <www.worldometers.info/demographics/nigeria-demographics>

²Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), 2018 National Personnel Audit (NPA) Report on Public and Private Basic Education Schools in Nigeria. Abuja: Binani Printing Press, 2019.

³Federal Republic of Nigeria, Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), 2012. <<https://ubec.gov.ng/>>

⁴National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2017 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2016-17, Survey Findings Report, Abuja, Nigeria, NBS and UNICEF, 2017. <www.unicef.org/nigeria/sites/unicef.org.nigeria/files/2018-09/Nigeria-MICS-2016-17.pdf>

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of this evaluation is to provide solid evidence on the achievements of GEP3 impacts, outcomes and outputs as indicated in the programmatic documents and results framework. It also provides a comprehensive review of the programme's theory of change. This evaluation focused on two key components of the programme: GEP3 programme which was implemented in six focal states and the GEP3 Cash Transfer Programme (CTP) which was implemented in Sokoto and Niger states. The study aimed to:

1. Determine if GEP3 achieved the expected results related to access and retention of girls in basic education and improved the quality of learning outcomes in basic education in northern Nigeria.
2. Document the resilience of communities and families in support of girls' education.
3. Understand the drivers of educational participation and performance of girls.
4. Analyse the value for money of GEP3.
5. Assess GEP3 preparedness and response to external shocks.
6. Provide strategic recommendations for future investments and initiatives to advance gender equality in education.

SCOPE

This evaluation assessed the contributions that GEP3 made to the education sector and explored the merits and shortfalls in the programmatic areas of access, quality and governance of education in northern Nigeria. In addition, it provided an objective assessment of the results obtained – what worked, what didn't and why – and the enabling factors and barriers to success. The evaluation focused on six programme states: Bauchi, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Zamfara and Kano for the duration of the investment from May 2012 to June 2021.⁵

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The design and approach of the evaluation were informed by the Terms of Reference and the Development Assistance Committee's criteria for relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. In addition, the criteria of resilience and gender equality and equity were used.

⁵GEP3 was implemented until 2022 with a slight pivot in the interventions for the costed extension phase (July 2021 to September 2022) towards adolescent girls in junior secondary schools.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach by combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The methodology included a quasi-experimental longitudinal panel design that tracked a cohort of targeted schools over the life of the programme. This design was developed to simulate a before and after approach with and without comparisons.

The evaluation included: (i) a household survey to measure the effectiveness and impact of cash transfers to girls' parents and caregivers; (ii) a school survey consisting of pupil learning outcome assessments; (iii) interviews of headteachers; (iv) classroom observations and headcounts; and (v) a desk review, key informant interviews and focus group discussions with a variety of stakeholders. A value for money and quantitative analysis of secondary data from national household surveys complemented the evaluation.

The effectiveness and impact of GEP3 on learning outcomes and socioeconomic indicators related to girls' education were assessed through the comparison of achievements in three school treatment groups. The first school treatment group benefited from 10 GEP3 interventions and the Reading and Numeracy Activity (RANA)⁶. In the second school treatment group, families of girls received unconditional cash transfers in addition to the 10 interventions and RANA. The third comparison group (i.e. control group) did not receive any GEP3 interventions.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Relevance

GEP3 was highly relevant in addressing the needs and barriers related to girls' education in northern Nigeria. The programme improved girls' access to school and increased their rates of enrolment and retention by using a comprehensive and systemic approach. This involved partnering with school and community-based organizations, committees and women's organizations and aimed to ensure that girls had safe and nurturing environments in schools and communities, which proved successful.

Several key complementary strategies such as Girls for Girls⁷, the High-Level Women Advocates (HiLWA), and Mothers' Associations, were very influential in supporting and mentoring girls. Local authorities, teachers, parents and girls reported that these strategies also impacted the larger community and demonstrated the effectiveness of female-run local initiatives.

Evidence indicated that there were strong and sensible synergies between community-level stakeholders involved in the programme, such as School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs), Mother's Associations, HiLWA and Community-Based Management Committees. This participation resulted in a robust and efficient community engagement process.

The plausibility of GEP3's theory of change was supported by the stakeholders' common understanding and adherence to the GEP3 objectives. This overwhelming support was due in part to the redesign and simplification of the theory of change in 2015. Overall, the theory of change was determined to be robust, structurally sound, plausible and upheld most of its assumptions. The implementation strategy of the programme fits well within the existing government strategies; however, future programming would need to consider existing structural barriers such as poverty, in-service teacher competencies, cultural stereotypes and gender norms.

⁶Reading and Numeracy Activity (RANA) was designed to improve literacy and numeracy instruction in Grades 1-3 in public schools and Islamic Qur'anic Schools (IQS), with the goal of increasing literacy outcomes for learners, especially girls. To achieve these goals, RANA has developed Hausa-language teaching and learning materials, built teacher capacity, mobilized communities and engaged local governments to improve early grade reading policies.

⁷Girls for Girls, also known as G4G, are girls' peer mentoring groups established at the school level.



Coherence

The evaluation team concluded that the GEP3 was very coherent with global, national and state policies and priorities, local priorities and contextual realities. The programme was aligned at the federal and state levels with global strategies on girls' education and the broader policy environment, including social protection and gender policies. It was strongly aligned with the national policy goal⁸ of reducing the number of out-of-school children, especially for girls in northern Nigeria.

Key contextual elements related to social, cultural, political, economic and governance domains and causal factors were taken into consideration when formulating the hypotheses and the underlying design of interventions. The GEP3 strategy focused on the most vulnerable and marginalized children, including girls, and ensured coherence with each state's priorities on integrating Islamic schools into the education sector.

⁸Federal Ministry of Education, *4-Year Strategic Plan for the Development of the Education Development: 2011–2015*, Federal Ministry of Education, Abuja, Nigeria, 2012.

Evidence reveals that GEP3 effectively achieved its expected results related to girls' enrolment, retention and education completion. Improving the quality of teaching and teaching capacity and improving governance and support for the inclusion and participation of different stakeholders, such as local and traditional authorities, was also achieved to some extent.

Access: The enrolment and retention of girls in schools were primarily driven by the programmes' intensive, comprehensive and sustained sensitization efforts enveloped in GEP3. There is evidence of a substantial increase in the gross enrolment of girls in schools and an improved gender parity across the targeted states. The GPI, which measures the ratio of girls to boys for enrolment, increased from 0.73 (baseline value) to 0.78 (midline) and reached 0.97 by the end of the programme. This suggests that the gender gap was almost closed in the targeted communities. The improvement in the GPI for public schools was especially profound: from 0.56 (baseline) to 1.00 (end-line) ($p < 0.01$)⁹.

In Niger and Sokoto states, the highest impact was felt by households that utilized a combination of early learning and cash transfer interventions. The proportion of households with two or more female children enrolled in school benefited the most from this combination (25 per cent) compared to households that received only GEP3 early learning (21.7 per cent) and the control group (17.9 per cent) ($p < 0.01$). Similarly, those benefiting from the combination of early learning and cash transfer interventions were households with one to two girls (33.0 per cent) and three or more girls (5.2 per cent) who completed nine years of schooling, compared to the GEP3-learning-only group and the control group ($p < 0.01$).

Quality: Pupils that benefited from the GEP3-RANA programme scored higher in literacy (Hausa and English) and numeracy assessments than their control group peers. For instance, pupils in the GEP3-RANA programme scored significantly higher in English literacy than their counterparts in the control group ($p < 0.01$). There were marked improvements in early learning, girls' inclusion and participation in the learning process when teachers, especially female teachers, were better trained.

The percentage of pupils achieving basic literacy in English increased from 10 per cent at the baseline to about 32 per cent and 40 per cent at the midline and end-line respectively. Pupils in GEP3 schools outperformed their peers in non-GEP3 schools, with a statistically significant

difference in scores. On average, girls performed better than boys in Hausa and English literacy in public primary schools for the end-line assessments. For instance, girls scored 10 points higher than boys in English literacy in Katsina and Niger and five points higher in Sokoto.

Pupils in GEP3-supported Integrated Qur'anic Schools (IQSs) scored significantly higher in numeracy tests than their counterparts in the control group ($p < 0.01$). Pupils in IQS were also significantly more literate in Hausa and English languages than pupils in public primary schools ($p < 0.01$). This may be attributed to the pupils' age, as children in IQSs are older than their public school counterparts.

Though the capacity-building of teachers was a noted strength of the programme, there were structural gaps in the quality of teaching. This was partly attributed to inadequate teaching aids, entry profiles and teachers' poor comprehension of new teaching material.

Governance: Building the capacity of head teachers in school management improved school governance. Evidence implies that this positively impacted the monitoring of teacher availability and performance. Governance was also improved by strengthening SBMCs, though in a few cases, non-functional SBMCs created a gap in monitoring and support, hindering the achievement of desired results.

External monitoring was suboptimal, with about 77 per cent of participating schools meeting with the local government authorities. Seventy-five per cent of schools received visits from GEP3 officials, against a baseline of 80 per cent of schools receiving a monitoring visit. Furthermore, only 60 per cent of the headteachers surveyed had attended management training. To address the weakness in the education system regarding quality practices (methods, strategies and pedagogical competencies), teacher training should be a clear focus in the next programme cycle.

⁹The difference is statistically significant at a 1 per cent level.

Impact

GEP3 demonstrated an overall strong positive impact on girls and their families, communities and schools. The impact of the CTP on girls' enrolment in primary schools was strongly positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). At the end-line assessment, households that benefited from CTP enrolled more girls in early grades of primary education (Grades 1-3) than households that did not. The probability of a girl enrolling in school from a household that benefited from the CTP was 92.1 per cent compared to 76.6 per cent for a girl from a household that didn't receive cash support. The impact of unconditional CTP on household spending for girls' schooling was also strongly positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, GEP3-RANA positively impacted Hausa and English literacy learning outcomes at both midline and end-line assessments, with more substantial improvements in English than in Hausa. However, there was a slight decline in the programme's impact between the midline and end-line, likely due to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and regional security risks.

While the impact of GEP3 interventions on the literacy rate was higher for boys than girls at the midline assessment, girls outperformed boys during the end-line assessment. Between the midline and end-line assessments, the programme impact on boys achieving basic English literacy decreased from 7.9 per cent to 1.2 per cent. In comparison, the programme impact on girls' proficiency in English increased from 4.3 per cent to 7.9 per cent. The decline in the share of proficient boys requires further analysis.

National population surveys showed improvements in the literacy rate among young women aged 15–24 years and a reduction in

early-marriage, adolescent pregnancy and childbearing in the focal states. The rate of early marriage (under the age of 19) dropped from 54.7 per cent to 25.7 per cent and the early childbearing rate (i.e., girls who had a live birth before the age of 15) dropped from 6.9 per cent to 2.4 per cent.

The programme enabled a definite shift in mindset regarding the importance of education for girls. The raised profile of educated girls indicates a transformation in perception and a change in gender norms.

One unintended negative consequence of increased student enrolment was revealed during the programme evaluation. With more pupils enrolled in target schools, the pupil-teacher ratio increased significantly from 44:1 at the baseline to 77:1 at the end-line ($p < 0.01$), putting the quality of teaching at severe risk.

It is also worth noting that stakeholders raised some concerns about including conditions on cash transfers during the programme design for GEP3. However, the successful implementation of unconditional cash transfers changed stakeholders' perceptions. The programme's successes, including cost efficiency, comprehensive coverage and improvements in the enrolment and retention of girls in public primary schools, have influenced subsequent CTP designs in Nigeria. This includes the design of the Federal-Funded National Cash Transfer Programme, which has a base cash grant for targeted poor households and individuals and a conditional top-up.

Efficiency

GEP3 demonstrated good value for money with a positive Net Present Value and the opportunity to scale up interventions are incredibly promising. The analysis of the original value for money proposition in the business case demonstrated that GEP3 spent less than the benchmarked unit cost for most activities with overachievement of the target on girls' enrolment. The unit cost expended per additional girl enrolled was much lower than the budgeted amount. It was estimated that GBP£107.3 would be spent per additional girl enrolled in the business case, but the annual target of 100,000 was exceeded each year at a lower cost. Overall, 1,283,024 girls were enrolled at a unit cost of £43 (US\$60) per girl and £55 (\$75) per girl retained in school. The cost of the RANA programme decreased from \$23 to about \$8 per child in the expansion phase

heralding the possibilities for nationwide scaling of the programme.

The analysis of information about school infrastructure showed a consistent reduction in the proportion of schools that needed repairs from the baseline (93 per cent) to midline (87 per cent) and end-line (70 per cent) ($p < 0.01$), suggesting that school grants inculcated a culture of infrastructure maintenance. The limited availability of toilets for pupils across all types of schools was also an issue. The pupil-to-toilet ratio in IQS was 198:1 compared to 246:1 in public primary schools, highlighting a need to improve the quantity and quality of infrastructure.

Sustainability

GEP3 has established sustainable, transformative gains with strong community ownership that informs culture and practices on girls' education. However, the capacity to sustain GEP3 interventions depends on the government's financial commitment. There is sufficient government capacity to implement and monitor the programme at national and state levels and ample evidence regarding local ownership and the use of local capacity.

All six focal states have developed sustainability plans to enable the programme activities to continue beyond GEP3. For example, Bauchi,

Katsina, Kano, Sokoto and Zamfara detailed plans to institutionalize enrolment drive campaigns at the level of the States Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and/or at the community-level. They also have plans to digitalize the Education Management Information System to support the Annual School Census and continue and expand the training of teachers, teacher facilitators and headteachers. All states indicated government budgetary commitments to these activities, but there was not yet evidence of the release of government funds.

Resilience

GEP3 was resilient to internal and external setbacks, including insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic. Community ownership of the GEP3 programme proved to be the right platform for tackling the COVID-19 pandemic that affected school attendance in all focal states. The flexible and innovative strategies developed to cope with the drawbacks of the pandemic, such as radio educational programmes, parents teaching and community mentors, seemed to play a double role in maintaining social contact and ensuring continuity of learning.

Gender-based violence, including rape,

harassment and molestation, seemed to have worsened during the COVID-19 lockdown, with girls at home for extended periods. Nevertheless, there was evidence of growing awareness of this social problem and instances at the school level when these problems were discussed.

The geographical distance between schools and homes was directly related to the perception of danger and risk of gender-based violence on the roads to and from schools.

Female mentors/mentees empowered by the programme, such as HiLWA, Girls for Girls or female teachers, seemed to be better prepared and more sensitized to these issues, which helped to create spaces to address them.

Overall, long-lasting insecurity issues implicitly influenced outcomes in Niger state, a factor that should be considered in future interventions or follow-up efforts.

Gender equality and equity

There was strong evidence that GEP3 enrolled an extraordinarily high number of girls and significantly impacted girls' learning outcomes. This resulted in a narrowing of the gender gaps and changes in social norms related to the value of women's economic empowerment. The Net Enrolment Rate of girls in CTP households differed between the wealthiest and the poorest households compared to the same variable for boys, implying that gender-sensitive cash transfer interventions bridged the divide for girls.

The programme worked holistically with women – through Mother's Associations, HiLWA and Girls for Girls – and engaged with multiple stakeholders, including community-level decision makers, to improve local governance by systematically addressing drivers of gender inequality. The engagement of women, especially as mentors and high-level advocates, was a strategy that produced both intrinsic and extrinsic benefits. HiLWA-related activities generated high-level political interest in girls' education. Even more importantly, mentoring offered by Girls for Girls led to a change in mindset among girls: a crucial foundation to ensure long-term change.

There was also evidence of social and behavioural change related to the importance of girls' education at a broader community-level among religious leaders, parents and teachers. Indications of the impact that CTP had on the social and economic empowerment of women and improved livelihood for households were especially promising. This appeared to influence the position of women in decision-making within the family and community and was highlighted by the increased investment in girls' education made with the cash transferred to mothers and caregivers.

Future programme designs should address the socially transmitted fear of (and shame associated with) pregnancy out of wedlock, a significant reason for girls' early-marriage after their first menstruation. Programme designs that support mothers and fathers through parenting education and enable intergenerational dialogue on sexual and reproductive health and rights could address these ongoing concerns.

The most compelling element of change in gender equality is the traditional script relegated to daughters. This change was articulated by various community representatives participating in the focus group discussion conducted during the programme evaluation. The older generation, for example, maintains that the primary role of a girl is to be a mother and wife under the guidance of her husband, with formal education helping to fulfil those roles. The perception of the younger generation, both boys and girls, is that education allows girls to pursue professional careers, such as doctors and teachers, and have financial independence. They see this as a critical factor in transforming the household gender dynamics from a submissive/dependent wife-husband relationship into a balanced and equal partnership. The evaluation also highlighted the effectiveness of intergenerational dialogue for programmes aimed at abandoning harmful social norms. Developing mutual understanding between different generations in a community was crucial in creating an enabling environment for adolescent girls and young girls to pursue further education and delay the age of marriage.

Reflections on the 12 strategic interventions of GEP3

Twelve strategic interventions were implemented throughout GEP3 programming:

1. Enrolment drives
2. School grant cash transfer for learning and retention of girls in school (which ended in 2017)
3. Girls for Girls groups
4. Capacity development of teachers and headteachers
5. Early literacy and numeracy intervention (i.e., RANA)
6. Capacity development of School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs)
7. Support of effective data-collection (e.g., Annual School Census in the GEP3 states and Local Education Sector Operational Plans)
8. Inclusion of Integrated Qur'anic Schools in Education Management Information Systems
9. Promote increased representation and participation of women through the High-level Women Advocates
10. Girls Education Steering Committee as a forum to advocate for girls' education issues at national, state and local government area levels
11. Advocacy and advice to generate planning and budgeting to sustain interventions at a larger scale
12. Advocacy engagement to support interventions

Enrolment drive campaigns that focused on girls in Grade 1 and girls in IQSs were carried out as planned and there is evidence of increased enrolment and retention of girls in basic education throughout the programme years. The COVID-19 lockdown and prolonged school closures led to a halt in enrolment activities, especially school and community-based activities. Nevertheless, the high effectiveness of enrolment campaigns over the years meant the effects of the COVID-19 restriction were minimal. By the end of the programme, five states (Bauchi, Katsina, Kano, Sokoto and Zamfara) outlined plans to institutionalize enrolment drive campaigns at the SUBEB and/or community levels, with government budgetary commitments to drive these activities.

School grants were provided to support the learning and retention of girls in school. IQSs and public schools benefited from school repairs, school uniforms, monthly financial support, classroom construction and school furniture (e.g., chairs and tables). However, only public schools benefited from improved sanitation facilities through the construction of boreholes and toilets. There was some social accountability for funds, including formal and informal control measures. Focus group respondents observed the presence of indicators such as approved improvement plans, monitoring tools and physical improvements carried out on the school premises. Improvements such as renovated classrooms, rehabilitated school buildings and new latrines were enumerated. In some cases, the SBMCs led the planning and implementation of activities funded through microgrants given to schools to ensure accountability.

By having alumnae of **Girls for Girls groups** become mentors, the ripple effects of investing in girls' education are multiplied for future generations. Integrating this 'imitation strategy' into the programme ensured that girls developed a voice, gained confidence and interacted with other girls as mentors to showcase the value of education. Girls for Girls was influential in stimulating a push-back to early-marriage practices and was mentioned several times during focus group discussions. However, the desired level of change was

limited due to strong stereotypes and inflexible attitudes linked to culture and religion. The Girls for Girls programme also supported the development of new skills. For instance, girls in Katsina learned how to make petroleum jelly and liquid soap, knit, weave mats and baskets and make beads.

Capacity development of teachers and headteachers was carried out in public schools and IQSs. Teachers received pedagogical training and management training was delivered to headteachers, administrative staff and education managers. This was pursued in states through the Female Teachers Trainee Scholarship Scheme and the Headteachers Capacity Training Programme. The training was considered valuable and vital in improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising awareness of girls' access to education. There was also an increase in the use of learning resources, such as teacher textbooks, as evidenced by the end-line assessment (26.7 per cent) compared to the baseline (9.5 per cent) and midline (2.2 per cent) assessments. The use of posters, charts and pictures increased from 6.5 per cent to 7.9 per cent. The increased rate of material support in planning and management (e.g., lesson plans) and didactic elements (e.g., posters) could also be attributed to the skills acquired during training.

Early literacy and numeracy intervention through Reading and Numeracy Activity (RANA) was designed to improve literacy and numeracy instruction in Grades 1-3 in both public schools and IQS, with the goal of increasing literacy outcomes for learners, especially girls. To achieve these goals, RANA developed Hausa-language teaching and learning materials, built teacher capacity, mobilized communities and engaged local governments to improve early-grade reading policies.

The **capacity of SBMCs** were developed and frequently mentioned in the interviews and focus group discussions as critical drivers of change. Some 92 per cent of schools had functional SBMCs in place, and 85 per cent of them indicated that the SBMCs were supportive of implementing GEP3 in their schools. The role played by SBMCs was

reported as crucial in reducing early marriages for girls. In addition to sensitizing the communities about the importance of girls' education, they played mediatory roles in families. When they noticed girls' absenteeism from school, a signal of imminent dropout, they convinced men to release their daughters to return to school. They also carried out other advocacy activities and performed monitoring roles in schools to ensure the presence and availability of teachers.

The **effective support of data collection** and the improvement in education data quality and quantity was a notable achievement of the programme. All GEP3 local government areas developed and implemented Local Education Sector Operational Plans with monitoring and evaluation embedded in the programme design cycle. GEP3 improved the capacity of monitoring and evaluation teams at the state level, including the capacities of SUBEBs, in data collection and management. The improved monitoring and data management skills were reported as enhancing accountability and transparency and SUBEBs provided strong support for implementing and monitoring GEP3. In addition, GEP3 supported the implementation of the Annual School Census, which helped to identify the changes and gaps in pupils' annual enrolment in schools for necessary government or donor action. The standardization of Education Management Information System procedures and the decentralization of GEP3 data were reported as strengthening the programme's efficiency due to the improved quality of data collection and data treatment practices.

The programme supported the **inclusion of Qur'anic Schools into the Education Management Information System** to collect evidence on gender-sensitive issues and reinforce improved teaching and learning practices in those schools. Through improved data collection, girls and boys attending IQS were statistically recognized as being in school. This was particularly relevant as IQS are often socially favoured by parents as the schooling of choice for their daughters.

GEP3 promoted **women's increased representation and participation through HiLWA and Mother's Associations**. The HiLWA were community "champions" comprised of women who benefited from basic education without compromising cultural and religious ideals. They also served as influencers to encourage parents to allow access to basic education for female children. These women were key drivers of change, as seen in their crucial roles as mentors, advocates, sensitizers and facilitators of the enrolment and retention of girls in schools. Mother's Association activities and their financial commitments were also frequently reported as critical in reducing the number of out-of-school children.

Advocacy at the national, state and local government area level is an important component of GEP3. The **Girl's Education Steering Committee** provides strategic guidance and oversight to the implementation of GEP3 and addresses emerging issues that have policy implications on the provision of educational services nationally or in states with a similar context. Advocacy and advice for planning and budgeting at the community-level sustain interventions at a larger scale. With the federal government's assurance, the improved capacities of the government and GEP3 stakeholders stimulated more commitment at the state level and eventually led to higher budgetary allocations. Improvement in management capacities at the local and state levels is reflected in the better handling of programme protocols, including the cash transfer component.

As part of **advocacy engagement** to support interventions, the programme successfully increased the number of teachers in schools, as highlighted by stakeholders during the interviews. In addition, HiLWA successfully lobbied for teaching positions for young women in the communities.

LESSONS LEARNED

Methodologically speaking, the comprehensive societal approach (e.g., considering a wide range of social, psychosocial, cultural and economic factors, including gender norms) was effective in inducing the change in perceptions and behaviours concerning girls' education. The combination of interventions and use of different change-inducing modalities such as training, awareness-raising, role modelling (HiLWA), peer influence (Girls for Girls) and financial incentives were internally coherent and complementary. This wide array of approaches also allowed adequate targeting of different types of stakeholders, including community, school population, teachers, local authorities and families.

Simplifying the theory of change in 2015 and focusing on fewer, more streamlined and cohesive interventions aimed at improving girls' education proved to be the right decision to achieve more concrete and feasible results. This coincided with a modification in UNICEF's project management arrangements in terms of staffing, project architecture and technical delivery. These corrections improved

cooperation with the state government allowing the programme to promote sustainable scale-up of project interventions. Project management of risk, finance, results and data also improved significantly after this redesign and was an important lesson learned.

Several key strategies of the programme were identified as good practices including RANA, IQS, Girls for Girls and HiLWA. The evidence-based approach that RANA used for early-grade literacy and numeracy improved reading and numeracy skills for both girls and boys. The 'imitation strategies' for mentoring used by HiLWA and Girls for Girls were essential drivers of transformational shifts among girls and other community members and holds the potential to drive the change in social norms and shift the defined script for girls in the community.

The combination of early learning and cash transfer interventions had a multiplier effect¹⁰ on girls' enrolment, retention and completion. This is an important finding and should inform the package of interventions for the next programme cycle.

¹⁰A phenomenon whereby a given change in a particular input, causes a larger change in an output.

Recommendations

Strategic recommendations

1. Include cash transfer initiatives whenever possible, especially with the Plus element (e.g., complementing cash transfers with additional inputs and services). Integration or scale-up of the financial household component as part of a more comprehensive inclusive education intervention strategy shall be considered in future programmes.
2. Plan for classroom overcrowding with worsening pupil-teacher ratios as the result of increased student enrolment. Comprehensive efforts are needed to prepare and inject new contingents of trained teachers.

Create a more enabling environment (e.g., working with the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the gender policy) to achieve gender equality and transform discriminatory social norms that affect girls. Approaches to changing power relations between men and women, as well as girls and boys at the community, local, institutional and national levels, should be supported by government policymaking. The focus should be to actively reach out and reinforce sectoral programming with adequate methodological and technical tools.
- 3.

Operational recommendations

1. Consider integrating a sexual and reproductive health and rights sensitizing module in the Girls for Girls package of the programme to prevent unintended teenage pregnancies that could impact girls' education and prolong child marriage. Contextualizing the training module or toolkit to the local setting could address specific gender norms and incorporate lessons learned from this evaluation.
2. Maintain and scale up the holistic gender-sensitive approach:
 - i. Expand improvements in the school environment to allow robust menstrual hygiene management in schools.
 - ii. Offer a life skills programme in the Girls for Girls component and consider different barriers and concerns that become obstacles to learning.
 - iii. Advocate for broader integration of Girls for Girls, HiLWA, 'He for She' and similar strategies in the education sector.



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