![UNGEI | UNITED NATIONS GIRLS' EDUCATION INITIATIVE]

UNGEI Working Paper: A summary of evidence on gender gaps in education in the context of Covid-19

April 2022

Introduction

This UNGEI Working Paper presents a mapping of existing evidence on the gender gaps in education in the context of Covid-19. The paper reviewed research and reports from UN agencies and country offices, international and national non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, independent research thinktanks, governments and funders. It has benefitted from the guidance and insight of UNGEI partner and ally organizations and colleagues, including Amplify Girls, UNICEF country offices, and the REAL Centre. This working paper was produced as a background document for a baseline report of the G7 girls' education Global Objectives Monitoring and Accountability mechanism; and as a source paper for the Transforming Education Summit Action Track #1 (Inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools; sub-theme 2, Gender Transformative Education) Discussion Paper.

To share inputs or feedback into this working paper, please contact Gloria Diamond, Policy Advocacy and Evidence Lead, UNGEI Secretariat gdiamond@ungei.org.

About - Baseline Report: G7 Girls' Education Global Objectives

As part of the United Kingdom's Presidency of the G7, a pair of global objectives were developed to mobilize coordinated action on girls' education and gender equality in education by 2026, securing the support of other G7 member states:

> (1) Get 40 million more girls in primary and secondary school;

> (2) Ensure 20 million more girls reading by age 10 or end of primary school;

in low- and lower-middle-income countries. The two objectives refer to thematic SDG 4 indicator 4.1.4 and global SDG indicator 4.1.1b, respectively.

The UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) and Transform Education (a young feminist coalition hosted by UNGEI) are working with the UK Government, UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report, and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) to prepare the baseline report of the girls' education Global Objectives Monitoring and Accountability mechanism. The report will ensure a transparent approach in progress towards the two global objectives; the sharing of good practice and lessons learned in relation to G7 and other donor actions to advance girls' education and gender equality in education, with particular reference to marginalized girls; and a spotlight on thematic areas of strategic importance to girls' education and gender equality in education. The baseline and subsequent monitoring reports will aim to inform the G7 Accountability Working Group, which also monitors girls' education, and the three functional areas (evidence, data, and finance) under the new global education cooperation architecture mechanism.

About - Transforming Education Summit: Action Track #1 Discussion Paper

UNGEI | UNITED NATIONS GIRLS' EDUCATION INITIATIVE

UNGEI is supporting the inter-governmental process (led by UNESCO) to develop a 2-page discussion paper for the Transforming Education Summit Action Track #1 on the sub-theme of gender transformative education. The Transforming Education Summit (TES) is scheduled to take place in New York in September 2022, during the high-level week of the United Nations General. UNESCO is leading the inter-agency Summit Secretariat in close coordination and collaboration with other UN agencies. The Summit preparatory process will center around three main workstreams: National Consultations; Thematic Action tracks, and Public Mobilization. The Thematic Action Tracks work stream will spotlight five areas that require greater attention and action to accelerate progress towards the SDGs and transform education. Equity and gender equality will be addressed across each of the five Thematic Action Tracks:

1. Inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools
2. Learning and skills for live, work, and sustainable development
3. Digital learning and transformation
4. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
5. Financing of education

The changes that the Actions Tracks seek to promote should encompass the immediate needs to be tackled (especially, recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic), medium-term changes needed to advance on SDG 4, and the transformations needed in education systems and societies in a longer term. Action Tracks do not exist in silos. Action Tracks must be mutually supporting and explicitly recognize and incorporate linkages and synergies across each other. Given the diverse themes and depth of challenges to be tackled, Action Track #1 is divided into 5 inter-linked sub-themes:

1. Inclusion and equity
2. Gender transformative education
3. Education in emergencies
4. Safe schools
5. Healthy schools

The two-page discussion paper on Gender Transformative Education will inform the development of a short 4-page discussion paper for the Action Track 1 (covering all five sub-themes as mentioned above) that sets out the overall ambition, challenges, opportunities, and possible solutions.

Section 1: Research and reports from UN agencies including country offices

UNICEF, UNESCO, World Bank – Where are we on education recovery? [LINK]

Tracking re-entry post Covid

- In 2021, school-based mechanisms to track students from vulnerable groups not returning to school were only reported by approximately a third of countries, and only upper-middle- and high-income countries frequently reported the use of this measure.
- UNICEF's Pulse Survey in 2022 finds that among those reporting availability of information on school returnees, more than 80 per cent can disaggregate data by gender, while less than a quarter can disaggregate by disability status.

2

Global Objective 1: Get 40 million more girls in primary and secondary school

In Kenya, a survey of 4,000 adolescents aged 10–19 years found that 16 per cent of girls and 8 per cent of boys did not return to school at reopening.

- o Lack of school fees was cited as the major reason among 47% of girls and 21% of boys. The other key reasons among girls were pregnancy (10%) and early marriages (5%), while a few in Wajir (3%) did not see the point of returning to school. Amongst adolescent boys, access to job opportunities was a key reason for opting out of school.
- o There were also key differences among age groups.

Global Objective 2: Ensure 20 million more girls reading by age 10 or end of primary school

- In rural Pakistan (ASER districts), girls experienced greater learning losses than boys during the Covid-19 school closures across nearly all competencies and classes. This served to halt or even reverse an existing increasing trend in learning outcomes for girls who had, in some cases, been outdoing boys.
    - o Class 1 girls experienced a decline in Reading (Urdu) from 28 per cent in 2019 to 16 per cent in 2021, while boys declined from 25 per cent in 2019 to 19 per cent in 2021.
    - o Class 3 girls experienced a decline in reading Urdu stories from 21 per cent in 2019 to 14 per cent, and boys from 17.5 per cent to 16 per cent.
    - o In 2015, 9 per cent of girls were able to solve division sums compared to 10 per cent of boys. This rose to 22 per cent of girls and 19 per cent of boys in 2019. In 2021, both genders experienced losses, with a greater decline for girls (to 16 per cent) than for boys (15 per cent).
    - o Arithmetic levels for both girls and boys declined between 2019 and 2021. In Class 1, 21 per cent of boys and 19 per cent of girls could recognize numbers from 100 to 200 in 2019, but this figure fell to 12 per cent for both genders in 2021. While 16 per cent of boys and 19 per cent of girls in Class 3 could do two-digit division in 2019, this dropped to 11 per cent for girls and 9 per cent for boys in 2021.
    - o In 2015, 11 per cent of girls were able to read English sentences compared to 12 per cent of boys. This rose to 25 per cent of girls and 22 per cent of boys in 2019. For girls, learning levels declined in 2021 to 23 per cent, while boys saw an improvement to 23 per cent.

- In Kenya, a significant proportion of adolescent girls reported that housework affected their learning at home.
    - o 60% of adolescents reported that household chores interfered with their ability to learn at home. This was more prominent in Wajir at 63%, with girls (74%) being particularly affected compared to boys (46%).
    - o Conversely, a larger proportion of adolescent boys reported being subjected to child labour to raise income for the family as opposed to learning. Across all sites, 10% of adolescents reported that working to raise income affected their learning. Boys were more likely to be subjected to this pressure (13%) than girls (9%).
    - o In addition, an increased number of adolescent girls undertook their Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (KCSE) in hospital after giving birth. The Ministry of Education reported that 652 girls sat for the examination in hospital, which is 131% higher than the 282 girls in 2019.

UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank – The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery [LINK]

Global Objective 1: Get 40 million more girls in primary and secondary school

- Data from Bangladesh show that one in ten girls aged 12-15 reported not going back to school once systems reopened after COVID-19 induced school closures.
- In Ghana, where national re-enrolment was high at 97 percent, 60 percent of the dropouts were girls.

Global Objective 2: Ensure 20 million more girls reading by age 10 or end of primary school

- While girls in South Africa typically outperform boys in reading, evidence indicates that learning losses for girls were 20 percent and 27 percent higher than for boys in home language and English reading, respectively, in Grade 4; and girls lost 9 words per minute in reading speed, vs. 6 words per minute for boys.
- A citizen-led assessment in 2 states in Mexico found larger learning losses for girls than boys (among low-income households, and in reading among high-incomes households).
- Existing social norms in some countries and communities may create inequalities for girls in accessing and using digital devices. For example, fathers in Nigeria reported actively discouraging their daughters but not their sons from using the internet and were less likely to assist their daughters' learning through technology during COVID-19.
- In Kenya, 74 percent of adolescent girls reported household chores distracted them from remote learning.
- In Peru, male students were less likely than female students to engage in distance learning.
- In Ethiopia and Bangladesh, adolescent boys were more likely than adolescent girls to receive help from their family with their schoolwork.

UNICEF - Are Children Really Learning? Exploring foundational skills in the midst of a learning crisis [LINK]

Global Objective 1: Get 40 million more girls in primary and secondary school

- In Malawi, the dropout rate among girls in secondary education increased by 48% (from 6.4% to 9.5% between 2020 and 2021)

Global Objective 2: Ensure 20 million more girls reading by age 10 or end of primary school; in low- and lower-middle-income countries

- Although girls are beginning to gain ground globally in terms of foundational reading skills, this progress remains tenuous given the biases that girls and women continue to face.
- Foundational learning skills are just one of multiple facets of gender equality, and do not provide the full picture. Among the barriers girls continue to encounter are higher rates of exclusion from secondary school in many contexts, gender norms and stereotypes which can impact adolescent girls' engagement in learning, and higher not-in-education-employment-training (NEET) rates and lower access to the job market, especially high value jobs in the STEM sectors.

UNICEF, Global Partnership for Education, Montrose - Sierra Leone National Early Grade Reading and Mathematics Assessment Study 2021

National data on how students in primary classes (grades 2 and 4) are doing in reading and numeracy skills. Assessment to also understand what are the school, classroom and instructional conditions that are impacting learning of the students.

Global Objective 1: Get 40 million more girls in primary and secondary school

- Boys across all grades have an average attendance rate of 53 per cent and girls 54 per cent.
- Enrolment reduces over time by grade - for every 100 students enrolled in Grade 1, only 50 remain in Grade 6 (for both boys and girls).

Global Objective 2: Ensure 20 million more girls reading by age 10 or end of primary school

- Statistically significant gender differences in performance with boys outperforming girls on nearly every subtask in EGRA and EGMA in both grades.

UNICEF - How are children progressing through school? Education Pathway Analysis [LINK]

Global Objective 1: Get 40 million more girls in primary and secondary school

Tracking education outcomes through Covid-19

- UNICEF Education Pathway Analysis dashboard tracks educational progression of adolescents of upper secondary school age (15 - 17) in 103 countries and territories.
- The dashboard uses data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, as well as Demographic and Health Surveys (i.e. household survey rather than EMIS), and other nationally representative household surveys to follow children's educational progress. The Education Pathway Analysis draws attention to inequities in education, including persistent gender inequalities.
- Although data are not yet available on how the COVID-19 pandemic has directly impacted children's educational pathways, it is possible to gain some insight by comparing the educational efficiency rate with pandemic - related data, such as school closures and access to remote learning modalities. For example, if a country already has a low education efficiency rate, particularly among girls, meaning a small share of girls compared to boys who enter primary school make it to upper secondary school at the appropriate age, and schools have faced prolonged closures due to the pandemic, girls in these countries will likely be at an even greater disadvantage compared to boys.

Global Objective 2: Ensure 20 million more girls reading by age 10 or end of primary school

- Overall, the Education Pathway Analysis finds that girls (and particularly adolescent girls) continue to be educationally disadvantaged in around 30-40 low- income countries and fragile contexts. This infographic highlights this, as well as making the connection with the gender gaps (with girls more disadvantaged) on NEET and labour market participation, which is important to tell the full story on whether education is fulfilling its promise for girls and boys.

UNICEF LACRO - Impact of COVID-19 on girls in Latin America [LINK]

- Poor infrastructure and limited hygiene services prevented schools from reopening: 39% of public schools in Brazil have access to adequate sanitation
- Covid-19 also brought longstanding school feeding programmes to a standstill across the region: 19% of rural girls and adolescents say that they won't have enough food to eat
- 64% girls surveyed in the Southern Cone region, 45% in the Andean region, 67% in the Caribbean and 40% in the Central America and Mexico reported their studies being delayed due to Covid-19

UNICEF India Country Office – Rapid Assessment of Learning During School Closures in the Context of Covid [LINK]

- Fewer younger students, girls, government school students and rural students use tech-enabled tools for learning: eight (8) per cent fewer adolescent girls used WhatsApp vs. adolescent boys. 51% of adolescent girls and 59% of adolescent boys used Whatsapp, and this difference was statistically significant.
- In another study, only 26 per cent of girls reported that they could access the household phone whenever they wanted, compared to 37 per cent of boys. (Centre for Budget and Policy Studies, Life in the Time of COVID-19, Mapping the impact of Covid-19 on the lives of school going children especially girls in India, November 2020)

UNESCO – When schools shut: Gendered impacts of COVID-19 school closures [LINK]

- Data on learning during Covid-19 and school return are still limited, yet gender disparities have emerged in available data.
- Gendered norms and expectations have also affected pupils' ability to participate in remote learning and return to school.

Global Objective 1: Get 40 million more girls in primary and secondary school

Bangladesh
- 91 percent of girls surveyed wished to return to school, compared to 86 percent of boys, with little variation between more and less vulnerable households (Baird et al., 2020).
- A Population Council study found that about one in ten girls aged 12 - 15 reported not going back to school after reopening (Amin et al., 2020).

Ghana
- In Ghana there was high re-enrolment nationally, more than 97%, but among those who dropped out, 60% were girls.

Kenya
- The Presidential Policy and Strategy Unit, Kenya and Population Council (2021) study in four counties in Kenya found that 16% of girls and 8% of boys aged 15 to 19 did not re-enrol during the two months following school reopening. The data were collected in February to March 2021; the pre-pandemic enrolment baseline was measured in March 2020.

Table 2: Reasons for not returning to school among adolescents in Kenya, girls and boys aged 10 to 19, February to March 2021

		KILIFI % (N)		KISUMU % (N)		NAIROBI % (N)		WAJIR % (N)	
		Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
REASONS FOR NOT GOING TO SCHOOL (AMONG THOSE NOT IN SCHOOL IN FEBRUARY/MARCH 2021)	% (n) of total Kenya study sample not in school	14 (72)	4 (9)	19 (57)	7 (8)	17 (74)	12 (8)	18 (75)	23 (158)
	Was not in school pre-COVID	53 (38)	67 (6)	63 (36)	50 (4)	62 (46)	75 (6)	75 (118)	79 (59)
	Family could not afford fees	69 (50)	44 (4)	35 (20)	13 (1)	54 (40)	0 (0)	17 (27)	15 (11)
	School is closed	3 (2)	11 (1)	2 (1)	0 (0)	4 (3)	0 (0)	4 (7)	8 (6)
	Did not see the importance of school	6 (4)	11 (1)	2 (1)	0 (0)	3 (2)	0 (0)	15 (24)	5 (4)
	Parents did not see the importance of school	3 (2)	0 (0)	2 (1)	0 (0)	1 (1)	0 (0)	12 (19)	3 (2)
	Got pregnant	6 (4)	N/A	11 (6)	N/A	9 (7)	N/A	4 (7)	N/A
	Got married	4 (3)	0 (0)	7 (4)	0 (0)	4 (3)	0 (0)	22 (34)	3 (2)
	Got a job	7 (5)	11 (1)	4 (2)	13 (1)	4 (3)	13 (1)	3 (5)	1 (1)

Source: GSCA research in Kenya.

- Boys were seen as being at a higher risk of dropout in some states in Mexico. Of the 25% of adolescents aged 14 - 17 in Chiapas and Yucatan who had discontinued their education, boys in Chiapas had the highest dropout rate at 37.5% (Population Council, 2020).

Ethiopia

- In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, there was little gender difference in views on return to school, but the difference was marked in more food- and income-insecure families in Gambela province where more boys intended to return to school compared to girls, but with the opposite trend in Amhara province (Malala Fund, 2020a, p. 12).

India

- Ghatak et al.'s (2020, pp. 18–19) study among poor households in three Indian states noted that 78 percent of boys and 76 percent of girls from households who did not experience food or cash shortages during the lockdown said they would go back to school after the schools reopened, but only 50 percent of boys and girls from households who faced both cash and food shortages intended to return, with greater uncertainty about returning to school among those who attended private school, likely linked to school fees.

Cambodia

- A study in Cambodia by Save the Children (Hoeurn, 2021) surveyed 7,609 learners and caregivers in districts where the risk of school dropout was considered high. Male learners had a 2.1 percent higher risk of dropout than female learners, and children in male-headed households had a 5.2 percent

higher risk of dropping out than learners returning to school fall into broad categories of financial concerns; domestic responsibilities/labour concerns; concerns about learning loss and falling behind; transitions to adulthood including marriage and pregnancy; and concerns about health and safety due to COVID-19.

Global Objective 2: Ensure 20 million more girls reading by age 10 or end of primary school

- Gender roles and expectations determined whether girls and boys were able to participate in, and benefit from, remote learning strategies. Across a wide range of countries, the GSCA found that with schools closed, girls' increased time spent at home often carried a greater burden of domestic responsibilities while boys were more likely than girls to help their families by working outside the home, for example, in a family business or by earning an income. This was particularly the case in households experiencing economic stress exacerbated by COVID-19.
- Limited access to internet-enabled devices, lack of digital skills and cultural norms placing greater restrictions and monitoring of girls' use of devices precluded girls' engagement with digital remote learning modalities in many contexts. Gaps in perceived or actual digital skills also affected teachers, in particular female teachers, and contributed to reported higher levels of stress.

Sierra Leone

- The Sierra Leone 2020 Back to School Study, an assessment of 2,000 secondary school students in Sierra Leone when schools reopened, found learning performance was better for all learners in this study than in the 2019 assessment. At the same time, school closure may have exacerbated previous inequalities. Boys performed better than girls in English and Maths, and the performance gap widened at older ages (Sierra Leone Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, 2021).

Lesotho, Malawi, Madagascar, Zambia, Zimbabwe

- In a study with 322 adolescents and young people involved with the FutureLife-Now! And School's Out programmes in Lesotho, Malawi, Madagascar, Zambia and Zimbabwe, 23% of male respondents said they were able to continue studying without problems, compared to only 12% of female participants. 28% of male respondents always had internet access to help with their studies, compared to only 15% of female participants, while 30% of female respondents had internet access rarely or not at all, compared to 21% of male respondents (MIET AFRICA, 2021, p. 57).

India

- A study conducted in India found that only 26% of girls said they could access the phone in their household whenever they wanted, compared to 37% of boys (Ghatak et al., 2020).
- Khan et al (2021) in a survey drawing on 385 secondary school students from grades 8 to 12 in Delhi, found that both girls and boys were adequately able to engage with on-line learning materials, but reported feelings of isolation from peers. Other research (Banati et al., 2021) suggested that boys could have greater access to personal phones and Internet connectivity as they are more likely to work and have access to financial resources.

UNICEF - A Survey on Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on Children and Young People and Their Needs [LINK]

Global Objective 1: Get 40 million more girls in primary and secondary school

Survey of 6,771 young people (aged ~15-19) covering 77 provinces across Thailand.

- 55% of girls report spending most of their free time during lockdown on household chores, compared to 37% of boys.
- 30% of girls report being most interested in learning about stress and depression management – if an online learning on this topic is available for children and young people during Covid-19 – compared to 19% of boys.

World Bank: Remote-learning, Time-Use, and Mental Health of Ecuadorian High-School Students during the COVID-19 Quarantine [LINK]

A rapid response phone survey of over 1,500 high school students aged 14 to 18 in Ecuador.

- Gender differences in remote learning are small, with females doing slightly more schoolwork. Female students also do more household tasks than males, while male students are more likely to be working than females.
- One clear gender difference in time usage occurs between work and household tasks – boys are more likely to engage in work, and girls in household tasks. Girls and boys are equally likely to be pursuing education in the morning, but in the late afternoon relatively more girls continue schooling as boys engage in relatively more leisure activities.
- In combination with the gender difference in time spent on household tasks, this may indicate a higher risk of fatigue resulting from home schooling for girls.
- The survey finds higher levels of depression for girls, and for indigenous students.

World Bank: TV-Based Learning in Bangladesh: Is it Reaching Students? [LINK]

- No significant differences between girls and boys in terms of awareness of TV broadcasts and whether they watched the broadcasts in the previous week.
- Although there are not significant differences in ownership of smartphone by gender, access to internet is significantly lower for female students. 19% of girls have access to internet compared to 25% of boys.

Section 2: Research and reports from thinktanks, (I)NGOs and civil society

Brookings - What do we know about the effects of COVID-19 on girls' return to school? [LINK]

Global Objective 1: Get 40 million more girls in primary and secondary school

- Recent evidence from Senegal and Ghana suggests good news when it comes to girls' reenrolment. Both countries saw low overall dropout rates (1.6% and 2% respectively) when schools reopened in November 2020 and January 2021, respectively.
- In Senegal, there was no statistical difference between the dropout rate for girls and boys.
- In Ghana, boys—especially from poor and rural households—were more likely to have dropped out than girls. Similar findings have also been observed in Ethiopia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.
- In Ghana grade repetition nearly tripled from pre-COVID levels (rising from 3.5% to 10.5%), with boys more likely to be repeating than girls.

Gender gaps more pronounced among adolescent boys and girls –

- When schools reopened after six months of closure in Uganda, 10% of grade 10 girls failed to return compared to 8% of grade 10 boys. 18% of grade 12 girls did not come back compared to 2% of grade 12 boys.
- A survey of nearly 4,000 adolescents living in urban settlements and rural counties in Kenya found that 16% of vulnerable adolescent girls compared to 8% of adolescent boys did not return to school when schools reopened in the country in January 2021.
- A study of nearly 400 of the hardest-to-reach rural adolescent girls in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda found that 34% had lost a parent or guardian to COVID-19, 70% had to pursue income-generating activities, and 86% could not afford to return to school.
- Beyond economic precarity, the study of the hardest-to-reach adolescent girls also found that 29% of girls had dropped out of school during Covid-19. More than half of these girls dropped out because they were or recently had been pregnant. And of the girls who were planning to return to school, 30% were pregnant.

Global Objective 2: Ensure 20 million more girls reading by age 10 or end of primary school

- In terms of numeracy scores, learning gains for both girls and boys in Ethiopia have slowed, with the gender gap narrowing slightly.
- An earlier study of COVID-19 in Kenya found that older adolescent girls (15-19 years) were less likely to be engaged in distance learning, less confident that they would return to school, and more likely to experience symptoms of depression than younger adolescent girls (10-14 years).
- The aforementioned study on the hardest-to-reach adolescent girls in eastern Africa indicates high levels of academic anxiety among girls concerning their learning loss, the degree of remedial learning they will need, and the likelihood of having to repeat a grade and thus be much older than their peers.
- During the first year of the pandemic, Kenya saw a 131% increase in the number of girls who completed their secondary school exams in the hospital after giving birth, rising from 282 girls in 2019 to 652 in 2020.

ActionAid Survey - The Covid-19 crisis and its impact on global education [LINK]

Survey of 130 teachers working in 82 schools in Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Rwanda, Somaliland and Zimbabwe.

- Three in five teachers surveyed say a higher drop-out rate for girls (59%) and poorer children (61%) will be a long-term impact of the pandemic.
- Nearly half are concerned about increases in early pregnancy (41%) and early marriage (45%) due to the Covid-19 crisis. Over a third (35%) are worried about rising hunger.
- Teachers say some of the biggest issues preventing girls from returning to school are parents unable to afford the cost (62%), unpaid care work (59%), child labour (53%) and early marriage (52%).
- Most schools (81%) made some provision for distance learning, but 76% of teachers said that less than half of their pupils were able to keep up with their lessons.

Husein Goohe, a headteacher at a school in Gabiley district, Somaliland, said just 13 pupils – all of them boys – returned to his school after it reopened in July, down from 119 before Covid-19. He said all 50 girls at the school were unable to return, mainly due to early marriage affecting children as young as 12. In a community dependent on agriculture hit by a devastating desert locust infestation and small business owners bankrupted by lockdown, he says: "*The parents prefer girls to stay at home and do domestic work.*" He adds that early marriage is the issue most affecting girls during the Covid-19 crisis and female genital mutilation has also increased.

Echidna Giving – April 2021 Update [LINK]

Global Objective 1: Get 40 million more girls in primary and secondary school

Research from Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, South Africa, and elsewhere shows that so far re-enrollment rates have been high for both girls and boys. In many instances, re-enrollment has even outperformed community expectations. If we zoom in on adolescent girls, the picture begins to look less promising:
- In Ghana, 9% of girls are not re-enrolling due to pregnancy.
- In Kenya, at adolescent age only 84% girls re-enrolled compared to 92% boys.
- Among very vulnerable girls in rural and low income areas of East Africa, one study found that 40% of girls that had not returned did not return because of pregnancy.
- Early results from a predictive machine learning model of dropout suggest that early marriage is an especially important driver of drop out, and finishing grade 10 and then getting married is all too common.

Young Lives – Covid-19 Phone Survey [LINK]

Global Objective 2: Ensure 20 million more girls reading by age 10 or end of primary school

- Even by the age of 22, over half (53%) of young women in Ethiopia in our sample had never used a smartphone, compared to 38% of young men. In India, the gender divide was even more pronounced with 60% of young women never having used a smartphone, compared to only 19% of young men.
- Among those most likely to have been disadvantaged by interrupted education in India, girls have been hardest hit, especially those from poor and rural households, those from disadvantaged caste groups, and those without internet access: less than 1% of female students from the poorest households had access to a home computer to continue their studies during the pandemic, compared to 11% of male students.

- In India, 67% of girls spent increased time on childcare during lockdown, compared with only 38% of boys
- In Ethiopia, 70% of girls spent more time on household work during the pandemic response, compared with only 26% of boys.

CGDev - Learning Loss and Student Dropouts during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Review of the Evidence Two Years after Schools Shut Down [LINK]

- A study among lower secondary girls (grades 7 and 8) in rural Bangladesh found learning loss of 5 to 6 percent, although students were assessed on third grade content, so that could lead to underestimates relative to measures of more recently acquired content. Learning loss was more than double among girls in the poorest 40 percent of the sample, relative to better off girls (Amin et al., 2021).
- In rural Kenya, researchers observed a tripled risk of dropout among secondary school aged girls, rising from 3.2 percent in pre-pandemic years to 9.4 percent. The risk of getting pregnant prior to completing secondary school also doubled.
- The data suggest that girls in Sub-Saharan Africa may be particularly vulnerable during school disruptions:
  - In Kenya, where children remained out of school for six months, Zulaika et al. (2022) find the risk of pregnancy doubled among adolescent girls.
  - In the regions of Nigeria where child marriage is more prevalent (the northwest of the country), adolescent girls' enrollment was much more affected than that of boys (Dessy et al., 2021).
  - In Malawi, while girls and boys did not have statistically significantly different dropout rates, the reasons were different: marriage and pregnancy were cited as the main reasons for girls to drop out, whereas boys did not re-enrol because of financial constraints (Kadzamira et al., 2021)

Girls' Education Challenge II: Kenya and Nepal [Evaluation of two GEC projects in Kenya and Nepal] **LINK**

- The report finds significant learning losses in both contexts. In Kenya 1 in 3 girls studied every day during school closures, although 1 in 4 did not study at all. In Nepal 58% girls reported studying every day, and 13% of girls reported not studying at all during closures.
- In Kenya, girls reported less time on household chores or other caring responsibilities during COVID-19, but they were more likely to have helped with the family business than before.
- In Nepal, in addition to helping out more with the family business, girls were more likely to report having to spend time on caring activities, agricultural work and fetching water during school closures than before.
- Regression analysis revealed that the only factors that were significantly associated with learning were the availability and usage of reading materials at home, including textbooks, either with the help of parents (in Kenya) or by reading from textbooks on their own (in Nepal). This suggests that traditional ways of delivering information – textbooks and through household members – might actually be the simplest pathway to remote learning. It also means that ensuring schools and children have sufficient textbooks which they can take home in a crisis (as opposed to sharing books between

students, which can be common for cost savings reasons) can help build resilience to shocks like COVID-19.

Girls' Education Challenge - Emerging Findings: The impact of COVID-19 on girls and the Girls' Education Challenge response [Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Rwanda and Uganda] **LINK**

Global Objectives 1: Get 40 million more girls in primary and secondary school

- Learners from the poorest households, the remotest areas, learners with disabilities and learners affected by conflict were the least likely to be engaged in remote learning.
- There were increases in the cases of gender-based violence (GBV) reported across the four countries. In Malawi and Uganda, the number of forced or early marriages increased and Uganda also saw an increase in the reported teenage pregnancy rates.
- In DR Congo, 14 - 20% of girls surveyed were experiencing poor mood, lack of calm and energy more than half of the time. TEAM (Malawi) found that 21% of girls reported increased anxiety since schools closed.
- COVID-19 has impacted the rate at which learners returned to school, particularly for girls. Costs related to schooling was a common reason for non-return.
- In DR Congo, there has been a reduction in the number of children returning to school, with reductions in attendance more pronounced for girls than boys.
- Teacher strikes are also a reason for nonreturn to school in Malawi, along with early marriage and pregnancy during school closures which have impacted dropout levels across the region.
- In Rwanda, headteachers and teachers believed worsening student performance, students dropping out, and teenage pregnancy would be the most common challenges when schools reopened, with girls and poor students among the groups of students that were most likely to drop out.
- GEC girls in both Malawi and DR Congo expressed anxiety about missed learning and their ability to catch up. For example, in DR Congo, 37% of girls surveyed were worried about being prepared for exams.
- Empowering Girls with Disabilities in Uganda through Education found that some parents were reluctant to invest in their girls' education due to the high risks of getting pregnant and dropping out of school.
- DR Congo: REALISE's rapid assessment of girls' wellbeing (November to December 2020) found several concerns relevant in the context of school reopening. More than half of girls were worried about food or other changes in household income due to COVID-19 (62%) and learning at home (52%). A third or more girls were worried about attending school (32%) or preparing for exams (37%).

Plan International - COVID-19 Education response: Findings from Survey in West & Central Africa [Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria] **LINK**

- In all countries, the 2020 school year has been validated so that students can move into the next grade in the new academic year.
- In contexts already dealing with existing insecurity, respondents reported that threats and attacks on communities have increased and state-run schools are regularly targeted. Fear of school attacks or insecurity on the way to schools have also prevented children, in particular girls, from attending classes.

- Stakeholders reported that students' increased exposure to violence and sexual harassment or abuse constitute serious obstacles to girls when returning to school post Covid-19.
- A rapid needs assessment carried out by Plan International Nigeria between November and December 2020 revealed that children, especially girls, were kept from returning to school by parents in order to support agricultural activities.

AMPLIFY Girls - Understanding the Barriers to Girls' School Return: Girls' Voices from the Frontline of the Covid-19 Pandemic in East Africa [LINK]

Study of pandemic-related experiences of 382 adolescent girls from rural communities in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania who were school-enrolled prior to the COVID-19 closures.

- Approximately 56% of the 108 girls who had dropped out of school were currently or recently pregnant, and approximately 30% of girls who said they were planning to return to school also reported being pregnant.
- The overwhelming majority of FGD participants cited transactional sex for basic goods (such as food, clothing, and menstrual hygiene products) as the primary cause of unintended pregnancies in their communities. Economic precarity leading to transactional sex and unintended pregnancies was the most common pathway leading to girls' dropout.
- Whereas respondents very rarely reported that their families were unsupportive of girls' education, girls frequently noted that their communities were discouraging towards pregnant girls' education.
- In Kenya and Rwanda, teachers predict a 59% higher dropout rate for girls due to economic hardships, early marriage and teen pregnancy resulting from the pandemic.
- Government authorities in both Kenya and Uganda have reported serious spikes country-wide in domestic violence, sexual violence and child abuse.
- In Rwanda the government fielded hundreds of calls per day on their GBV hotline during the lockdown.
- Although closures were shortest in Tanzania, a recent study from Haki Elimu shows that more than 80% of school children surveyed across 16 districts had experienced psychological abuse in the last year and almost 20% of girls had experienced some form of sexual violence.
- The vast majority (90%) of girls who dropped out of school during the pandemic had never experienced significant learning interruptions prior to the pandemic.