

Questions from Day 1 – Gender Equality and Education

Regarding the AFC-led project in Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Nigeria

Question: While enrollment of girls is very necessary, there is a need to reach out to parents to ensure that they are informed on the importance of girls enrolling in school and receiving a quality education. Nepal organized and prepared plans and policies to ensure that girls went to school but, unfortunately, parents are enrolling many girls in public schools while enrolling boys in private schools, where the boys tend to receive a better-quality education. As a result, girls are way behind than boys in terms of learning achievement. How are African countries, and more specifically this project, reaching out to parents to ensure that girls and boys receive similar opportunities in terms of education?

Response: Most of the projects we are studying and implementing across West Africa have a strong community engagement strategy which helps create awareness among parents and community stakeholders regarding the importance of valuing girls' and boys' education. Despite these efforts there is still tremendous resistance to investing in girls' education at the same level as boys' due to socio-cultural beliefs regarding inheritance and the fact that, in many contexts across West Africa, girls will at some point become the "property" of their husbands' families.

Question: I appreciate the approach of Accelerated Education Programs (AEP); I am just concerned about quality. How is this being addressed in this project?

Response: To maintain the quality of AEP programs, we try to provide a one-to-one book ratio and to ensure small class sizes, of usually around 25 learners per class. In addition, intensive trainings and refresher trainings, along with continuous supervision, mentoring, and coaching are also provided for facilitators of AEP classes. The community also plays an important role in selecting facilitators who are committed to helping the children of the community and reliable in devoting quality-time to their AEP classes.

Question: Girls and women dropping out of school because of forced or early marriages is a problem in Mali; this affects girls and women education and employability. How is this project addressing this problem in beneficiary countries?

Response: An excellent question... this is a problem that remains a tremendous barrier to girls and women attaining basic education in the region. Some AEP projects are providing more than just literacy, numeracy, and life skills in the content of their Accelerated Education Programming. Some projects are, in addition, empowering girls to build confidence and to resist early marriage and, in areas where social protection mechanisms are becoming more visible (e.g., Sierra Leone), making girls aware of and linking them to the

diverse means of escaping this offensive practice. Approaches aimed at empowering girls and young women, must consider setting up spaces where these girls and young women can have mentors and coaches. Breaking the cycle of early marriage in these remote and traditional communities requires a ton of coordinated efforts, including gender advocacy groups working with AEP implementors to bring together local and national stakeholders with the aim of creating child protection mechanisms, and to report on the negative impacts and consequences of the offensive practice of early marriage (e.g., UNICEF in Ghana).

Question: Many studies and plenty of research have been conducted on the issue of gender equality in Sub Saharan Africa. However, little decisive action in terms of addressing the problems has been taken. Thus, is it time for us to change our approach in getting the attention of governments? Or do we need to do more in terms of generating and sharing more compelling evidence that will make our governments react more speedily and decisively on this issue?

Response: One of the main crippling factors regarding gender equality in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) is the fact that several commitments to finance strategies and organizations focused on addressing these issues have yet to materialize. Moreover, recent cuts to aid budgets across the Global North have had a significant impact on NGO's working in the gender equality space in SSA. Yes, we must continue working with NGO's promoting gender equality, and we must keep providing them with evidence to help them strengthen their cases to the different governments and stakeholders; however, the voices of girls and women in SSA also need to have consistent support and platforms where they can speak out and be heard. Thus, more research with a strong focus into how funding cuts in Official Development Assistance (ODA) impact gender equality in SSA should be carried out.

Question: Socio-cultural and socio-economic aspects can impede or obstruct access to education and learning for girls, such as the opportunity costs perceived by parents for putting children in school. Hence, I was wondering, what are the specific outreach activities/ incentives for parents to agree to have their children go through this accelerated education program?

Response: At the start of the program, AEP implementors spend time explaining communities the reasons and benefits of Accelerated Education Programs and making the case of why they can be a viable alternative route to formal schooling. This dialogue makes parents of out-of-school children aware of AEP and allows them to understand that an AEP program is more intensive and flexible than formal schooling, often operating in the afternoons when the farming is over. For instance, the AEP programs in Ghana are designed to avoid the height of the farming seasons so that children can attend AEP classes in the afternoons and still assist their parents on the family farms and herding cattle in the mornings.

Question: In Gambia, there is a pilot of a similar accelerated education program called 'second chance education'. This pilot is about to phase out. My question is, how can the evidence derived from this KIX-funded project support a better design and implementation of similar accelerated education programs?

Response: The designs of these Accelerated Education KIX-funded Programs take deeply into consideration and address the local realities of Nigeria, Ghana, and Sierra Leone. So far, the evidence is pointing to the need of ensuring that governments in West Africa have at least a two-track AEP system in operation (i) one class to help children transition back into upper primary and then, (ii) a second class to help them transition into junior high school. Nigeria is the furthest along in certifying an AEP program, the country even has a three-track system enabling children to complete two to three years of AEPs, to then go right into senior high school (SHS) levels. The key to successful AEPs, is government commitment and sustained funding.

Regarding the CAMFED-led project in Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe

Question: While enrollment of girls is very necessary, there is a need to reach out to parents to ensure that they are informed on the importance of girls enrolling in school and receiving a quality education. Nepal organized and prepared plans and policies to ensure that girls went to school but, unfortunately, parents are enrolling many girls in public schools while enrolling boys in private schools, where the boys tend to receive a better-quality education. As a result, girls are way behind than boys in terms of learning achievement. How are African countries, and more specifically this project, reaching out to parents to ensure that girls and boys receive similar opportunities in terms of education?

Response: The CAMFED model uses two key approaches to reach out to parents. First, it is community embedded. Rather than CAMFED as an NGO organizing meetings and messaging about educating girls, we develop an ecosystem of education champions in the community. These include members of school parent groups, and local government officials who we engage with training and support. These champions become the local advocates that, through group or individual meetings, encourage parents to enroll their daughters in school. Our second approach is through generational transformation. This takes time, but over the 28 years of CAMFED, we have seen that educated young women become highly effective in reaching out to positively influence and encourage parents to educate their daughters. In time, these young women become parents and neighbors themselves and, since they believe in the power of girls' education, they send their daughters (and other girls) to school. Some of them become leaders within the education system (for example, on school boards and school committees) and within community government structures (such as village and ward level committees).

Question: Girls and women dropping out of school because of forced or early marriages is a problem in Mali; this affects girls and women education and employability. How is this project addressing this problem in beneficiary countries?

Response: The Learner Guide model directly addresses girls' drop out in many ways. Learner Guides provide motivation for girls to complete their education and become their role models since they themselves are young women who have overcome great challenges to complete their education. The program provides girls (and boys) with life skills training as well as with individualized counselling to address the specific issues pressuring them to drop out of school. Drop out is caused by many issues and, therefore, we dive

deep into the specifics to provide individual tailored support (rather than a more general one-size-fits-all approach). Because Learner Guides work locally, they understand local issues and power structures and can get to the root of the specific problems faced by a girl and her family. For example, is the distance between school and home too long to be travelled daily by the girl? Is she and/or her family experiencing illness or hunger? Is she lacking a uniform or shoes? Is her journey to school unsafe? Is she being abused? Learner Guides identify a girl's specific risk factor(s), often making home visits to understand a child's context. For these reasons, several factors are important for the effectiveness of the Learner Guide model: Learner Guides need to be placed and to work locally; they need deep training and support to understand how to mobilize local resources; and they need full and visible support from community leaders to have the confidence and recognized authority to carry out their work including linking girls to appropriate support.

Question: Many studies and plenty of research have been conducted on the issue of gender equality in Sub Saharan Africa. However, little decisive action in terms of addressing the problems has been taken. Thus, is it time for us to change our approach in getting the attention of governments? Or do we need to do more in terms of generating and sharing more compelling evidence that will make our governments react more speedily and decisively on this issue?

Response: We are encouraged by some trends of improved gender inclusivity in several countries of Sub-Saharan Africa being driven –in part– by their governments at the national level. Many have introduced fee-free schooling to reduce poverty as a barrier for girls' education. Some are developing better re-entry policies. Some are improving school infrastructure to address girls' requirements for safety and privacy. With support from the GPE, many are making strong commitments to gender inclusivity in education. However, top-down policy change does not always translate into practices and improvements that directly affect the lives of individual girls and young women. Thus, implementation of policies and change must also be driven from the bottom-up – by local grassroots action and advocacy. Therefore, building local leadership that includes educated young women is essential. These young women must be supported and encouraged to step up and use their voices and actions to lead the practical implementation of policies and to lead advocacy for relevant and practical policy change.

Question: How effective is the loan given to out-of-school girls or their parents to encourage girls' participation and retention in formal school in Tanzania? What happens if the girls and their parents are unable to repay the loan since it is not a grant?

Response: In the Learner Guide model, interest-free loans are provided to volunteer Learner Guides. This enables them to start or to grow small businesses so that they can support themselves while they carry out their periods of volunteer service. These loans are not provided to parents or students. CAMFED partners with loan providers who agree to provide flexible repayment terms in case of loan delinquency and who are not punitive in the rare cases of loan default. In addition, CAMFED links and supports the Learner Guides to obtain diverse types of available government financial support and interest free loans e.g., women and youth loans in Tanzania to start or grow businesses.

Regarding the KIX Africa 21 Hub

Question: Many studies and plenty of research have been conducted on the issue of gender equality in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, little decisive action in terms of addressing the problems has been taken. Thus, is it time for us to change our approach in getting the attention of governments? Or do we need to do more in terms of generating and sharing more compelling evidence that will make our governments react more speedily and decisively on this issue?

Response: Yes, it is time and more than necessary to revisit our approach in order to bring more attention to the issue of gender equality in Sub-Saharan Africa. This requires a focus on contextualized approaches based on proven experiences. Indeed, even if the educational challenges are sometimes the same from one country to another, the way to address them differs according to the specificities of each country. In addition, there is a need for more connection between researchers and governments to ensure that the solutions proposed by research are understood, feasible, and adaptable to social and political realities.

Question: I would like to know more about best practices being shared through the KIX Africa 21 Hub regarding gender equality and inclusion. I'm particularly interested in practices designed to decrease gender related discrimination against women facing vulnerability and/or poverty. Can you share some of these best practices and ways for the interested public to access this information?

Response: Countries' efforts to achieve gender equality and inclusion are reflected in various strategies that involve both the political and the community levels. For example, Madagascar, a country covered by the KIX Africa 21 Hub, has taken important steps including the expansion of community preschool activity centers (CAPs), the establishment of a comprehensive sex education program (Harmonized Life Education), the provision of scholarships to disadvantaged children, and the adoption of a school feeding program. These measures, which are not exhaustive, have also been adopted (in part or in full) by other countries. This demonstrates the willingness of countries to move towards inclusive education for all children. For more information on the KIX Africa 21 Hub please visit: <https://www.gpekix.org/regional-hub/kix-africa-21>

Question: In Gambia, there is a pilot of an accelerated education program called 'second chance education'; similar to the one presented today. This pilot is about to face out. My question is, how can the KIX Hubs support the exchange and dissemination of the evidence derived from this -and other- KIX-funded projects to contribute to a better design and implementation of similar accelerated education programs?

Response: The role of the KIX Hubs is precisely to support the identification and documentation of these types of initiatives in order to facilitate their dissemination and adoption by interested countries, so that they can use them to respond to their educational challenges. To do this, the KIX Africa 21 Hub has developed an approach that consists of providing exchange opportunities and frameworks to better understand the diverse projects or innovations in order to measure their potential impacts. This phase is

followed by an evaluation and documentation phase with technical teams from the ministries of education to ensure that the project/innovation is relevant to the country's educational objectives. Dissemination, which is an important step, is done through the Hub's diverse communication tools. Finally, this is reinforced with advocacy actions that promote the adoption and implementation of the project/innovation in other countries of the Hub.

Questions from Day 2 – Data Systems and Data Use in Education

Regarding the University of Oslo-led project in The Gambia, Uganda, and Togo

Question: Can you elaborate on what the capacity needs were in the Gambia and how concretely support was provided?

Response: HISP West and Central Africa supports MoBSE in their data system configuration and maintenance. The project does not rely on classical "technical assistance" but rather focuses on participatory design approaches to system configuration where MoBSE obtain system configuration capacity. In terms of the growing need for capacity both in system configuration and analytics at the sub-national level (districts) we have initiated the development of a master program in information systems, with specialization in EMIS with the University of the Gambia. This is a longitudinal process, of course, that aims to ensure long term sustainability.

Question: On empowering decentralized education governance structures – the roles, extent, and context of decentralization of education governance and oversight to "districts" varies country to country ... is there a minimum specification decentralization design and structure to justify investment at this level?

Response: It does indeed vary based on politics, available capacity, and other factors. I think what is striking is that most countries have stated decentralization goals in their education sector policies since the 90ies, but many of these ambitions have been crippled due to capacity limitations at the sub-district level. As we are moving towards richer, more granular, and more frequent production of education data, the national level will not be able to make meaningful use of most of it. The district will be close enough to the ground to translate policy into relevant data-driven interventions. A baseline would perhaps be a dedicated EMIS monitoring and evaluation officer at the district level that can work together with cross sector planners and design interventions. Better yet, it would be interesting with knowledge exchange forums of what has worked well in more decentralized setups.

Question: Is there excitement and curiosity about applying data for improving implementation or resistance to such change?

Response: Our experience is that the sub-national level has a great appetite and enthusiasm towards applying data and has started to demand more in-depth training and requested configurations that support different types of analysis from the central level.

Question: What kind of role can technical and financial partners like KIX play in addressing governments' interest, or lack of interest, in using research and releasing data?

Response: I am not entirely confident that I have understood the context of this question, in particular the part about "releasing data". In my experience governments are not very secretive about education statistics or even information about their challenges related to meeting education information needs and data flows. There are issues of data quality in many contexts, especially with denominators at sub-national level, and in that sense, there may be well founded reservations with sharing data that is clearly erroneous. When it comes to utilizing research findings, or even participation in research projects, the key limitation is the absorptive capacity. Interventions will not be sustained unless there is institutional capacity to absorb them. KIX and other international partners can play a key role in advocating for funding of key data personnel at the sub-district level. The district needs to be staffed with not only data clerks (less relevant with digital data flows), but statisticians and planners that can leverage education data for decision making and ensure that national policy and operations on the ground are aligned and realistic.

Regarding the UNICEF Office of Research Innocenti-led project in Madagascar, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Laos, Nepal, Niger, Togo, and Zambia

Question: What key strides were being made to mitigate biases in the data responses which might affect the analysis and outcomes?

Response: The first stage of the [DMS research](#) is analyzing, together with MoEs, administrative datasets - meaning we are including ALL public schools in this analysis. We are hoping that by doing so, we will have unbiased data as it includes all the schools (and not a sample).

Question: How does the DMS research factor in and control for other factors (e.g., socio-economic, public/private status of the school?) when you explore why some schools outperform others?

Response: We usually include most variables available in EMIS (water, electricity, PTRs, teachers' qualifications, etc...). When possible, we also add district fixed effects so that we control for the many other factors that are not reflected in the EMIS.

Question: In three parts: 1) Data in most of the countries is wasted since there is less research on the data, in this sense, I think everyone should look at ways to use data for many forms of analysis; 2) Positive deviance was good, but certain part of this calculation needs to be annexed in EMIS, without this, this would be a one-

time study only, and 3) The positive deviance study has been produced on the form of report, however, localization of such report in Nepali language, or in simpler term is yet to be done, and therefore, such things need to be done.

Response: You are completely right for 1), 2) and 3). For 2), I am really hoping that through the co-creation and co-implementation approach, MoE colleagues would have the know-how to program the identification of positive deviant schools in an automatic manner (very much like what the Nepal MoE did with the Equity Index) so that we could identify those exceptional schools every time new data is available. For 3), I cannot agree with you more. Our very first DMS research Nepal report was published a few weeks ago – [here](#). Let's discuss a potential translation in Nepali.

Question: How are exceptional schools being identified/defined in your contexts? In other words, is the conceptualization of exceptional for the study based solely on students' performance scores or other more qualitative factors?

Response: Because this DMS research is being co-created and co-implemented with MoEs and country stakeholders, the very definition of 'positive deviant school' changes from one country to another. In most countries, however, MoEs are interested in ensuring that children stay in schools (retention rate) and are learning foundational skills (literacy and numeracy).

Question: Looking at the list of Countries you are currently working, Liberia is not included. Are there plans to include Liberia in the next phase?

Response: We are always on the lookout to work with engaged Ministries of Education and development partners. The research is currently being implemented in 14 countries across 3 continents. We would like to complete the entire research journey in a few countries before expanding to new ones to make sure we can learn from our partnerships with other MoEs and see how we can best refine the research design to make it even more impactful. So, let's stay in touch about Liberia!

Question: Since you have worked in many countries, how do you see as to how Nepal can learn from African countries and African countries can learn from Nepal -- in terms of EMIS.

Response: This is a good question. We believe that all our participating countries have things to learn from each other. In the case of Nepal, we were very impressed with the automatization of certain indices (e.g., [Equity Index](#)) within the structure of the annual EMIS analysis. This is something that we believe other participating countries could get inspired by. Additionally, we think that some of our African participating countries are doing extremely well in collecting and compiling EMIS data even in very complex circumstances, we would love to document some of their best practices and lessons learned and share them with our partners.

Question: What kind of role can technical and financial partners like KIX play in addressing governments' interest, or lack of interest, in using research and releasing data?

Response: Overall, we think that creating demand for more research and robust evidence would eventually lead to an increase in interest. However, it is important to note that post-COVID, all the Ministries of Education participating in the [DMS Positive Deviance research](#) have been very open with their administrative datasets and are extremely motivated in co-implementing this policy-relevant research. Technical partners should continue to engage MoEs through meaningful and fair co-creation processes to ensure that the evidence created is contextualized and aligned with sector's priorities. Financial partners, like the GPE/IDRC KIX, should continue to create research funding opportunities that are large enough (in terms of amount and in terms of time) to allow researcher (and governments) the flexibility of building a policy-relevant and demand-driven research.

Question: What benefits do country partners see in cross-country collaboration on data system strengthening?

Response: Provided live by panelists during the symposium.

Question: How can you expect to use data for decision making in countries where data is lacking due to lack of research and human resources?

Response: Provided live by panelists during the symposium.