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Gender and education in Kenya

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GENDER AND EDUCATION IN KENYA

Recommendations

- Focus efforts on the places and stages where gender gaps in enrollment and completion persist, especially transitioning to secondary school and secondary school completion.

- Given Kenya's relatively high enrollment levels, shift resources to focus more on improving learning outcomes, including literacy rates, for girls in Kenya.

- Conduct evaluations of multicomponent programs that allow researchers and policymakers to better understand the effects of different components on educational outcomes.

- Conduct more research on specific gender-related barriers to education that are prevalent in Kenya and East Africa.

Kenya is home to a vast network of engaged gender and education actors who are working tirelessly to ensure all children, especially girls, thrive in their educational pursuits.

Kenya has made tremendous achievements toward gender parity in education at the national level. However, gender inequity remains a challenge in **nearly half of Kenyan counties**. By aligning policies and programs with the greatest needs and the most effective solutions, gender and education stakeholders can make evidence-based decisions and collaboratively forge a better path toward gender equity in education.

Therefore, the Population Council's Evidence for Gender and Education Resource (EGER) initiative has developed a series of briefs that synthesize data and evidence on where needs are greatest in the Kenyan gender and education space, what is being done in practice, and what works to reduce gender-related barriers to education. This final brief of our Kenya Roadmap series follows EGER's framework (pictured right) and highlights the alignment—or disconnects—between needs, evidence, and practice around five policy themes:

- improving access to education;
- improving quality of education (learning);
- improving education equity;
- improving safety and security, and reducing gender-based violence; and
- improving nurturing and mentoring.

EGER's Needs, Evidence, Practice Framework

Alignment occurs when programs focus on where needs are greatest, evidence-based approaches are utilized, and evidence exists to address the most pressing needs. When these conditions are not met, we term it as a **disconnect**. Where evidence or data is lacking or results are mixed, alignment remains **unclear.**

EGER

POPULATION COUNCIL KENYA
Ideas. Evidence. Impact.

Ministry of Education

Improving education **access** for girls in Kenya

DISCONNECT—Evidence exists on effective interventions to address access-related barriers to schooling (e.g. inability to afford tuition and fees, a lack of adequate food). However, there are still gender disparities in access to education across some of the counties in Kenya. For example, we observe important gender gaps in primary completion among 20–24-year-olds* in Kenya, resulting both from gaps in primary school enrollment and from higher dropout by girls (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and ICF 2022).

DISCONNECT—The practice data show that most gender and education programs are focusing on primary school completion despite most counties having achieved universal access to primary school. However, few gender and education programs are targeting secondary school where the net enrollment rate is only 54.1 percent (Kenya Ministry of Education 2020).

Needs
What are the current needs in girls' education?

Evidence
What works in girls' education, and where?

Practice
What are organizations currently doing to improve girls' education?

ALIGNMENT—Interventions that have been shown to be effective in improving access to school, such as reducing financial barriers, are being implemented widely in practice. Around 40 percent of access-related gender and education programs aim to reduce financial barriers in their programming.

DISCONNECT—Evidence shows that providing adequate food (in the form of school meals or take-home rations) are effective in increasing access to school. However, only 18 percent of programs aiming to improve school access provide a school feeding component. The disconnect in providing adequate food is also due to the inconsistent application of these types of programs across Kenya.

UNCLEAR—To improve access to education, most gender and education programs focus on addressing gender-related barriers such as lack of support for girls' education, inadequate life skills, and a lack of safe spaces. However, more research is needed about the effectiveness of interventions aiming to address these barriers to girls' access to schooling.

*In the 2022 KDHS, the 20–24 age range provides a comprehensive view of the educational trajectory of Kenyan youth, including primary and secondary school completion and trends in school leaving. Sampling younger age groups may underestimate school leaving and other outcomes due to their ongoing educational pursuits.

Improving education **equity** for girls in Kenya

ALIGNMENT—Both girls and boys in the poorest households in Kenya were less likely to have completed primary school than wealthier peers–but levels were lowest for poor girls. The evidence shows that interventions aiming to address the cost of schooling are effective at increasing enrollment and narrowing gender gaps in enrollment and attainment. Currently, a substantial number of gender and education programs in Kenya (32 to 45 percent) aim to address financial barriers to school.

ALIGNMENT—From 2014 to 2022, child marriage and adolescent childbearing rates have dropped across the majority of counties in Kenya. However, 10 counties still have child marriage rates of 25 percent or higher. Fifty-one percent of total gender and education programs address early marriage, adolescent childbearing, or both topics in their programming.

Needs
What are the current needs in girls' education?

Evidence
What works in girls' education, and where?

Practice
What are organizations currently doing to improve girls' education?

UNCLEAR—Over half of all gender and education programs mapped aim to address gender norms and attitudes (59 percent), child marriage (67 percent), and/or adolescent childbearing (65 percent) in their programming. However, commonly used approaches aiming to address these issues (i.e., community mobilization/engagement or gender, rights, and power education) have not yet clearly shown impact on girls' education outcomes in East Africa. This is because there are too few studies, or the results thus far have been mixed. More evidence is needed.

Improving education **quality** for girls in Kenya

DISCONNECT— According to the 2018 Monitoring Learner Achievement report, learning levels remain very low for girls in Kenya (Kenya National Examinations Council 2018). Yet, there is strong evidence globally on the effectiveness of improved pedagogy to improve learning for both boys and girls. While the East Africa literature includes more mixed results, we found evidence of programs that provide pedagogical support and materials—such as digital literacy and numeracy applications and books—are effective at improving learning outcomes for girls. The provision of these materials is most effective when provided alongside teacher training or integrated into the curriculum by teachers.

DISCONNECT—Despite rising literacy rates among poor girls in 35 counties between 2014 and 2022 (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and ICF 2014, 2022), children from the poorest households are still disadvantaged compared to those from wealthier households. However, very few programs that aim to improve learning implement a literacy component in their programs. Only 32 to 36 percent of programs that aim to improve learning implement a literacy approach outside or inside the classroom.
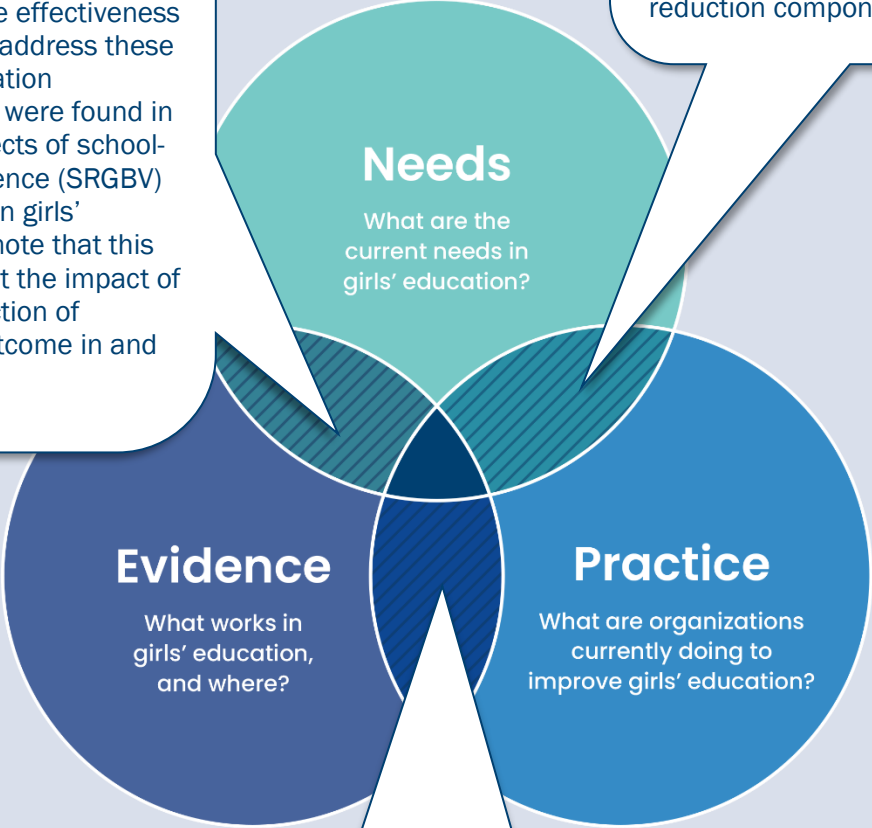
Needs
What are the current needs in girls' education?

Evidence
What works in girls' education, and where?

Practice
What are organizations currently doing to improve girls' education?

DISCONNECT—Gender and education programs identified in Kenya that aim to improve learning most often include approaches such as community engagement (62 percent), gender, rights, and power education (55 percent), and general awareness-raising (53 percent). However, very few programs implement approaches backed by evidence on what is most effective for improving quality of learning—such as teacher-focused approaches—despite substantial percentages of poor children who cannot read.

Improving education **safety and security, and reducing gender-based violence** for girls in Kenya

UNCLEAR—Data from the 2022 KDHS found that 19.5 percent of young people aged 15–19 have experienced physical violence since age 15 and 7.2 percent have ever experienced sexual violence. However, there is a substantial gap in the literature regarding the effectiveness of interventions aiming to address these issues on improving education outcomes. No evaluations were found in East Africa testing the effects of school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) prevention interventions on girls' education outcomes. We note that this assessment did not look at the impact of interventions on the reduction of violence—an important outcome in and of itself.

DISCONNECT—A significant portion of girls in Kenya experience interpersonal violence, according to 2022 KDHS data. More than half of all the programs mapped in Kenya address gender-based violence (GBV). However, among these programs, only a quarter to a third specifically include at least one violence reduction component.

Needs

What are the current needs in girls' education?

Evidence

What works in girls' education, and where?

Practice

What are organizations currently doing to improve girls' education?

UNCLEAR—Of the gender and education programs analyzed in Kenya, more than half (61 percent of total programs) address some form of GBV. Approaches such as community engagement (71 percent), general awareness-raising (60 percent), and gender, rights, and power education (69 percent) are implemented most frequently in our sample. However, given the substantial evidence gap regarding interventions to address GBV, it is unclear whether these approaches are effective at improving education outcomes.

Improving **nurturing and mentoring** for girls in Kenya

UNCLEAR—Gaps in the literature remain regarding the effectiveness of programs related to nurturing and mentoring for girls. In the East Africa literature, evaluations examining the effect of life skills education programs with a mentorship component on education outcomes provide mixed results and therefore low confidence on whether and how life skills education impacts girls' education. More research is needed.

UNCLEAR—There is limited data and information on mental health and wellbeing in Kenya, which leaves a gap in our understanding and ability to pinpoint areas for intervention.

Needs
What are the current needs in girls' education?

Evidence
What works in girls' education, and where?

Practice
What are organizations currently doing to improve girls' education?

UNCLEAR—Though more than half of gender and education programs focus on mentorship in their programming, the evidence remains unclear about whether mentorship approaches are effective at improving girls' education outcomes. This is mostly due to the multicomponent nature of these types of programs which makes it difficult to understand the direct effects of individual components.

UNCLEAR—Though 55 percent of total gender and education programs identify mentorship as a program focus area, only about a third to half of those programs implement a mentorship model of some kind, including peer mentors, school counselors, or adult mentors (teachers and non-teachers).

Recommendations for the gender and education community

1) **Focus efforts on the places and stages where gender gaps in enrollment and completion persist.**

While most counties have achieved near universal access to education, 2019 Census data show that primary school access for boys and girls remains below 40 percent in four counties (Garissa, Mandera, Turkana, and Wajir). Further data have also demonstrated that gender gaps in attainment were driven by gaps in primary school enrollment in several counties, including Garissa, Isiolo, Mandera, Samburu, and Wajir. In other counties, these gaps were driven by higher dropout rates by girls. These counties include Busia, Narok, Siaya, Tharaka-Nithi, and Turkanna. However, accessing and completing secondary school remains a challenge for girls. Only five counties reported girls' secondary completion rates of 70 percent or higher (Kiambu, Machakos, Nairobi, Nyeri, and Uasin Gishu).

2) **Shift resources to focus more on improving learning outcomes, including literacy rates for girls, given Kenya's relatively high enrollment levels.**

Prioritize foundational skills that can impact academic success and overall life outcomes. This is particularly important in places with high levels of learning poverty—such as the northeastern region, where a high proportion of girls who completed primary school cannot read a simple sentence. Effective interventions to address this need could include improved pedagogy—including structured pedagogy and teaching to the student's learning level; ongoing teacher training and support; and targeted support for struggling students.

3) **Conduct evaluations of multicomponent programs that allow researchers and policymakers to better understand the effects of individual components on educational outcomes.**

Currently, there is a gap in the East Africa literature on the effectiveness of many interventions aiming to address gender-related barriers to education. Many evaluations are not designed to test the effects of individual program components or specific combinations of components. This challenge is particularly common among studies that explore interventions aiming to address barriers such as the lack of support for girls' education, child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, lack of teaching materials and supplies, gender-insensitive school environment, and inadequate life skills. Identifying the specific components and combinations that lead to improved education outcomes can be beneficial, especially in situations where resources are limited and there is a need to attain results efficiently.

4) **Conduct more research on specific gender-related barriers to education that are prevalent in Kenya and East Africa.**

Further research is especially needed for barriers such as the lack of support for girls' education, child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, gender-insensitive school environments, mental health and wellbeing, mentorship and nurturing, and GBV. While there may be robust evidence on each of these topic areas, understanding their effects on education outcomes specifically could allow for improved program and policy design.

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