



Accountability for Gender Equality in Education

Working Paper

Sustainability, gender equality and girls' education:
Reflections from approaches to MEL (Monitoring,
Evaluation and Learning) in Girls' Education Challenge
projects in Kenya

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May 2024

This AGEE Working Paper has been published without undergoing copyediting, layout or proofreading. It is being released to share work relating to our project with wider research and practitioner communities, and to encourage discussion of methods and findings. This research was supported by ESRC funding, ES/VOO1086/1 (AGEE project follow on funding) and GCRF and Newton Consolidation Accounts funding, GNCA 6884654.

The research included in this working paper was conducted in collaboration with the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) and ActionAid International Kenya. The Accountability for Gender Equality in Education (AGEE) research team would like to acknowledge and offer special thanks to Collins Olang (ActionAid International Kenya) and Michelle Lewis Sandall (former GESI Advisor for GEC) for their thoughtful inputs, comments and feedback during the research study and on earlier versions of this paper.

We would also like to thank all the individuals and organisations involved in the research study. Thank you for sharing your experiences and insights concerning the topics discussed in this paper and for your unwavering commitment to delivering girls' education projects during some of the most challenging moments of the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya and beyond:

Adam Alibhai, Ananda Marga Relief Team (AMURT)

Emily Echessa, Save the Children UK

Rebecca Kalume, ActionAid International Kenya

Zaccheaus Kanyi, Ananda Marga Relief Team (AMURT)

Jitendra Kumar, Ananda Marga Relief Team (AMURT)

Alicia Mills, Girls' Education Challenge

Ruth Naylor, Independent Consultant

Charles Nderitu, Ananda Marga Relief Team (AMURT)

Beldine Otieno, Sauti Ya Wanawake Organization

Emma Sarton, Girls' Education Challenge

Sharon Tao, Girls' Education Challenge

As well as several other individuals and organisations that wish to remain anonymous.

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Executive summary

This working paper explores how project level data, collected as part of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) processes of girls' education projects, can contribute insights to wider initiatives concerned with building a broader data ecosystem to understand how and why gender inequalities in education manifest and change, and what processes can work to help build institutions that sustain gender equality in and through education. To do this, this paper draws on perspectives from a diverse group of individuals and organisations involved in designing and delivering four Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) projects in Kenya during the global COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis looks in-depth at how sustainability was understood and negotiated within this specific group of GEC projects, and explores some of the different ways in which sustainability and gender equality have been conceptualised and measured in practice. This working paper aims to reflect critically on how data and evidence generated at the project level can be augmented and used to promote and sustain gender equality in and through education in contexts of crisis.

Processes to promote and sustain girls' education and address gender inequalities in education are complicated and complex (Monkman et al, 2023; Unterhalter et al 2022). Progress has been frustrated by numerous overlapping issues including forms of crises, political backlash, lack of resources, and data and measurement issues, despite longstanding policy support for girls' education at global and national levels (UNESCO 2024; Unterhalter 2023a; UN Women 2022). Generating and gathering accurate data and building inclusive institutions are key aspects of trying to protect against the indifference and dehumanisation of processes that oppose or hinder progress towards gender equalities in education. But while building the evidence base in support of gender equality in and through education is a difficult task, it is not impossible. A growing community of practice comprising academics and practitioners is collaborating to make gender and education data more accurate, complete, accessible, and useful for building inclusive, equitable and sustainable institutions and to help deepen understanding about how transformative, sustainable change can happen.

This working paper contributes to this community of practice by looking at the work of two of its members: the Girls Education Challenge (GEC) and the Accountability for Gender Equality in Education (AGEE) project. The paper highlights dialogues between those working on the two initiatives in Kenya and concludes by drawing out wider issues. Through exploring evidence and knowledge of practitioners working on girls' education at the project level, this paper provides insight on how data are used and what improvements in data are needed for work on gender equality in education. It also reflects on the ways in which holistic measurement frameworks, such as the AGEE Framework, can assist thinking about how to sustain girls' education work in crisis.

The research discussed in this paper was conducted by members of the AGEE team over an eight-month period from February to September 2023. Data was collected through a review of GEC MEL documentation, dated from 2017 to 2024, as well as through workshop discussions and nine

interviews with individuals involved in four of the seven GEC projects in Kenya. The workshop was held on 19 April 2023, and was modelled on prior AGEE workshops using participatory and consultative methods. Kenya was chosen as the focus country because the GEC had seven projects operating in diverse settings across the country between April 2017 and March 2023. In 2023, the Kenyan government planned national reforms to improve education quality, equality and inclusion thus providing an appropriate setting for reflections on sustainability and gender equality in and through education.

The findings demonstrate how there were a range of ways of understanding girls' education in practice and that sustainability might be messier and more rhizomic (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) than propelled through outcomes based on cause and result interactions. The examples of sustainability shared by participants did not showcase maintaining the same exact project sustainability goals, but instead how their sustainability goals were navigated, negotiated and adapted in response to the pandemic and other emerging challenges or interests. All of the research participants involved in this study recognised that girls' education projects have some ability to influence change at different levels – on girls' lives, on social norms and on national and local education policy, and the concept of 'influence' as associated with sustainability emerged as a key theme. The associated concept of social sustainability, as opposed to financial or environmental sustainability, also emerged as a key theme. There were a number of connections and disconnections between participants' views on sustainability and gender equality in education. Overall, however, there was greater coherency in defining gender equality in education, and this led to more exploratory and innovative thinking around what additional measures would be needed to monitor girls' and women's education in the longer term. The AGEE Framework was seen to be a useful tool for thinking about that process and improving data collection as crucial for building institutional conditions for gender equality in and through education.

This paper concludes that data and evidence generated project level could contribute to wider initiatives concerned with building a broader data ecosystem to better understand and sustain gender equality in and through education. It also suggests how they might be assisted through better data collection and specifically, more reflective, holistic, and participatory approaches to data gathering using a number of complementary tools such as GESI, AGEE and various sustainability or scaling guides. Evidence and learning generated at the project level, however, often remain disconnected and underutilised in wider initiatives on gender equality in and through education. The valuable data, evidence and insights, as well as the voices and experiences of project level staff, are not always included in national and global data collection processes. The paper underscores the importance of including all stakeholders in discussions about data and draws out several recommendations and areas further research.

I. Introduction

This working paper explores how project level data, collected as part of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) processes of girls' education projects, can contribute insights to wider initiatives concerned with building a broader data ecosystem to understand how and why gender inequalities in education manifest and change, and what processes can work to help build institutions that sustain gender equality in and through education. To do this, this paper draws on perspectives from a diverse group of individuals and organisations involved in designing and delivering four Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) projects in Kenya during the global COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis looks in-depth at how sustainability was understood and negotiated within this specific group of GEC projects, and explores some of the different ways in which sustainability and gender equality have been conceptualised and measured in practice. This working paper aims to reflect critically on how data and evidence generated at the project level can be augmented and used to promote and sustain gender equality in and through education in contexts of crisis.

Despite longstanding policy support for girls' education at global and national levels, progress has been frustrated by numerous overlapping issues including forms of crises and political backlash against gender equality and women's rights (UNESCO 2024; Unterhalter 2023a; UN Women 2022). Since approximately 2010, a number of transnational movements of conservative and religious groups have restricted education on gender-based violence, sexuality and reproduction rights, and LGBTIQ+ rights in certain areas across the globe (Bergsten and Lee 2023; OHCHR 2020). The global COVID-19 pandemic and its effects heightened the visibility of gender inequalities in education, underscoring the multiple layers of precarity faced by women, girls and other groups, including poor boys, children with disabilities and children identifying as LGBTIQ+, due to a host of gendered issues related to, for example, discrimination, violence and uneven caring responsibilities (Datzberger et al. 2022; INEE 2021; Monkman et al. 2023; Pfuyne and Ademola-Popoola 2021; UNESCO 2022). A UN Women report (2022) on progress towards global gender equality found that gender disparities are worsening and estimates that it could take another 286 years to close global gender gaps in legal protections for women and girls (UN Women 2022, p.2). The political backlash against gender equality is particularly worrisome in education, according to the report (UN Women 2022), because "girls' right to education is integral to virtually every aspect of development" (p.4).

Data on gender and education has been particularly important in tracking how, despite the expansion of access to all levels of education worldwide in the last twenty years, significant gendered inequalities persist in terms of educational attainment, completion rates and subjects studied (UNESCO 2020). The reasons for this are associated with long established structures of inequality, the form of institutions, relationships and ideas, and the complex processes of maintaining delivery on human rights obligations and concerns with equality and inclusion (ibid). Some recent global commitments that prioritise girls' education and women's empowerment in and through education, including the *G7 Declaration on Girls' Education* (2021), the *Freetown Manifesto for Gender*

Transformative Leadership in Education (2022), the United Nations' *Transforming Education Summit* (UN 2022) and the *G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration* (2023), each call for collecting data and generating evidence on gender and education. Some scholars (Monkman et al, 2023; Unterhalter 2023a), however, have raised some concerns about their focus on gender parity measures that count the number of girls and boys accessing schooling, participation, and progression. These scholars argue that gender parity measures are necessary but not sufficient at considering the underlying socio-economic contexts, relationships, and processes that contribute to and maintain gender and educational inequalities (Unterhalter, 2023a, p.2). Better documenting, through accurate data, the processes that form intersecting inequalities and contribute to processes of redress is one way to deepen understanding and contribute to change.

Another feature of the institutional landscape associated with gender and education is a number of disconnected processes for data collection, analysis and incorporation into practice (Psaki et al. 2022; Unterhalter and North 2018). While several innovative initiatives, such as the *Global Platform for Gender Equality and Girls' and Women's Empowerment in and through Education*¹, launched in October 2023, are working to support and connect data processes across project, school, neighbourhood, and national education systems, challenges remain due to lack of resources and measurement issues. A particular challenge lies with the quality and availability of the data itself. A number of scholars (Longlands et al. 2024; Peppin Vaughan and Longlands 2023; Unterhalter et al. 2022) underscore how there is incomplete and missing data required to monitor and track global indicators on gender and education, which raises questions about who is collecting the data and for what purposes. The role of civil society, including through the collection of project level data, is suggested as one way to help fill missing data gaps and build more robust and accountable frameworks (Peppin Vaughan and Longlands 2023). In addition, there is a role of governments to strengthen their data collection systems and absorb data generated by civil society (UNESCO 2024). Improving the processes of gathering accurate data and building inclusive institutions are key aspects of trying to protect against the indifference and dehumanisation of processes that oppose gender equalities.

While building the evidence base in support of gender equality in and through education might be a difficult task, it is not an impossible one (Unterhalter et al. 2023). There is a growing community of practice of academics and practitioners² collaborating to make gender and education data more accessible, more useful in processes of building inclusive, equitable and sustainable institutions, and more complete to help deepen understanding of processes of change. Research investigating

¹ The Transforming Education Summit was convened in September 2023, by the United Nations Secretary-General, in response to a global crisis in education. As one of the key outcomes of the Summit, leaders and education advocates launched the Global Platform for Gender Equality and Girls' and Women's Empowerment in and through Education. See <https://www.egeresource.org/global-accountability-dashboard/>.

² The community of practice includes the AGEE project, Equal Measures 2030, GEC, UNESCO, and UN Women, among others. For more information, see recent meeting report (2024) at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388490>.

contexts, relationships, and processes that contribute to educational inequalities has led to the development of frameworks, dashboards and indices better attuned to complex processes of intersecting inequalities and unjust power dynamics (EGER 2024; Equal Measures 2022; SIGI 2023; Unterhalter et al. 2022; UN Women 2022). In-depth reviews of available gender and education data have uncovered new approaches to data collection as well as areas for future data collection and usage improvements (Peppin Vaughan and Longlands 2023; NORRAG n.d.; UNESCO, 2024). The current UNESCO (2019) *Strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019- 2025*, acknowledges how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) monitoring framework "does not go far enough" (p.10) because of its focus on parity measures that "mask continuing disparities in education by level and region as well as any progress towards addressing gender bias, norms and stereotypes that maintain gender inequalities in education" (p.6). UNESCO, alongside other members of the community of practice, are calling for better data and frameworks that look beyond gender parity to help identify gendered processes, patterns and trends in education (UNESCO 2019, p.10).

This working paper seeks to contribute to this growing community of practice by exploring some of the emerging questions concerning what data, evidence and processes are needed to promote and sustain gender equality in and through education. It draws on the work of two members of the community of practice, the Girls Education Challenge (GEC) and the Accountability for Gender Equality in Education (AGEE) project, which are briefly summarised below. In attempting to help widen understanding about data on sustainability and gender equality in education, this paper explores evidence and knowledge of practitioners working on girls' education at the project level considering what forms of data were useful for this group and what more is needed. The paper looks particularly at dialogues between those working on the two initiatives in Kenya but draws out some wider issues in its concluding section.

The Girls Education Challenge (GEC)³ was a 12-year commitment by the UK Government and considered one of the largest global funds dedicated to girls' education. It aimed to ensure "over a million girls in some of the poorest countries, including girls who have disabilities or are at risk of being left behind, receive a quality education" (GEC n.d.). The GEC was launched by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in 2012; DFID was incorporated into the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) in 2020. Between 2012 and 2024, the GEC funded 41 projects in 17 countries (ibid). In Kenya, the focus country in this paper, the GEC funded seven projects in phase II (2017-2024) (See **Appendix A** for more information about the GEC and GEC-funded projects in Kenya).

³ See <https://girlseducationchallenge.org/>.

Accountability for Gender Equality in Education (AGEE)⁴ is an innovative project that developed an indicator framework for gender equality in education through critical participatory discussions at local, national, and international levels. The AGEE Framework, launched in 2021, provides an alternative to gender parity, offering a more holistic approach for assessing gender equality in education. Gender parity, which involves counting the numbers of boys and girls, men and women enrolled, participating or achieving in education, is limited because it does not look at the relationships and conditions that underlie or are associated with gender parity or its absence. This paper is concerned with the application of the AGEE Framework at project level, specifically how project-level MEL processes can draw on the AGEE Framework for diagnostic, monitoring or evaluation work concerned with girls' education and gender equality in education (See **Appendix B** for more information about the AGEE project and AGEE Framework).

II. Research questions and structure of the working paper

This working paper asks what we can learn about sustainability and gender equality in education from a group of GEC projects and practitioners that worked directly with girls, schools, communities and governments during the global COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya. By looking closely at a group of projects, funded through a single framework, in one country setting, over a particular moment of crisis, the paper considers: *How did girls' education projects, funded by GEC in Kenya, carry on, adapt, and sustain activities during the COVID-19 pandemic and other experiences of crisis? How did MEL and data collection processes facilitate or hinder GEC projects' efforts to navigate challenges and address issues of gender inequality during the pandemic?* It also reflects on the ways in which holistic measurement frameworks, such as the AGEE Framework, can assist thinking about how to sustain girls' education work in crisis.

The remainder of this working paper is structured in six sections. The next section highlights some of the literature on sustainability and gender equality in education, which is followed by a discussion of the research methods used for reflecting on the work of the GEC and the AGEE Framework. Then, background information on Kenya's educational context and GEC project MEL from 2017 to 2023 is provided to situate the study. The findings section is organised into three broad categories highlighting the research participants' perspectives on sustainability, navigating gender equality, education and sustainability, and MEL frameworks for data and learning about sustainability, women's rights and gender equality. The paper concludes with some reflections on how project level data could contribute to wider initiatives concerned with building a broader data ecosystem addressing gender equality in and through education. It also provides several recommendations and areas for further research.

⁴ See <https://www.gendereddata.org/>.

III. Sustainability, gender equality and girls' education

There is no universally agreed upon definition of sustainability in relation to gender and education among academics, practitioners and donors (Elliot 2013; Moore et al 2017; Taylor 2014; Tikly 2020). Some education and development scholars draw on different forms of sustainability such as financial sustainability associated with long-term financing for education (Evans et al. 2021; Rose et al. 2023), environmental sustainability associated with addressing climate impacts on education (Kwauk 2020; Mathie and Wals 2022; McCowan et al. 2022), and social sustainability associated with societal perceptions and norms in and through education (Merida-Serrano et al. 2020; Zaleniene and Perira 2021). In work on sustainability, gender issues and education, Pankhurst (2022) argues how the existing literature concerning the causal links of the climate crisis and girls' education in low and lower-middle income countries (LLMICs) is limited and inconsistent, and concludes that more context-specific, quality research is required to better understand pathways and relationships localised in different situations for different groups of people (p.38).

One of the earliest and most influential definitions of 'sustainable development' is found in the Brundtland report (WCED 1987): "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (p.47). Tikly (2020) describes this definition as simultaneously vague yet significant finding that while it lacks clarity regarding what specifically needs to be sustained, its ambiguity also provides an opportunity for diverse interests to converge around a common agenda (ibid). This convergence, however, has not yet occurred and literature tracing global discourses on sustainable development since the 1970s shows how its meaning has evolved in terms of form and emphasis over time (Elliot 2013; Tikly 2020). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.7 on education for sustainable development (ESD) offers an example of this. Goal 4.7 promotes ESD in areas such as climate change, human rights, and gender equality with associated indicators tracking how education systems mainstream these concepts in national education policy, curricula, and student assessment (UN, 2015; UNESCO, 2020). In practice, however, tracking progress towards ESD remains a challenge in part because the concepts are contested and enacted differently around the world (UNESCO, n.d.). Tikly (2020) goes so far as to call ESD a 'floating signifier' because of the various ways it has been articulated and how its definition changes in association to different educational concerns (p.53-4). The analysis looking at ESD, by Tikly and others (e.g., Pedersen et al. 2022), considers issues of power and injustices in its various forms and emphasis, but it does not specifically address gender and the forms of harm associated with protections against misogyny, violence and particular discourses of derision that link with protecting women's rights and gender equality in and through education.

A number of studies on sustainability and development assistance support a view that sustainability is an outcome to be measured. Feeney et al (2022) argue that a sustainability outcome is a measure of the "net benefits, directly or indirectly attributable to an international development intervention, after external funding has ceased" (p.23), which are best understood using a realist evaluation approach

that looks at the specific contexts, mechanisms and outcomes to “identify what works, for whom, in what respects” (p.22). This conceptualisation of sustainability is much narrower than ideas deriving from the Bruntland report and limits its meaning and associated measures to what is left behind of a particular kind of intervention after aid money ceases. This view of sustainability captures some of the elements common in definitions by foreign aid agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development and United Kingdom Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) (ibid). This view also extends to the FCDO-funded GEC projects, under review in this paper, where sustainability was understood as one of four key project outcomes. The GEC’s definition of sustainability and how it reported on sustainability outcomes to FCDO are further detailed in a later section of this paper.

Some interpretations of the sustainability of development interventions do not limit this to the focus of the intervention associating sustainability with more complex and context-specific processes. Taylor (2014) argues that sustainability should be understood pluralistically, incorporating environmental, economic, and social concerns, and occurs when an intervention has “altered the systems that underpin poverty” in an adaptive and permanent way (p.1182). In policy and practice, the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Network (2019, 2021) identifies sustainability as one of six core evaluation criteria for development aid interventions. The DAC guidance, which was updated in 2021, defines sustainability as “the extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue or are likely to continue” (OECD 2021, p.11) but adds that ‘benefits’ should be “understood as financial, economic, social and environmental and attention should be paid to the interaction between them” (ibid, p.11). In these interpretations, sustainability is understood as an outcome to be measured but they also recognise that measurement may be associated with more complex and interacting processes.

Emerging research on intervention scaling, a term often used interchangeably with sustainability, draws out the importance of context-specific analysis finding that it is “not enough to simply identify effective education initiatives and expand them to more people...[scaling] is a complex process that requires different expertise, local knowledge, and different partnerships within education systems (Curtiss Wyss et al 2023, p.1). While the emerging literature on scaling provides more nuanced views around how sustainability can be achieved through interventions, most of the literature looking at sustainability as an outcome is gender neutral, meaning it does not explicitly address gender in its analysis of sustainable outcomes. One recent exception is the Research on Scaling the Impact of Innovation in Education (ROSIE) Network which distinguishes between research for scaling and research about scaling process and recommends more research is needed on gender and equity-based scaling processes (Olsen et al 2022, p. 39-43).

A body of feminist writers have addressed how to mainstream gender into institutions and thus sustain concerns with gender equality, social justice and human rights. In looking at these issues in

education, Unterhalter and North (2017) draw out sustainability as a process, which involves attending to intersectionality and undoing hierarchies. Resurrección (2016) traces the emergence of feminist political ecology since the 1990s, which recognises women's agency, and an alternative possibility of women's engagement with sustainable development without essentialised roles. Leach et al (2016) argue that sustainability and gender equality must be addressed together, and that processes of unsustainable development and gender inequality are often inherently linked and mutually reinforcing. In contrast, pathways to sustainability and gender equality can often support each other (ibid). Foregrounding the question, 'sustainability for what, and for whom?', Leach et al (2016) suggest a 'gendered pathway approach' which provides a framework for analysing current trajectories and imagining alternative futures. Lagi et al (2023) explore the interconnections between climate change, gender equality and education, scrutinising the extent to which Fiji's policies acknowledge traditional knowledges, and arguing for an alternative policy framing based around connection, inclusion and regeneration. In trying to map how theories of connection may bring together different ways of thinking about gender and education, Unterhalter (2023b) argues that processes are needed to articulate ideas about values and what matters, including sustainability, with insights about what works for whom and for what reasons.

In this paper, through an analysis of how sustainability was understood and negotiated in a specific group of girls' education projects, we look at some different ways in which sustainability and gender equality have been conceptualised in practice and reflect on the ways in which these ideas can help co-create insights on data and sustainability in a broader data ecosystem. Our specific focus is the MEL frameworks that one group of GEC projects used, and the ways in which these are or are not able to consider some of the wider issues about protecting and sustaining processes linked to gender equality in and through education in Kenya. In the next section we outline the research methods used for investigating perspectives on sustainability and gender equality with individuals and organisations involved in a number of GEC projects in Kenya.

IV. Research methods, ethics and limitations

The research discussed in this paper took place over an eight-month period from February to September 2023. The research was conducted by members of the AGEE research team in collaboration with members of the GEC Fund Manager (FM)⁵ team. Later phases involved research activities with UK-based and Kenya-based individuals and organisations involved in designing and

⁵ The GEC FM is the global team tasked with awarding projects with GEC funds, overseeing the global portfolio of all GEC-funded projects and reporting progress and results to the donor, first to DIFD and later to FCDO. The FM also provided technical and expert assistance to GEC projects and developed the global log frame, MEL guidance and tools and reporting templates used by GEC projects, including the projects based in Kenya.

delivering four GEC phase II projects in Kenya, between April 2017 and March 2023 (See **Appendix C** for a timeline of research activities).

The research topic was developed over several months (February to March 2023) through discussions between members of the AGEE research team and GEC FM team. Since most GEC projects were closing out by the end of March 2023, members of the GEC FM team expressed a specific interest in exploring issues of sustainability, including if and how some of the individuals and organisations involved in GEC projects will continue to support girls' education work after the projects cease operation. In addition, there was interest in further exploring the GEC MEL approaches in relation to the AGEE Framework, and how this might generate insights on data and sustainability in a broader data ecosystem addressing gender inequalities in education.

Kenya was selected as the focus country because the GEC had seven projects operating in Kenya during phase II (See **Appendix A** for a list of GEC phase II projects in Kenya). In addition, the Government of the Republic of Kenya remains committed to education and planned national reforms, in 2023, to improve education quality, equality and inclusion (PWPER 2023), thus providing an appropriate setting for reflections on sustainability of gender equality in and through education. It was decided that one of the GEC partners in Kenya would collaborate in organising data collection and ActionAid International Kenya was identified as a Kenya-based partner to help support research activities.

Data was collected through multiples stages including:

- A review of GEC phase II documentation, dated from 2017 to 2024, including internal and publicly available documents such as project tracking and progress reports, annual reports, MEL frameworks, and other relevant project MEL guidance and tools;
- A three-hour online workshop, held on 19 April 2023, with ten Kenya-based GEC project staff members involved in four of the seven GEC phase II projects in Kenya; and
- Ten individual interviews, conducted between July and September 2023, with Kenya-based and UK-based individuals involved in designing and delivering GEC projects.

The online workshop was modelled on prior AGEE workshops using participatory and consultative methods and drew on the AGEE Framework to think about project level reporting and MEL of the GEC projects involved (For details of the AGEE Framework see **Appendix B** and for summary of April workshop see **Appendix D**). Interview participants were asked in-depth questions about their personal experiences working on GEC projects during the global COVID-19 pandemic with a particular focus on how they understood, measured, and reported on sustainability and related activities (See **Appendix E** for semi-structured interview guide). The AGEE research team relied on snowball sampling to identify the relevant participants to interview. Four members of the AGEE

research team, based in London, took part in discussions and activities at different times during the research process.

Ethical issues were considered and ethics approval for this research was obtained through the Institute of Education, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society.⁶ Participants received information sheets and consent forms for their involvement in the research. The information sheet made clear that participation in this research was voluntary. The consent form offered a voluntary consent option, meaning that participants could opt to have their name and organisation cited in this paper or to remain anonymous. Interviews were conducted online via Zoom to allow for flexibility around work schedules and time zones.

There are several limitations to the scope of the study. This research looks only at GEC phase II projects in Kenya from 2017 to 2023. All seven of the GEC phase II projects in Kenya are not represented in this research. The perspectives and experiences shared in this paper are specific to the participants involved in the study and should not be generalised to all GEC projects in Kenya nor to the wider GEC global portfolio of projects. While members of the GEC FM team did not participate in the online workshop or in interviews, their earlier involvement in this research could have created some power imbalances because the FM was the oversight body of all GEC projects involved. To mitigate these potential imbalances, the AGEE research team reiterated to participants how this research was not an evaluation of GEC projects, that the AGEE research team was not reporting to the GEC FM, and that the research activities were being conducted independently from the GEC FM. All internal documents reviewed by the AGEE research team were provided directly by members of the GEC FM team, which introduced some potential bias. For this reason, internal GEC documents were discussed with research participants during the online workshop and in interviews without any member of the GEC FM team in attendance. This paper looks only at the GEC MEL approaches and tools that were discussed by the research participants during research activities. Other GEC MEL documents or tools are considered outside the scope of this study.

V. Contextualising the perspectives of GEC projects in Kenya

Before presenting the perspectives shared by research participants involved in the four GEC Kenya projects involved in this study, some of the context framing their reflections are needed. This section situates the study by providing some background information on Kenya's educational context and GEC phase II project MEL with a particular focus on GEC MEL guidance during the global COVID-19 pandemic. This section also provides information on the individuals and organisations involved in this study.

⁶ Full ethical approval for REC1845: AGEE (Accountability for Gender Equality in Education) research on projects received on 2 August 2023; data protection registration number: Z6364106/2023/07/136.

A. Kenya's educational context during the GEC phase II projects

The GEC phase II (2017-2023) projects involved in this study operated through more favourable and challenging periods for girls' education in Kenya. In the past two decades, the National Government of the Republic of Kenya has been committed to improving education. Kenya's Vision 2030 (2008) highlights education as a key sector for transforming Kenya into an industrialised, middle-income country. Kenya abolished all fees in state primary schools in 2003, and in state secondary schools in 2008, which increased access to education but also resulted in challenges related to resource allocation and maintaining educational quality (iiG 2009; Ohba 2011). In 2007, Kenya's Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) adopted the Education and Training Sector Gender Policy, updated in 2015, to ensure a human rights approach and equal access to education for boy and girls and men and women in the country (MoEST 2015, p.1). In 2018 and 2019, the MoEST also implemented competency-based education (CBE) curricula reform at the basic education level.

While the country has seen a significant rise in national literacy and school enrolment rates of girls and boys at all education levels, a World Bank report (2022) found regional and gendered inequalities, noting how girls in regions with lower school performance are dropping out of school earlier than boys due to issues of poverty, insecure learning environments and increased exposure to violence. Nationally, girls outperform boys in all subjects in third grade but in higher grades, boys outperform girls in mathematics and science, a trend that continues to grow as students' progress through the system (ibid). There are also linkages between low educational outcomes and poverty. For example, the national Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS), a measure that combines access and learning, is 8.4 years in Kenya, the highest LAYS in all of Africa, but in some of the poorest regions of Kenya, the LAYS is as low as 4.54 years (ibid).

In 2022, President William Samoei Ruto appointed a Presidential Working Party on Education Reform (PWPER) to gather new evidence and issue recommendations on how to improve the education sector in Kenya. The PWPER report, published in June 2023, recognises how some of the national educational achievements mask regional inequalities with very low outcomes concentrated in a few counties. The PWPER report (2023) recommends that Kenya could do more to ensure that all children and young people, including girls and young women, are achieving at or above the national averages, aligned with the PWPER's vision of an education system that ensures "no one is left behind" (ibid, p.85). The report includes an entire chapter dedicated to addressing equitable access and inclusion in education with specific recommendations, from updating guidance for accelerated education programs to better include 'marginalised groups' to expanding the EMIS system to capture information on out-of-school children and youth (ibid).

The PWPER was launched in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in the wake of its unequal effects on gender and education across the country. In Kenya, the COVID-19-related school closures were among the longest in Africa with most schools and learning centres fully or partially closed anywhere

from nine months to over a year (Maluccio et al. 2023). A national phone survey found that 50% of students across the country were not able to engage in remote learning opportunities due to lack of access to internet connectivity, and the infrastructure and devices required (HRW 2023, p.25). During the pandemic, the dropout rate among secondary school aged girls rose by 6.2% (from 3.2 to 9.4%), and their risk of pregnancy doubled (World Bank 2022). A study by Population Council (2022), conducted in the four areas of Kilifi, Nairobi, Wajir, and Kisumu found one-third of girls ages 15 to 19 did not re-enrol in school once it reopened after COVID-19, with economic constraint as the most frequently cited reason, followed by pregnancy or having a baby. The study found that the school closure period increased girls' domestic workloads and childcare responsibilities, as well as created situations of economic hardship and physical and emotional insecurity for adolescent girls in the four areas (Population Council Kenya 2023). Nationally, the number of reported cases of gender-based violence and female genital mutilation also increased during the height of the pandemic (Bhalla 2020).

These elements of context highlight how at the time of this study, in 2023, Kenya was an appropriate setting in which to discuss sustaining work on gender and girls' education given the supportive government policy environment, the presence of large donors (FCDO, World Bank) interested in the issue and long-established NGOs with a track and considerable experience of working on gender and girls' education projects. The GEC Kenya projects were operating before and during the height of the pandemic in Kenya, providing an interesting setting to explore how each project navigated crisis and change. The next section outlines how the GEC FM responded to the pandemic and the effects this had on its MEL approaches and reporting to FCDO.

B. GEC MEL approaches and guidance in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic

Since its beginning, in 2012, the GEC maintained a rigorous approach to MEL, and the work of all the GEC projects in Kenya were linked to this aim. The GEC set out to generate a "comprehensive resource" to enhance the delivery of girls' education projects and influence future policy and practice (GEC n.d.). This intention was highlighted in the GEC MEL documentation, which provided data collection tools and reporting guidance, periodically updated, to project teams. Evaluations were to be conducted by an external evaluator (GEC 2017). Additionally, the GEC has actively and publicly shared knowledge and learnings through webinar series, conference presentations, interviews, learning briefs and other written reports (GEC n.d.).

The GEC FM developed a GEC log frame, which was updated in 2021 and 2022, partly in response to COVID-19 and partly due to other key learnings over the course of the projects (GEC 2022b). This refresh removed project payments tied to results and aimed to improve the consistency and continuity of reporting across all GEC projects worldwide (ibid). The GEC projects in Kenya varied in terms of their specific aims, target populations, and locations (see **Appendix A**), however, all GEC projects

reported to the FM, on a quarterly and annual basis, on four key outcomes:

1. **Participation:** GEC girls are able to participate in formal or non-formal education (especially during school closures)
2. **Learning:** GEC girls are able to demonstrate improvements in learning assessments
3. **Transition:** GEC girls are able to transition into and progress through formal and non-formal learning opportunities, transition into skills or vocational training, transition into work
4. **Sustainability:** GEC projects establish a foundation for longer term viability of outcomes for girls (GEC 2022b).

While each GEC project reported against the four core outcomes, there was some flexibility in the selection of measurement tools and indicators. For example, GEC projects were allowed to use different literacy or numeracy assessment tools to track progress towards outcome 2 (learning). The aim of the four outcomes was not to mandate specific assessment tools but to offer some data points of comparison between projects, so that the FM could track progress and consolidate results for FCDO across its global portfolio of projects.

For outcome 4 on sustainability, each GEC project was required to establish a sustainability plan, and track and report their progress towards sustainability objectives each year. The aim of annual reporting was to encourage each project to consider sustainability throughout its lifecycle rather than as an “afterthought, or [a project measure that] only comes into sharp focus towards the latter half of a project cycle” (GEC 2023a, p.2). According to the GEC FM, sustainability was described as “paramount, so that girls continue to flourish well beyond the life of a GEC project” (ibid, p.1).

When the GEC log frame was refreshed in 2022, “particular emphasis was given to the sustainability outcome as that had previously lacked clarity and specific targets” (GEC 2022c, p.2). In the initial GEC phase II guidance (2017), a sustainability outcome was understood as when a “project can demonstrate that the changes it has brought about which increase learning and transition through education cycles are sustainable” (p.46). The guidance noted that it is “not an exact science” (ibid, p.46) but that “underlying changes in gender power relations and gender norms and stereotypes can be particularly powerful in sustaining project successes beyond the project phase. Gender equity is therefore considered a key part of any sustainability plan” (ibid, p.49).

In 2022, during the global COVID-19 pandemic and in recognition that many GEC projects may need to update their sustainability plans to address the new realities, this definition of sustainability was expanded as follows:

“Sustainability in the GEC is about delivering and enabling long lasting girls’ empowerment through education, for current and future generations, by working with girls, families,

communities, schools and systems. For each project, sustainable change and impact are embedded in the Theory of Change. Sustainability can be built at the individual girl level, and also within her enabling environment for change, including at community, family, school and system level” (GEC 2022c, p.2)

The new definition recognised that “sustainability does not simply mean a continuation of activities, or necessarily a scaling up of whole projects” (ibid, p. 1) and required GEC projects to generate wider evidence to demonstrate the positive impacts of strategic priorities and long-lasting benefits of change at different levels (*e.g.*, girls, families, communities, schools and systems) (ibid). Sustainability was described as deepening the impact and reach of the project with hope for a “multiplier effect that benefits future generations of girls” in the schools, communities, and countries with GEC projects (GEC 2023a, p. 2). The new definition also recognised different arenas for sustainability outcomes, such as through families and communities, that moved beyond a focus on sustainable learning, transitions and gender equity in the prior definition.

The notion of sustainability as a key outcome of GEC projects aligned with DFID (2018) and later FCDO (2021, 2023) policy on education and gender equality, through a common thread linking girls’ education to wider outcomes for girls and young women in areas such as reproductive health, women’s rights, the elimination of violence against women and women’s economic empowerment. The GEC was highlighted as part of “unprecedented investments...in gender equality that have achieved results at scale” (DFID, 2018, p.6) and thus, the GEC portfolio, through input from each GEC project, needed to demonstrate how it contributed to those wider returns on investment for girls and women, including through the COVID-19 context.

C. Background information on GEC participants and organisations involved in this study

The participants in the study represent a mix of professional backgrounds, including three UK-based individuals that served as global education or gender advisors to support the design and development of GEC projects and twelve Kenya-based individuals that served as project managers, MEL specialists or delivery specialists on one of the four GEC projects involved in the study. The sample of six organisations is a mix of international non-governmental organisations, local non-governmental organisations, and for-profit social enterprises with expertise in the areas of health, community development, human rights, women’s rights, technology, and education. Each GEC Kenya project was delivered through a consortium of partners including a lead partner and ‘downstream partners’ that were contracted by the lead partner to support specific project activities. The six organisations involved in this study include four lead partners and two downstream partners.

The difficulties and challenges of the pandemic were acutely felt by the GEC projects involved in this research. In Kenya, most of the projects were operating in schools or learning centres that were

closed by the Kenya Government. The social distancing measures made it difficult to gather groups or teams together for activities. The Government also restricted travel, which limited GEC staff members' abilities to visit project sites or interact with project stakeholders, including the girls involved in the projects. While some of the GEC projects involved in this study briefly paused their activities at the start of the school closure period, all four GEC projects remained active during the pandemic. Some of the ways they did this are further explored in the next sections of this paper.

VI. Perspectives on sustainability, gender equality and MEL frameworks at the project level

The COVID-19 pandemic required many GEC projects to rethink their sustainability plans, including what could be achieved and how to report on sustainability during a period of crisis. In analysing the data generated through the document review and discussions conducted for this study, a range of meanings and ideas about sustainability emerged. In the section above, we show how ideas about sustainability formulated by the GEC FM were concerned with 'deepening impact' and establishing 'multiplier effects'. The GEC FM considered sustainability as an outcome, closely bounded by the intervention, using the intervention to 'cause' further effects. Among the research participants involved in this study, however, conceptualising the intervention in these terms was by no means given. Discussions highlighted how there were a range of ways of understanding girls' education in practice and that sustainability might be messier and more rhizomic, connecting in ways that are "acentered, non-hierarchical, non signifying" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 21), than propelled through outcomes based on cause and result interactions.

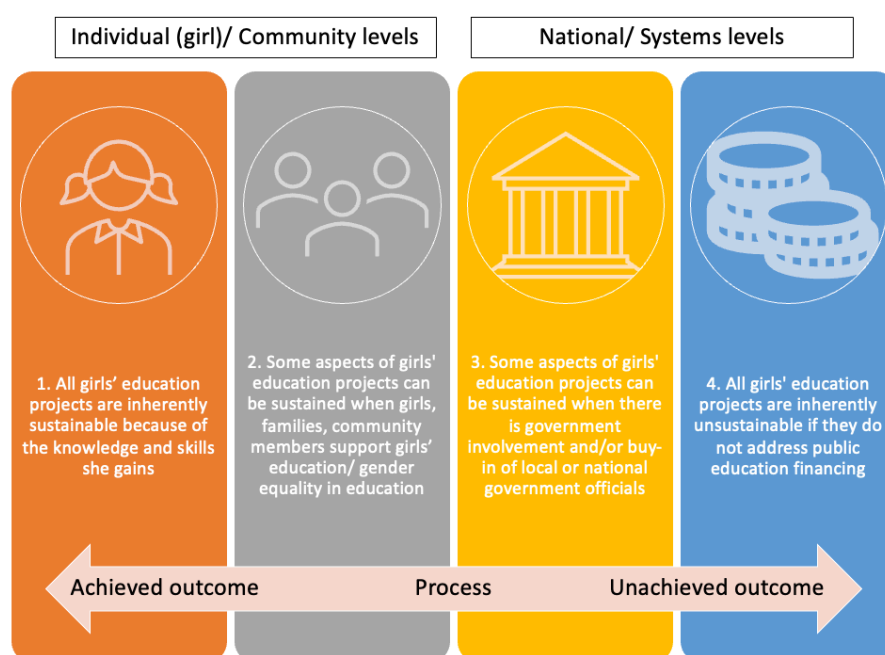
This section presents the findings of this research organised in three broad categories related to participants' perspectives on sustainability, navigating gender equality, education and sustainability, and MEL frameworks for data and learning about sustainability, women's rights and gender equality. The perspectives presented in this paper represent the views of the research participants involved in this study.

A. Perspectives on sustainability

Participants gave mixed responses when asked about their views on sustainability in girls' education at the project level. **Figure 1** demonstrates the ways in which participants formulated their understandings. Views range from arenas of confidence regarding individual girls gaining in knowledge and skill to zones of uncertainty, where the capacity of government to continue to finance girls' education and gender equality projects is unstable. In the middle are mixed views on how communities and government can support girls' education because of enhanced understanding and some changed actions. It is noticeable that the space of sustaining the project has considerable bearing on how sustainability is understood. Some research participants were most confident that

their work with individual girls would be sustained over their lifetime, and others had more mixed views on how or whether community or government support had been built in ways that were long lasting. Some participants were doubtful about long term financing at the project level where the resources of government were tied in with national and international processes for financing and resource mobilisation. It is important to note that the views were not mutually exclusive, meaning some participants took multiple views on sustainability finding it more or less achievable in certain spaces.

Figure 1: Mixed views on sustainability



The outermost views in **Figure 1**, with one seeing girls' education projects as inherently sustaining learning for individual girls, and one seeing their effects as unstable and unknown because of the uncertainties of public finance to support girls' education, both conceptualise sustainability with a particular kind of outcome, something that is achieved (knowledge and skills for individual girls) or not achieved (long-term funding for gender equality in education at the national/systems levels). The views depicting sustainability as an outcome were most clearly expressed by UK-based participants involved in this study. Participants with views distilling confidence in how the knowledge and skills of individual girls would be sustained argued that any time a girl is educated, the information and skills she gains remain with her and can lead to improvements in her health, relationships, opportunities and choices over the course of her life. They also spoke about generational benefits, how girls educated through the projects are more likely to continue on in education as well as support

education opportunities for their children, relatives and others in their wider community. All of these benefits are sustainability outcomes achieved in this view, lasting long after a project closes.

Views of uncertainty regarding the sustainability of project level work was most explicitly stated by a participant looking at the GEC work from the UK. This participant argued that all girls' education projects are unsustainable because time-bound injections of foreign aid funds will have little to no effect on education systems in the long-term without "progressive and transformative public financing". This participant spoke about the global COVID-19 pandemic as provided evidence of the effects of limited resources; "When education is underfunded, girls are more likely to be excluded from education". Other participants spoke about unachieved sustainability outcomes at national and systems level due to limited resourcing, including staff time and funds, to dedicate to government relations and advocacy. Some participants also spoke about limited interest by governments in their work. This is not to say that the GEC participants involved in this study were unsuccessful at working with governments. On the contrary, participants provided several examples of working with governments and communities to achieve progress towards sustainability goals in Kenya. These participants, however, did not conceptualise sustainability in terms of outcomes that are achieved or not. This led to more mixed views on what is sustainable, situating them within the inner views of **Figure 1**.

The more mixed views looking at sustainability as located in communities and governments were most clearly expressed by Kenya-based participants. This could be because the Kenya-based participants were more involved in the day-to-day operations of GEC projects working directly with different stakeholders to think about sustainability and how to address it. In this view, participants underscored how project level activities can be both sustainable and unsustainable for individuals and communities. For example, one participant shared how a GEC project expanded local women's networks to provide a range of services from tutoring to jobs and entrepreneurship training for women and girls. The participant described these activities as sustainable because they are carrying on after the GEC project closed, but also shared how some networks are more active than others, and how some remain informally supported by GEC project staff. Another participant shared how identifying 'community champions' to carry on aspects of the GEC project after it closed was part of their sustainability plan, but this process proved to be highly personal, time intensive and did not work in all locations; "some locations just don't have a [local] champion to identify", which caused the project team to renegotiate and think about other ways to be sustainable in those locations.

For those who commented on government policy they noted how sustaining girls' education is linked to influencing education policy and scaling impact at national or systems levels. In this view, participants associated sustainability with their project's ability to influence change in national or local education policy and by successfully integrating aspects of the GEC project within the wider education systems in partnership with government. For example, one participant shared that GEC project staff

participated in national consultations on accelerated learning guidance, which resulted in the national guidance featuring GEC-developed protocols and measures for safely reopening schools and other sites of learning. The participant explained that the GEC project successfully influenced national policy, but it was in areas of health and safety rather than through the lens of girls' education and gender equality. This participant described this result as "sustainable in some ways but not sustainable in others" and distinguished between what they hoped to achieve and what was possible in the context of COVID-19. In this view, sustainability was not a clear outcome to be achieved or not, but rather it was described as a more rhizomic process of negotiation and navigation within a given context.

The concept of 'influence' as associated with sustainability emerged as a key theme in this study.

Table 1 provides some examples of sustainability as shared by participants involved in GEC projects in Kenya. As demonstrated through the examples, participants did not showcase maintaining the exact same project activities or achieving clearly defined sustainability outcomes. Instead, they associated sustainability with their project's ability to influence change across the different levels, including influencing conditions of girls' lives, shifting community perceptions and norms, and integrating aspects of the GEC project in national and local policy or systems. All research participants involved in this study, UK- and Kenya-based, recognised that girls' education projects can have some ability to exert some influence at local and national levels.

Another theme that emerged through workshop discussions and interviews with participants was the concept of social sustainability. When asked about sustainability within their GEC project, all but one Kenya-based participant highlighted examples associated with social aspects rather than environmental or financial aspects of sustainability. A few participants mentioned how they resourced materials, such as solar powered radios, to reduce the project's carbon footprint and another participant noted how the GEC project considered 'value for money' before purchasing goods or services. Social sustainability, however, was the main focus of these discussions and there was limited reflection on financial sustainability or protections against climate crisis or violence. A strong focus on social sustainability could be due to the GEC FM's conceptualisation of sustainability, understood as deepening impact and outcomes for girls, which may have swayed GEC projects to attend to social elements of sustainability for reporting purposes.

The examples at **Table 1** further demonstrate that progress towards sustainability was not achieved through rigid pathways and goal setting but required continuous review and adaption to changing situations and confronting new challenges and realities as they emerged. One participant shared how in their initial sustainability plan, developed at the start of the project, the team identified five relevant national policies for which they wanted to work with the government and promote girls' education and gender equality in education. However, all government priorities changed during COVID-19, and the GEC project ended up working with the national government on new policy, and not one of the ones it

originally identified. In this participant's view, the GEC project addressed sustainability (i.e., influenced national policy) but the process looked much different than the team had anticipated. The GEC project had to update and amend its sustainability plan to remain relevant to national and local government priorities. Other participants noted the need to be flexible and adapt to changing government interests and needs, which was highly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It can be seen that understanding the girls' education projects as an intervention linked with a sustainability outcome (achieved or unachieved) tended to be expressed most firmly by the GEC FM and participants located at the global level, while seeing girls' education projects as more rhizomic helping to build 'influence' was more commonly expressed by those engaged with day-to-day delivery. For the Kenya-based participants, project sustainability seemed to align most closely with interpretations associated with complex and context-specific processes (Taylor 2014), looking at the interactions between different sustainable benefits be they financial, economic, social or environmental (OECD 2021). This raises questions around what these perspectives may mean for sustainability measurement and reporting. The ways in which GEC participant views were formed was probably closely linked with their familiarity with a MEL tool developed by GEC, which is discussed in more detail below.

Table 1: Examples of sustainability activities as shared by participants involved in GEC project in Kenya during COVID-19⁷

Areas of influence	Examples of sustainability as shared by GEC staff	Part of initial sustainability plan?	Adaptations due to COVID-19	Stakeholders involved as shared by GEC staff	Challenges to sustainability
Individual girls' conditions and skills for learning, gender equality	<p>A GEC project set up 'safe spaces' including girls' clubs and study group to provide GEC learners with additional opportunities to learn numeracy, literacy and other relevant skills</p> <p>In some locations, these spaces remain active after the GEC project closed (organised by GEC learners and community members, without any GEC funds)</p>	Yes, but the form of these spaces changed due to COVID-19	<p>Safe spaces shifted from in-person meetings to digital platforms such as WhatsApp and telephone calls when and where possible</p> <p>Some offered opportunities for learners to safely gather outside and socially distanced in small groups</p>	GEC learners, parents, teachers, local women's networks, schools, local 'champions' as identified by GEC staff to carry on activities after the project closed	<p>Limited access to internet connectivity and technology devices in certain rural areas</p> <p>Parent and teacher attitudes around online and distance learning</p> <p>Girls' increased unpaid care and domestic responsibilities leading to less time to engage in clubs/ groups</p> <p>Local 'champions' could not be identified in each location of the project</p>
	<p>A GEC project conducted wellness check-ins and provided psychosocial and health services to the GEC learners during covid lockdown measures</p> <p>This activity addressed some of the immediate needs of the girls to support their health and encourage their continuation on the project during the pandemic. This activity successfully contributed to a high retention rate of GEC learners in the project during COVID-19</p>	Yes, but these activities became a central aspect of the project during COVID-19. Initially, these activities were seen as peripheral support only for girls that needed it. They shifted from 'peripheral' to 'central' activities for all GEC learners	<p>Negotiations with national and local governments to allow health workers affiliated with the GEC project to physically visit learners' homes and conduct wellness and health assessments</p> <p>Once approval was obtained, health workers also brought learning materials and books to learners' homes, and graded assignments</p>	GEC learners, parents families, community health workers, local government, national government	<p>Changing government priorities and different policies concerning social distancing and lockdown measures</p> <p>Parent and community attitudes towards girls learning, wellness and psychosocial support</p> <p>Tensions created between GEC learners and community members (not involved in the project) unhappy that they did not receive access to these services</p> <p>Unequal access to health services in different locations of the project</p>

⁷ The information provided in this table was collected during participant interviews.

Community perceptions and norms about gender equality in education	<p>A GEC project conducted a community awareness campaign about COVID-19 including how to stay safe and mitigate the spread of the virus</p> <p>This activity addressed some of the immediate needs of the girls and their communities to support their health, encourage their continuation on the project during the pandemic and support the reopening of schools and other sites of learning. This activity led to increased visibility of the GEC project, generating more support for the project at the community level</p>	No	Activity in direct response to COVID-19	GEC learners, parents, teachers, families, community members, schools, local governments, national government	<p>Changing government priorities and different policies concerning social distancing and lockdown measures</p> <p>Parent and community attitudes towards girls learning, wellness and the pandemic</p> <p>Lacking necessary goods to mitigate covid (water, hand sanitiser, vaccines)</p> <p>Unequal access to health services in different locations of the project</p> <p>In direct response to COVID-19 and thus potentially considered outside the main scope of the GEC project</p>
	<p>A GEC project set up 'community forums' to bring together GEC learners, parents, families, teachers and other community members to discuss opportunities and barriers to girls' education and learning</p> <p>In some instances, these activities led to community-level advocacy and small grants were awarded to community groups to be used to improve gender equality/ girls learning in schools</p>	Yes, but the forums changed shape and focus during COVID-19	<p>In-person forums stopped during COVID-19 and were replaced by remote interactions such as phone surveys</p> <p>Some of the forums were repurposed to share community health and safety information. Forum members were also asked about the specific needs of GEC learners so that the project could adapt and try to address them.</p>	GEC learners, parents, teachers, families, community members, local women's networks, schools, local government, local 'champions' as identified by GEC staff to carry on activities after the project closed	<p>Parent, teacher and community attitudes towards girls' education</p> <p>Girls' increased unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, and increased financial concern, leading to less time to engage in forums</p> <p>Most forums run by local 'champions' which could not be identified in each location of the project</p> <p>Limited GEC staff resources to follow up on any ongoing activities since the GEC project closed</p>

Integrating aspects of the GEC project in national and local policy or systems	<p>A GEC project equipped numerous schools with internet connectivity and devices (e.g., cell phones, computers), which remained in schools after the project closed</p> <p>Also developed online learning programs, which were later used to assess learning lost once GEC learners returned to school after the lockdown</p>	Yes, but uses of the technology changed during COVID-19	<p>The use of technology on school grounds was severely restricted during COVID-19. During lockdown periods, the technology was most used by parents and teachers and not GEC learners</p> <p>When schools reopened, the online learning programs were repurposed to assess any learning lost among GEC learners and other students</p>	GEC learners, families, schools, teachers, community members, local government	<p>Limited interest among teachers and parents to have GEC learners access and use the internet and technology</p> <p>Dependency on local government/national companies to maintain connectivity in schools</p> <p>Limited GEC staff and resources to fix, replace, troubleshoot devices after the GEC project closed</p>
	<p>A GEC project amended its planning documents to allow for on-site childcare at TVET training centres to support young mothers in the project. The project successfully lobbied the local government to fund a vocational training programme with childcare provisions to allow young mothers to join in the future</p>	No	<p>Recognition of a barrier to girls learning during the pandemic lead the project team to amend project plans and budgeting lines.</p>	GEC learners, teachers GEC project staff, local governments, TVET centres	<p>Dependency on local government to sustain provisions</p> <p>Discrimination girls face in TVET training, around motivation, skills, and subjects they can study</p> <p>Girls' increased financial and domestic responsibilities due to COVID-19 leading to less time to engage in TVET training</p>
	<p>A GEC project developed protocols and measures to safely reopen schools and sites of learning after the COVID-19 lockdown period</p> <p>Members of the GEC project staff were included in national consultations on accelerated learning and some of the project's protocols and measures were featured and integrated into the national guidance.</p>	No but the project did have strategic priorities to influence government policy	Activity in direct response to COVID-19	GEC project staff, national government	<p>Dependency on national government to sustain provisions</p> <p>Potential for change and shifting government priorities</p> <p>In direct response to COVID-19 and thus considered potentially outside the main scope of the GEC project</p>

Interpreting and contesting sustainability measurement

GEC projects were asked to devise sustainability plans and work towards addressing sustainability over the course of the project. In 2022, as part of the GEC refresh, previously described in context section above, the GEC Sustainability Framework was updated to use a rating continuum for GEC projects to track progress against their sustainability plans (GEC 2022b). Aligned with the GEC FM's updated definition of sustainability, the GEC Sustainability Framework (See **Figure 2**) acknowledges variety in how sustainability could be achieved by projects at different levels of scope (individual girl, school, community and national levels). These are then mapped across five levels of ambition (contribution, continuation, adaptation, replication and scaling) in order to rate the sustainability achieved by each GEC project. Contribution is understood as what projects should achieve, at minimum, and scaling is understood as the highest form of ambition (See **Figure 3** for examples). Based on our review of GEC reporting documentation, the four GEC projects involved in this study provided evidence to the GEC FM on the number of project activities or strategies demonstrating progress towards their sustainability plan and goals at specific levels of scope and ambition. The GEC FM then rated each project's sustainability using the GEC Sustainability Framework to report the outcome to FCDO.

Most participants spoke about the value of having a framework that recognised sustainability efforts at different levels. The GEC FM allowed GEC projects to update their sustainability plans, providing flexibility around which levels they wanted to report on. In interviews, all Kenya-based participants shared that they used the GEC Sustainability Framework. It was described as 'useful' and 'helpful' because it could be adapted to changing interests and needs across multiple levels. One participant explained "what was once sustainability is no longer sustainable," when talking about the effects the COVID-19 pandemic. In describing the experience, the participant shared how "during the project, a crisis emerged, priorities shifted and new learnings surfaced, all of which required project sustainability plans to change in response to changing realities". The GEC Sustainability Framework became a reference for considerations of the wider contexts, by levels, to adapt to the changing needs, and sustained the work.

Figure 2: GEC Sustainability Framework⁸

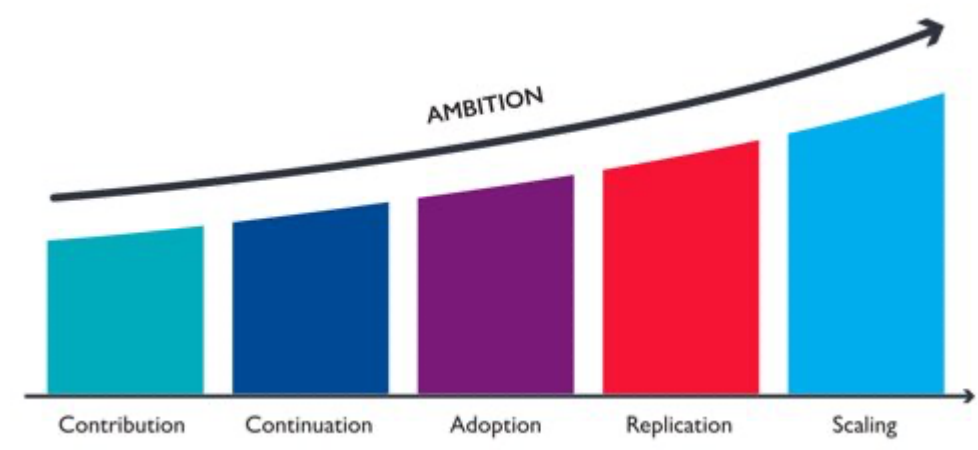


Figure 3: Examples of sustainability across levels of scope and ambition⁹

Success statements	School level	Community level	National level
Who are the actors that activities are targeted towards?	Teachers, head teachers	SMCs, PTAs, community-members, district education officials, county education officials	Ministry of Education or other government ministries
Contribution	Effective approaches are demonstrated in schools for supporting girls' education	Effective approaches are demonstrated in communities for supporting girls' education	Effective approaches are demonstrated at the national level for supporting girls' education
Continuation	Evidence suggests that effective approaches to supporting girls' education are sufficiently established for continued use in the school	Evidence suggests that effective approaches to supporting girls' education are sufficiently established for continued use in the community	Evidence suggests that effective approaches to supporting girls' education are sufficiently established for continued use at the system level
Adoption	Evidence suggests that effective approaches to supporting girls' education have been integrated within existing school practices	Evidence suggests that effective approaches to supporting girls' education have been integrated within existing community practices	Evidence suggests that effective approaches to supporting girls' education have been integrated within existing national-level practices
Replication	Evidence suggests that effective approaches to supporting girls' education have been picked up by other actors for use at other schools	Evidence suggests that effective approaches to supporting girls' education have been picked up by other actors for use in other communities	Evidence suggests that effective approaches to supporting girls' education have been picked up by other actors for use in other systems
Scaling	Evidence suggests that effective approaches to supporting girls' education at the school-level have been expanded and realised by a significant group of people	Evidence suggests that effective approaches to supporting girls' education at the community-level have been expanded and realised by a significant group of people	Evidence suggests that effective approaches to supporting girls' education at the national-level have been expanded and realised by a significant group of people

⁸ Image by GEC (2023), In *Advancing sustainability across a portfolio: A deep dive into the Girls' Education Challenge Sustainability Framework*. Portfolio in Practice 1. https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/2ebawqj0/gec_pip_1_sustainability_final.pdf.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Despite a general consensus among Kenya-based participants that the GEC Sustainability Framework was a useful MEL tool, they also noted challenges around reporting with it. While there were divergences in views on sustainability (See **Figure 1**), the research participants involved in this study did not view sustainability efforts at different levels (individual girl, school, community and national levels) as mutually exclusive. All interview participants saw some value in working across all the levels when and where relevant. It was further observed that the sustainability efforts that participants described as the most effective engaged with stakeholders across multiple levels. For example, one Kenya-based participant shared that the GEC project successfully lobbied the local government to consider offering on-site childcare at TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) centres to encourage young mothers to participate in TVET courses. This result, which demonstrates sustainability at the local systems level, was born out of the project's sustainability efforts at the individual girl level. The participant explained that the idea to offer on-site childcare was a direct result of conversations with GEC learners during the pandemic. The project staff was worried about retention because a number of the GEC learners, especially young mothers, were increasingly voicing financial and caring concerns during the pandemic. Following these conversations, the project pivoted its focus in two ways: by offering more TVET opportunities, in response to the learners' request for training for paid employment; and by hiring child minders to watch the learners' children at the TVET centre, in response to the learners' caring responsibilities. The participant shared how the GEC project "for the first time, opened the government's and really everyone's eyes to how smart and capable this forgotten population [of young mothers] is, all because we could be flexible and change course to address their needs. It was and still is a very beautiful thing". In this example, the project's thinking about sustainability was not orderly and linear (as depicted in **Figure 2**) but rather complex and connected across levels.

Other participants contested the linear notion of ambition levels within the GEC Sustainability Framework. In all four GEC projects involved in this research, 'continuation' became a major focus during the pandemic, but this aim was matched with high levels of ambition and creative thinking among the GEC project teams to navigate and sustain girls' education in the new realities. **Table 1** demonstrates that most participants explained how their sustainability activities were not part of their initial sustainability plans, and those that included were amended or adapted in response to the new realities. One participant described the process as "ongoing negotiations" with the GEC learners, their families and communities, on one hand, to adapt projects to address some of the real and immediate needs of the pandemic, and on the other hand, with GEC project partners, national and local government representatives, and the GEC FM, to remain compliant with the COVID-19-related regulations and measures and within the remit of the GEC. Another participant described the GEC project staff as "highly motivated" to do whatever they could to remain in contact with GEC learners and "keep the girls alive", stressing the gravity of the situation during COVID-19. Some of the activities that were seen as highly ambitious by GEC project staff, however, were downgraded by the GEC Sustainability Framework, and seen as less sustainable, because 'continuation' is defined on the lower end of the ambition scale (see **Figure 2**).

Some participants also contested the notion of scaling as the most ambitious form of sustainability, sharing how global and national policies and strategies can be counter-productive to sustaining girls' education work in certain areas and contexts. One example discussed concerned Kenya's national remote and distance learning policy during COVID-19. It was argued that this policy mostly pertained to urban areas where there was access to internet connectivity and the required infrastructure. The interview participant explained how "aligning to this policy would be ineffective because remote learning was not an option in the communities we worked in. But failing to align also created challenges with the Ministry of Education and our plans for working with them". This tension between policy alignment and local considerations was also noted by another interview participant who shared how "pushing back against global trends can be challenging and have potentially negative effects on funding" noting how pressures, particularly with government partners, can cause project teams to implement ill-designed activities or measure the outcomes as specified rather than in any meaningful way.

For some in the GEC projects in Kenya, this pressure meant working with the GEC Sustainability Framework, but using it more as a check box exercise rather than meaningfully reporting on sustainability processes. One participant noted that the project's ongoing sustainability efforts to engage with GEC learners, teachers and parents were unsuccessful because the team faced numerous unforeseen challenges during the pandemic; "In the end, we felt real pressure to leave something behind and so we came up with things to leave...but I am not sure how sustainable [the things left] are and they do not at all reflect what we tried to do". Thus, the sustainability reporting in this case did not detail nor could capture some of the ongoing engagement with schools, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders in the process of trying to achieve sustainable results or outcomes. Based on our review of GEC reporting documentation, other cases appeared where the full extent of the GEC project's thinking and activities concerning sustainability were not reported to the GEC FM because there was little to no space to write about processes that did not result in achieved outcomes. This raises some questions about what sustainability consists of, who is involved, how it occurs at project level, which are topics further explored in the next section on navigating gender equality, education and sustainability during COVID-19.

B. Perspectives on navigating gender equality, education and sustainability

Despite mixed views on how sustainability in girls' education could be understood, there were more coordinated views around gender equality in education, which came into focus during the pandemic. All participants involved in this research acknowledged that to promote gender equality in education required them to work beyond the school or site of learning where the GEC project was in operation. While it was stressed in workshop discussions how a single project bound by resources and time cannot address all structural and social challenges in a given context, there was a general consensus among workshop participants that they, through their work on GEC, were able to recognise a host of intersecting issues faced by the girls involved in their projects and adjust or devised new ways to address them. Participants discussed how processes of recognising and navigating intersecting

issues related to gender equality and education were vital to their sustainability efforts. Specific GEC MEL instruments seemed to have been important in achieving this. In addition to the GEC Sustainability Framework, discussed above, Kenya-based participants also spoke about the usefulness of the GEC GESI tool, which is further discussed in this section.

Thinking about context

All four GEC projects involved in this study looked at ways to understand, address and measure outcomes in relation to the wider contexts in which they were operating, or as one participant explained, “easy measures of numeracy and literacy are not enough if the aim is to improve and sustain gender equality in education”. A workshop participant summarised some of the issues raised during group workshop discussions:

“We recognise that access to education alone will not generate desired impacts, especially among out-of-school girls. We also need to focus on holistic approaches and grassroots movements that address, for example, girls’ caring responsibilities, community support, school dropout culture, sexual and reproductive health information, psychosocial support and skills training, environmental impacts”.

For some participants, the structural and social challenges linked to gender equality in education became more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. One interview participant shared how “COVID forced [a GEC project] to look at wider forces and impacts of exclusion” because the girls and women involved in the project became some of the first people to lose access to public services, including education, in their areas. Another interview participant shared how “it was a moment of despair for the girls” when schools and learning centres were closed because they were not sure what would happen to them. Another interview participant reflected on the real fears he felt concerning girls’ learning but also their safety, physical health, mental health, nutrition, hygiene, and risks of violence, and thus linking disruptions in girls’ education with wider concerns of gender equality.

The interconnections between gender equality and sustainability also come into focus through the examples of sustainability shared by participants in Kenya at **Table 1**. These examples show how GEC projects not only associated sustainability with a range of structural and social challenges linked to gender equality in education, but they also introduced ways of addressing the wider context. Their activities extended beyond the school or site of learning and concerned issues such as parents’ and community attitudes and perceptions, unequal access to health services, gender discrimination, and increased unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, among others. Through their navigation of a myriad of gendered issues, the approaches taken in Kenya seem to support feminist views linking sustainability and gender equality, and how both must be equally addressed because the processes promote and support each other (Leach et al 2016; Unterhalter 2023).

In two of the four GEC projects involved in this research, interview participants shared how they were able to sustain GEC activities during the COVID-19 pandemic through partnerships with individuals and organisations working outside of the education sector. For example, one of the GEC project's consortium of partners included a community health organisation that deployed local health volunteers in areas where the GEC project was operating. The network of health volunteers was initially engaged in a supportive role, to provide *ad hoc* health services to GEC learners who required it. During the pandemic, however, these activities become vital for keeping the project active during lockdown periods when movement within and between communities was restricted. The community health volunteers, because they worked within national health system, were identified as frontline workers and thus received special permissions to travel around the country. In this period, they became the project's main hub of activity. They travelled to girls' homes to physically check up on them, deliver learning materials and health supplies, and link the girls to other services they needed. The participant explained how the "shift from school to household was a big task" that required coordination across partners, sectors and actors. Taking a holistic view and a cross-sector approach are thus seen as vital components of sustainability processes supporting gender equality and girls' education. How participants went about understanding the wider contexts and addressing intersecting issues in their areas of operation are detailed in the next section.

Disaggregated data and thinking about gender and inclusion

Every single participant interviewed for this study mentioned the importance of collecting disaggregated data to contextualise how education and gender interact with race, age, location, socioeconomic status, among other factors. It further emerged through discussions that disaggregated data was not only used for parity measures, such as reporting on the number of girls, boys and other populations being served by the project, but also for drawing out and understanding the sustainability of projects. In discussion on what was done to carry on, adapt and sustain project activities during the pandemic, most Kenya-based participants spoke about how they used the GEC GESI tool in particular to support their understanding of sustainability in the new realities of COVID-19.

The GEC Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) tool, updated in 2020, supported GEC projects to collect evidence and track progress around some of the contextual barriers to GESI in girls' education and learning. The revised GESI tool built on the initial approach, developed in 2018, which was based on ten GESI minimum standards and a self-assessment tool for projects to rate the extent to which they were addressing or not GESI considerations in the project (GEC 2023b). GEC projects rated their GESI considerations on a continuum from 'GESI absent' to 'GESI aware' with GESI transformative as the highest rank (See **Figure 4**). GEC projects submitted reports annually to the FM tracking their progress towards meeting the ten minimum standards (ibid).

In 2020, the GEC FM moved away from compliance reporting and the use of minimum standards to establish a more reflective GESI tool and process. As depicted in **Figure 5**, the new GESI tool had six critical questions related to six GESI domains, asking project teams to apply a gender lens and take an intersectional approach to understand if project activities are maintaining harmful structures of power and privilege or if they are gender responsive and transformative. Through a consultative and collaborative process, each GEC project identified their GESI strengths and gaps in relation to the six domains and collected and analysed evidence around opportunities and challenges. This aimed to design a flexible tool with a “pragmatic application rather than a one-size-fits-all approach across the portfolio” (GEC 2023b, p.13). The reflective tool aimed to guide GEC project teams by enhancing their understandings of what GESI transformative practices look like and building their capacity to address GESI related issues rather than relying on the FM to assess their compliance to minimum standards.

Figure 4: GESI rating continuum¹⁰

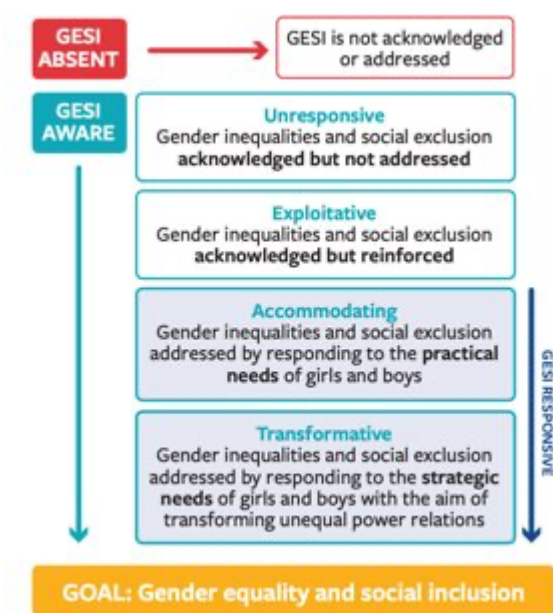


Figure 5: GESI Domain Tool¹¹

GESI Domains Tool	
Six critical questions for GEC projects	Relevant GESI Domains
1. Does the project have sufficient resources to be able to contribute towards improved gender equality and social inclusion? Is the project able to convert these resources into GESI-responsive practices?	<p>1. Culture and capacity: Project shows ownership of, understanding of and commitment to GESI, ensuring that their culture and project resource allocations are GESI responsive.</p> <p>1.1 Capacity: Project is adequately resourced to be GESI sensitive and has staff, partners and contractors with appropriate gender equality and social inclusion expertise.</p> <p>1.2 Culture: Project demonstrably seeks to build more GESI-responsive organisational cultures.</p>
2. How well has the project planned activities that will contribute towards improved gender equality and social inclusion? How likely is it that these activities will transform inequitable relations and structures?	<p>2. GESI-responsive programming: The changing needs, views and lived experiences of girls¹ drive the design, implementation, adaptation and results of GEC projects.</p> <p>2.1 Analysis: A progressive gender and social inclusion analysis of the context is conducted and used to inform all aspects of the project cycle.</p> <p>2.2 Implementation: Project has strategies in place aimed at the transformation of unequal structures, institutions and norms at the school and community level.</p> <p>2.3 Empowerment: Project applies a critical and thoughtful approach to activities that make claims around girls' empowerment.</p>
3. How strong are the processes through which the project knows whether it is making contributions towards improved gender equality and social inclusion?	<p>3. Project has GESI-responsive monitoring and evaluation and learning systems.</p>
4. How effectively is the project accountable to girls and women, particularly those from excluded social groups?	<p>4. Risk management and accountability: Project demonstrates transparency and accountability to those we work with through GESI-responsive practices and programming.</p> <p>4.1 Risk management: Do No Harm and other risk management* is informed by a GESI lens.</p> <p>4.2 Accountability: Project is accountable to women, girls and those from excluded social groups they work with, as a necessary and central part of all programming.</p>
5. To what extent are girls and women, particularly those from excluded social groups, central to the project structure, partnerships and decision-making processes?	<p>5. Partnerships and participation: Project actively partners with GESI transformational organisations and promotes active and meaningful participation of girls and stakeholders from excluded social groups.</p> <p>5.1 Partnerships: Project seeks to partner with organisations representative of the most marginalised groups with which they work, and work with partners in a way that shifts power away from dominant organisations and towards excluded social groups.</p> <p>5.2 Participation: Project meaningfully engages girls in all aspects of the programme, amplifies and listens to their voices, and includes them in decision-making processes that affect their lives.</p>
6. Is the influencing work carried out by the project likely to lead to a positive change in the unequal structures and relations that sustain gender inequality and other exclusions?	<p>6. Influencing and sustainability Project is working towards transformative and sustainable change in gender equality and social inclusion including at the individual, household, community and societal levels.</p>

¹⁰ Image by GEC (2023), In *Driving gender equality and social inclusion across a portfolio: Lessons from the Girls' Education Challenge*. Portfolio in Practice 5.

https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/4p4htntj/gec_pip_5_gesi_final.pdf

¹¹ *Ibid.*

This type of data collection proved vital for developing meaningful sustainability planning during COVID-19. For example, one Kenya-based participant shared how before the pandemic, a GEC project collected disaggregated data on each girl participant in support of the projects GESI considerations. The project developed a database that included background data (age, race, location) as well as contact information (home address, phone number) so that the project could follow up with each girl and get her periodic feedback throughout the course of the project. During the pandemic, this database also served as a vital tool to facilitate contact with each of the girls, provide water and other needed supplies, and link them with services and supports. The participant further shared that this database designed for the GEC project was useful that the organisation has started looking into how to institute it as a key feature within all their projects. Even though not prepared for the pandemic, this data collection supported them.

While collecting disaggregated data, through the GESI tool, was seen by most participants as a vital step in their process of building sustainability, some participants also mentioned how the tool did not help them to report on sustainability to the GEC FM. Most participants involved in this research noted how challenging it was to generate evidence or report on the sustainability outcome because it was not always a clear or consistent measure. While the flexible and adaptable MEL tools using rubrics and scales were seen as highly supportive of GEC projects' different approaches to sustaining girls' education and gender equality in different contexts, some participants also shared how their evidence around sustainability felt anecdotal. Participants in the GEC projects interviewed for this study did not have specific indicators to measure sustainability, despite attempts to develop them, but noted that project sustainability was often tied to a combination of indicators used to measure and communicate the other three outcomes (learning, participation, and transition) of GEC reporting, or ways in which the project was addressing gender equality and inclusion in education.

This greater coherency in how participants defined gender equality in education lead to more exploratory and innovative discussions around what additional measures would be needed to monitor girls' and women's education in the longer term, and how MEL frameworks could support these aims. In the last part of the paper we consider the GEC MEL tools and the learning they generated, drawing out some of the further reflections prompted by looking at the AGEE Framework.

C. Perspectives on MEL frameworks for data and learning about sustainability, women's rights and gender equality

All the participants working on GEC projects in Kenya remarked that the more flexible and adaptable MEL approaches, introduced by the GEC FM between 2020 and 2022, supported internal reflection by individuals and organisations. One participant stated, "there was a big focus on the L of MEL" and then proceeded to explain how some of that learning was applied to other projects within her organisation. Another interview participant shared how their organisation's COVID-19 emergency response plan, developed for the GEC project, remains the organisation's official guidance on how to collect data in all contexts of crisis. Another participant shared how after the GEC project, in all project

planning, even in projects not related to girls' education, the organisation is collecting disaggregated data on all persons involved in all projects.

Some participants considered that the learning generated through a reflective approach was sustainable because it is something that carries on within an organisation even after the project closes. One participant explained how the use of the GEC GESI tool “brought [the organisation] into a conscious level to talk and speak about inclusion” and shared how the tool is being applied to all projects within the organisation; “It has become our standard practice, for all projects, we want to take them [all] to the gender transformative level”. Specific examples were given of how participants developed data collection instruments they had learned about through working on GEC GESI. For example, one project used remote time diaries and surveys to better understand how the pandemic was affecting learning across the different populations they served. Another project established a hybrid approach to data collection by activating networks of support, through the consortium of partners, to visit GEC learners' homes or collect data over the phone.

Given the appreciation for some of the GEC MEL tools already in use, we also wanted to explore what else could be specifically learned by project level data in relation to wider initiatives concerned with building a broader data ecosystem to sustain gender equality in and through education. A key question considered was whether the AGEE Framework, which was initially developed for use at national and cross-national levels to support government planning, provided any additional insights to projects to support MEL, and thinking more widely about issues of gender and sustainability. The current conceptualisation of the AGEE Framework has six distinct but interlinked domains, that are equally weighted, for measuring gender equality in education: Resources; Values; Opportunities; Participation on Education; Knowledge, Understanding and Skills; and Outcomes (See **Appendix B** for more information on the AGEE Framework). **Table 2** summaries our analysis looking at the AGEE domains in relation to the GEC measures and considerations at the project level. A review of GEC documentation demonstrated that most GEC portfolio measures (*i.e.*, the outcomes the GEC FM reported to FCDO) are situated in the Opportunities domain, including the sustainability outcome as measured and reported through the GEC Sustainability Framework. The GEC portfolio had no specific measures related to the Resources or Outcomes domains.

Further summarised in **Table 2** are the general and specific considerations shared by workshop participants concerning overlaps between the GEC MEL tools and the AGEE Framework and where the AGEE Framework identified areas not currently covered by the existing GEC MEL tools. In workshop discussions looking at the AGEE domains from project perspectives in Kenya, participants spoke about project outcomes and the need to balance a holistic view, as presented in the AGEE Framework, with what is achievable and sustainable. They underscored the importance of the Opportunities domain, particularly its consideration of indicators that may advantage or disadvantage certain groups of people in education. One workshop participant stated that “without looking at opportunities we would be losing out” because certain barriers to girls' education sit within this

domain. The Opportunities domain was seen as an important area to document in any project level MEL tool concerned with sustaining gender equality and girls' education. Participants noted how opportunities can be thwarted by threats, and the scope in the AGEE Framework to consider this was seen as useful for project design and plans for activities, results, and outcomes. The Outcomes domain, while considered important, was seen as not applicable or out of scope at the project level, because it requires data that would be collected outside of education or by governments. In this sense, the workshop discussions corroborated the document review uncovering a strong overlap or connection through the Opportunities domain, and some divergence or disconnection through the Outcome domains.

Table 2: AGEE domains in relation to GEC measures and considerations at the project level¹²

	Resources	Values	Opportunities	Participation in Education	Knowledge, Understanding and Skills	Outcomes
AGEE definitions	The goods and services required for a gender equitable system. Resources include, for example: money, policy, schools, trained teachers, administrator, support workers and information	How policy is understood, put into practice, or contested. Values are expressed in formal policy frameworks or laws and in more informal discourses. Values include ideas about, e.g., rights, capabilities, Ubuntu, national unification, peace, human capital or attention to girls' voices	Factors that can constrain or enable gender equalities in education and the ways in which these are differently converted into actual opportunities by individuals and/or institutions	Gender differences in the capability to participate in education, and levels of participation and progression of girls and boys in all levels of education	Learning areas and levels of girls and boys in relation to formal instruction and informal formation of attitudes	Gender equality in, and support for, girls and women's health, employment, access to support to protect from violence, political. Participation, ownership of assets, legal standing and many other areas of human development
GEC portfolio measures <i>(GEC document analysis)</i>	GEC reporting on sustainability references long-term financing and resources but has no specific measures	IO1 (changing community attitudes and norms)	Output 1 (reach) IO2 (reducing financial barriers) IO3 (improved teaching) IO4 (effective management) IO5 (safer learning environments) Outcome 3 (transition) Outcome 4 (sustainability)	IO7 (continued attendance) Outcome 1 (participation) Outcome 2 (learning)	IO6 (empowering girls)	GEC reporting on participation links to later life outcomes related to early marriage, violence, employment, etc., but has no specific measures

¹² See also **Appendix B** for summary notes of the AGEE workshop further detailing workshop discussions and participants' responses.

<p>GEC project level measures in Kenya</p> <p><i>(General considerations shared by workshop participants)</i></p>	<p>Resourcing is a major determinant of what educational opportunities can be delivered by a project, how it is delivered and to whom</p> <p>Projects may have less oversight over resourcing and allocation processes at national and local levels</p>	<p>Considerations of social and cultural norms and values, particularly those held by parents and families can facilitate or hinder opportunities for girls in education</p>	<p>Providing opportunities, particularly to girls facing exclusion and marginalisation, or those not best served by national and local policy, is a vital aspect of girls' education work in Kenya</p> <p>An account of the real opportunities available to girls requires considerations of policy at both ends of the spectrum– the opportunities and threats that enable and constrain gender equalities within the project</p>	<p>Considerations of voices of girls and boys in education, how they are able to influence policy, and their opportunities to engage in education</p>	<p>Considerations of what is being taught, foundational skills (literacy and numeracy) and understandings of self and others, all serve as building blocks to future educational opportunities</p> <p>Also requires an understanding of what happens to girls in education (e.g., gender biases by teachers, stereotyping of girls' learning and skills)</p>	<p>Wider social determinants of opportunities for gender equality and girls' education do have implications for projects</p> <p>While these must be considered, collecting data and evidence on them seem 'out of scope' at the project level</p>
<p>GEC project measures in Kenya</p> <p><i>(Specific considerations shared by workshop participants)</i></p>	<p>Tracking resources of household and school environments (e.g, WASH facilities) involved in projects</p> <p>Tracking donor financing in education (timely allocated, services denied)</p> <p>Tracking resources of specific populations (e.g, people with disabilities) involved in projects</p>	<p>Measures on parental involvement and household support of education</p> <p>Measures on child safeguarding policy</p>	<p>Assessing and expanding opportunities for gender equality in education should serve as the central focus on project-level measurement</p> <p>Specific measures vary by project objectives and aims.</p>	<p>Measures on participation rates in education, including alternative pathways such as TVET</p> <p>Measures on girls' agency to participate in education</p> <p>Measures on mental health and mental preparedness for school, work, employability</p>	<p>Measures on numeracy, literacy, vocational skills, life skills, sexual and reproductive health, self-esteem (tracking gains in all these skills/ competencies)</p> <p>Measures on teachers' and mentors' preparedness and skillsets to support girls' education</p>	<p>Out of scope of project level data</p>

Through a central focus on the Opportunities domain, participants felt that holistic approaches, such as AGEE, were particularly useful in building wider understandings in projects. The AGEE Framework was considered a thought-provoking tool to encourage projects to consider the wider contexts and impacts, in relation to the other domains, identifying how issues of resources, values, and so on, may facilitate or hinder the opportunities a project seeks to create. The GEC projects involved in this study were already addressing and measuring aspects of the wider context linked to gender equality in education, as highlighted in the section above. The AGEE Framework provides them with useful language, key concepts, and conceptual framing to review their evidence and data in a more systematic and holistic way. **Figure 6** is a visual depiction of how the AGEE Framework could be conceptualised for project-level data on gender and education based on discussions with participants involved in this study.

Figure 6: Visual depiction of AGEE Framework for project-level education and gender data



Participants suggested several ways the AGEE Framework could be used, both at project level and as a national framework, which would help with advocacy for better data collection nationally and sub-nationally. At the project level, it was suggested that the AGEE Framework could be used as a diagnostic tool to support projects to think holistically about gender equality in education, especially during design and development stages. Another participant suggested that the AGEE Framework could be used to develop better, more nuanced survey questions and data collection processes to

assess intersecting inequalities at project level. Another participant described AGEE as a useful framework for NGOs and civil society to use together, collectively, as an advocacy tool to promote girls' education work and reflect on current and missing project-level indicators in regional, national and global policy discussions.

As a national tool, projects could use national or sub-national data and indicators generated through AGEE to complement and locate their project's work within the broader data ecosystem. Several participants noted how more inclusive and participatory engagement with project level staff could help to fill some of the existing data gaps at national and global levels, especially within the Opportunities domain. Projects can offer specific information related to the experiences and intersecting inequalities faced by certain groups of people in education, such as people with disabilities and out-of-school youth, helping data collection initiatives to develop new indicators for them. Projects can also offer more qualitative data and case study analysis that could help to fill data gaps and paint a better more accurate picture of wider views on gender equality and education in certain areas and contexts,

It can be seen that the AGEE Framework, in flexibly moving between the international, national and local can provide more information than the existing GEC MEL tools in specific areas that bear on sustainability with regard to long-term education financing, the realisation of norms and values at national and sub-national levels, the constraints on opportunities outside school linked to housing, health or implementation of local government policies, forms of knowledge, understanding and skill, and specific measures with regard to outcomes linked to realising women's rights associated with work, political participation, good health, and freedom from violence and fear. The suggested applications of the AGEE Framework at project level are areas for further research for academics, practitioners and policymakers, to better understand how to link up data collection efforts across levels, and what processes can work to help build institutions that sustain gender equality in and through education.

VII. Conclusion

There is mounting pressure for international education projects, funded by foreign donors, to prove how they are contributing to transformative, long lasting sustainable development for peoples and communities they seek to serve. Girls' education has continued to be a high donor priority over the last two decades and looks set to continue; yet there is little agreement around what constitutes sustainability for girls' education and how foreign aid projects should track progress and measure how they are sustaining gender equality in and through education.

The research for this paper, through discussions with research participants about their lived experiences of navigating project sustainability during the pandemic, demonstrates how a group of GEC projects collected context-specific data and used that data to address emerging interests and needs of the girls and communities they served. In several instances, the MEL processes supported

project teams to identify, and pivoted towards opportunities to promote and sustain, gender equality in education in certain locations, or for specific populations. Each GEC project involved in this study positioned itself to help build opportunities for girls' education, despite facing immense challenges and crises. The group of projects generated new evidence and lessons learned out of the experiences that could contribute to wider initiatives concerned with building a broader data ecosystem to better understand and sustain gender equality in and through education. Some of the ways in which project level data might contribute to thinking about sustainability and gender equality are seen through some of the connections and disconnections between projects, and through global and local perspectives.

Disconnections found in perspectives on sustainability raise questions about how it is currently defined and measured at the project level. The FCDO, the GEC FM and some research participants located at the global level more firmly conceptualised sustainability as an outcome to be measured whereas Kenya-based staff and participants engaging in day-to-day project delivery described sustainability more as a messy and complex process that requires ongoing navigation and negotiation. The examples of sustainability shared by research participants demonstrate how GEC projects in Kenya adapted or changed their activities and strategies in response to the pandemic, shifting government priorities, and other emerging challenges or interests. Given these experiences, some participants contested notions of sustainability goals as orderly and linear, or something that can be achieved through increased ambition or scale. Others commented on how the details of their efforts were not always captured or easily applied to the GEC's reporting framework that defined sustainability in terms of outcomes.

More coordinated views on defining gender equality in education, and connections between sustainability and gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) measurement, suggest that these measures might be more closely associated or bound up together than initially thought by the GEC projects involved in this study. All participants acknowledged that promoting gender equality in and through education required considerations beyond the school or site of learning such as parents' and community attitudes and perceptions. For some, these wider considerations came into sharper focus during the pandemic and participants explained how collecting disaggregated data and evidence on GESI considerations became vital for their sustainable efforts. Participants highlighted the importance of taking a holistic view of sustainability that considers some of the structural and social challenges linked to gender equality in education, and that the GESI tool was helpful for capturing important, nuanced data and information about the GEC learners and their families, schools and communities.

Participants also highlighted the value of having adaptive, flexible MEL tools and guidance that recognised sustainability efforts at different levels and could be adapted to changing interests and needs, especially during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the learning generated through reflective approaches to MEL were considered 'sustainable' by some participants because it carried on within the organisation and strengthened the capacities of individuals and organisations even after the project closed. All of the research participants involved in this study recognised that girls'

education projects have some ability to influence change at different levels – on girls' lives, on social norms and on national and local education policy, and the concept of 'influence' as associated with sustainability emerged as a key theme. The associated concept of social sustainability, as opposed to financial or environmental sustainability, also emerged as a key theme as referenced in section VI looking at perspectives on sustainability. These areas of convergence provide space for further thinking about how we might expand definitions and measures of sustainability in relation to gender equality and education at the project level, both in terms of achievements but also the gendered processes, interactions and relationships within and across the different levels.

The AGEE Framework was seen to be a useful tool for thinking about data collection processes and what additional measures would be needed to monitor girls' and women's education in the longer term. Through discussions that related participants' views on sustainability with the AGEE Framework, the Opportunities domain and its central role in project level measurement emerged as a key insight. Participants spoke about how their projects focused on expanding real educational opportunities for girls of certain populations or in certain context, and collected in-depth data to support those aims. The other domains could support or inform wider contexts or impacts, by identifying how issues of resources, values, and so on, may facilitate or hinder the opportunities a project seeks to create. This configuration of the AGEE Framework is an area for further research, both at the project level, around what data project teams collect and use, but also at national and international levels, around how project generated data can augment and fill missing data gaps in building a broader data ecosystem.

This paper suggests that there is much to learn from individuals and organisations working at the project level, navigating global crises, facing political backlash to gender equality and women's rights and addressing other emerging issues for girls, communities and governments in real time. It also suggests how they might be assisted through better data collection and specifically, more reflective, holistic, and participatory approaches to data gathering using a number of complementary tools such as GESI, AGEE and various sustainability or scaling guides. Evidence and learning generated at the project level, however, often remain disconnected and underutilised in wider initiatives on building the evidence base in support of gender equality in and through education. The valuable data, evidence and insights, as well as the voices and experiences of project level staff, are not always included in national and global data collection processes. The importance of including all stakeholders in discussions about data, how data is used, how data is generated, and which data is generated and how different sites of reflection of this connect will continue to be explored in the next stages of the AGEE project.

VIII. Recommendations

In addition to the recommendations which emerge from issues highlighted in the study more generally, more specific recommendations emerged for areas of action and further research for academics, practitioners and policymakers concerned with data, evidence and processes for sustaining gender equality in and through education:

- **Investigate existing definitions and measurement of sustainability in girls' education projects** and consider expanding them to better account for the gendered processes, interactions and relationships involved in achieving outcomes and results. One way to do this is to think about the concept of 'influence' at different levels (e.g., girl, family, community, government) as associated with sustainability and gender equality in and through education.
- **Encourage project teams to collect disaggregated data and evidence on gender equality and social inclusion**, not only for evaluating gender parity, such as reporting on the number of girls, boys and other populations being served by the project, but also for drawing out more nuanced, context-specific understanding of the sustainability of projects in relation to wider structural and social challenges linked to gender equality in education.
- **Develop flexible and adaptable MEL guidance and tools that encourage learning and reflection** within and between project staff, practitioners and donors that look for ways to develop shared understandings for measuring outcomes and processes. This includes adapting the guidance and tools, as the GEC FM did, when new circumstances arise or priorities change.
- **Involve project level staff and practitioners in national and global data collection processes on gender equality in education**, to meaningfully integrate the valuable data, evidence, voices, and experiences they bring with aims of building more inclusive institutions that sustain gender equality in and through education.

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Appendix A: List of GEC phase II projects in Kenya¹³

The GEC was implemented in two phases: Phase I (2012-2017) focused on providing quality education to over a million girls facing exclusion and marginalization worldwide. Phase II (2017-2024) expanded support to GEC learners with an added focus on transitioning girls from primary to secondary education, or to technical vocational education and training (TVET) and employment (GEC, 2023). Phase II had two funding windows: GEC- transitions (GEC-T) and Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) to specifically support girls who have never attended or dropped out of school. In Kenya, The GEC funded a total of seven projects in phase II; four of these projects were involved in this study. All of the GEC phase II projects in Kenya are listed in the chart below.

Project name	Lead partner	Project category	Start date	End date	Description	Locations (counties)	Target # of girls served
Discovery Project	Impact(Ed) International	GEC-T	04/2017	12/2020	This project provided professional development to teachers, using video technology, and developed teaching resources to support girls learning (literacy and numeracy), develop their life skills and raise their aspirations. Known locally as the Nawiri project, this project reached 514 primary and junior secondary school communities in partnership with the Ministry of Education.	Wajir, Kajiado, Machakos, and Kiambu	152,955
Education for Life (E4L)	ActionAid International Kenya	LNGB	09/2018	03/2023	This project worked with girls and boys (ages 10 to 19, out-of-school, and some with disabilities) by providing learning opportunities and vocational trainings. This project also worked with communities (parents, teachers, local leaders) to improve existing school provision by addressing teaching quality, curricula, school environments and management practices, as well as other barriers to girls' education such as child marriage, stigma and violence.	Isiolo, Garissa, Migori, Kisumu and Kilifi	5,000
Expanding Inclusive Education Strategies for Girls with Disabilities Kenya	Leonard Cheshire	GEC-T	04/2017	03/2022	This project increased the number of educational and vocational opportunities for girls with disabilities in five counties within the Lake Region of Kenya. The girls in this project were supported to transition into secondary school, vocational training, self-employment, or adult education and home learning programmes. The project also worked to build positive attitudes and community support for disabled children by working with families and households.	Kisumu East, Siaya, Homabay, Migori and Kuria East in the Lake Region	2,260

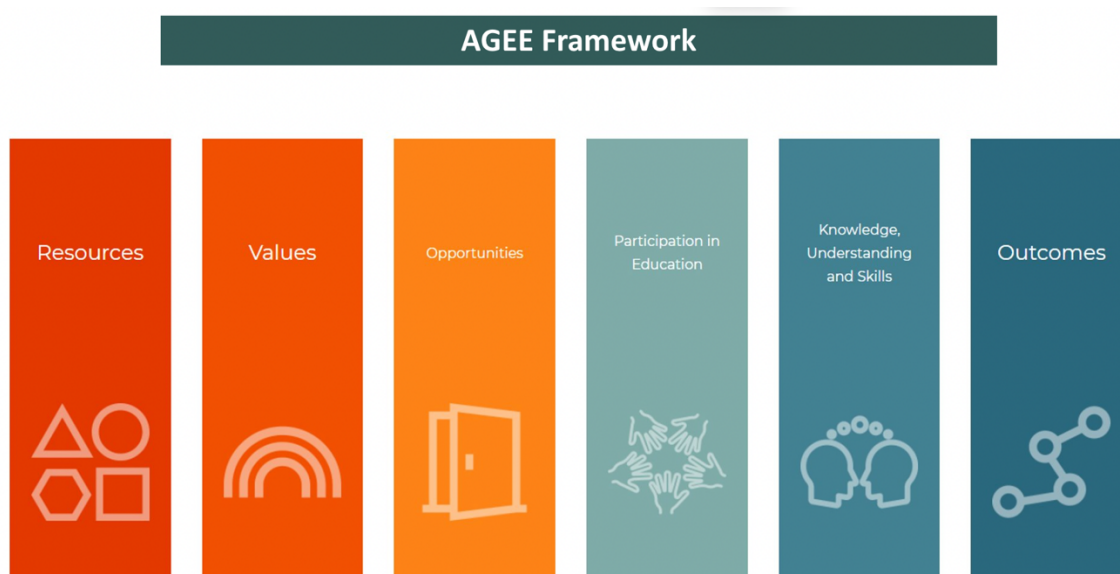
¹³ The information in this chart was publicly shared on the GEC website. See Girls Education Challenge (GEC). 2022a. *Country briefing: Kenya*. https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/o2fh5r55/gec_country_briefing-kenya_jan-22_final.pdf and <https://girlseducationchallenge.org/countries/country/kenya>.

iMlango	Avanti Communications Group	GEC-T	04/2017	06/2021	This project used technology to improve student learning, girls and boys, and support their transition to the next stage of education. The project generated real-time data on student attendance and their learning progress, as well as developed an online programme that tailored teaching content to each individual child. The project also provided stipends and loan schemes for parents.	Kajiado, Kilifi, Makueni and Uasin Gishu	70,130
Jielimishe (Educate Yourself)	I Choose Life-Africa	GEC-T	04/2017	03/2022	This project supported girls in primary and secondary school by supporting them to complete a full cycle of education and transition to the next level, including through alternative pathways such as technical and vocational education and training. The project focused on increasing girls' motivation to learn through coaching and mentorship schemes, improving teaching and teacher training, and encouraging local communities to support girls' education. The project also benefited boys in primary and secondary school.	Laikipia, Meru and Mombasa	10,120
Kenya Equity in Education (KEEP)	World University Service of Canada	GEC-T	04/2017	03/2022	This project supported girls in refugee camps and surrounding communities where conflict, displacement, and extreme poverty hindered access to education. The project aimed to keep girls in school, improve their literacy and numeracy skills, and help them to feel safe and supported. The project focused on adolescent girls at the highest risk of dropping out of school by providing financial support, offering remedial classes, and equipping them with life skills and greater self-confidence. The project also worked to men and boys to increase support for girls' education.	Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps and host communities in Garissa, Wajir and Turkana counties	20,670
Wasichana Wetu Wafaulu (Let our Girls Succeed)	Education Development Trust	GEC-T	05/2017	03/2023	This project worked with girls living in highly marginalised communities (arid and semi-arid lands and slum areas) in Kenya. It supported primary school girls with learning opportunities to develop the skills and confidence necessary for a productive next phase of life. The project focused on improving teaching quality and transitioning girls to secondary education. Some girls were supported to transition to alternative pathways (technical and vocational education and training or employment).	Nairobi, Mombasa, Turkana, Samburu, Marsabit, Kilifi, Kwale and Tana River counties	70,540

Appendix B: Accountability for Gender Equality in Education (AGEE) project and AGEE Framework

The research discussed in this working paper is informed by the AGEE (Accountability in Gender Equality in Education) Framework. The Framework (see below) outlines six distinct but interlinked domains for measuring gender equality and education: Resources; Values; Opportunities; Participation in Education; Knowledge, Understanding and Skills; and Outcomes.

The conceptual work informing this Framework draws on an understanding of gender equality based on the capability approach, which was developed by Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum and other scholars. The capability approach is concerned with social justice and equality, and highlights how opportunities, freedoms, and agency need to be considered alongside outcomes, resources, and measures of human development and wellbeing. This requires a wider range of information than is used in most planning and monitoring schemes and participatory processes for gathering and reflecting on that information. In this sense, the capability approach provides an alternative, more holistic, approach for assessing gender equality in education that extends beyond issues of gender parity, which involves counting the numbers of boys and girls, men and women enrolled, participating or achieving in education, because it calls for responding to girls' needs, rights and capabilities.



The AGEE Framework was launched in 2021, and has been developed through ongoing discussion with key practitioners in education institutions, governments, civil society organisations, and bilateral and multilateral organisations working on gender and education, as well as through in-depth engagement with a wide range of writings and dialogues with academic communities working on women's and girls' rights, gender equality and social justice in education in countries in the Global North and Global South. Participatory processes which aim at inclusive and critical forms of reflection are a crucial feature of this work, including reviewing any indicator framework, the concepts it deploys and the data it uses. Thus, research conducted in collaboration with GEC projects in Kenya is part of a continuous process of critical and participatory reflection, both on the AGEE Framework and the issue of gender equality and inequalities in education. This research this working paper draws on is concerned with the application of the AGEE Framework at project level, specifically how project MEL processes can draw on the AGEE Framework for diagnostic, monitoring or evaluation work on projects concerned with girls' education and gender equality in education.

Appendix C: Timeline of research activities (February to September 2023)

February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial discussions between AGEE research team and GEC FM members on research collaboration AGEE research team reviewed GEC MEL documentation (global policy, reporting and log frame) shared by GEC FM
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AGEE research team presented preliminary findings of MEL documentation review to GEC FM; teams jointly decided to focus research study on topics of sustainability, gender equality and girls' education in Kenya ActionAid International Kenya was identified as a Kenya-based partner to help support research activities.
April-June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AGEE research team and ActionAid International Kenya planned the AGEE online workshop The online AGEE workshop was held on 19 April 2023 AGEE research team drafted workshop summary notes and shared them with all workshop participants for comments and feedback (See Appendix D) AGEE research team requested additional GEC MEL documentation from the GEC FM with a specific focus on GEC FM MEL approaches and guidance concerning topics of sustainability, gender equality and girls' education, and specific documents discussed by workshop participants (project planning and reporting documents, data collection tools) of GEC Kenya projects. AGEE research team reviewed and analysed the internal documents as shared by GEC FM, as well as publicly available documents on the GEC.
July- August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AGEE research team conducted followed on semi-structured interviews with UK- and Kenya-based individuals involved in developing and delivering GEC projects. All workshop participants were invited to interview but a few declined. The AGEE research team relied on snowball sampling to identify the relevant participants to interview.
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AGEE research team analysed the data collected across the multiple stages (document review, online workshop discussions and individual interviews) and generated preliminary findings AGEE research team presented preliminary findings of research at the 2023 UK Education and Development Forum (UKFIET) conference in Oxford, UK. <p><i>(After September 2023, the AGEE research team continued to analyse the data collected for this working paper, incorporating contributor comments and feedback in multiple draft versions. In March 2024, the team shared a final draft of this working paper with all research participants involved for comments. These comments were addressed and incorporated in the final version of the working paper).</i></p>

Appendix D: Summary notes of the AGEE Workshop

Note: A draft of these summary notes was shared with workshop participants for comments in early July 2023. The below text is the final version.

Summary Notes

AGEE Kenya Workshop in Kenya

19 April 2023

Virtual | 2.00-5.00 pm (Nairobi)

On 19 April 2023, the Accountability for Gender Equality in Education (“AGEE”) project team hosted a three-hour, virtual workshop with ten participants representing six non-profit organisations working in Kenya. The six organisations were involved in four of the seven Girls’ Education Challenge (“GEC”) projects active in Kenya between April 2017 and March 2023. GEC has two streams of work: (i) GEC-T (transitions), with a strong focus on improving literacy, numeracy and life skills, and supporting girls to seek out and secure their full potential; and (ii) the Leave No Girl Behind initiative with aims to reach highly marginalised girls with essential interventions to provide literacy and numeracy and skills relevant for life and work. See [here](#) for more information.

The AGEE framework for measuring gender equality in education is being developed through participatory consultations with key practitioners in education institutions, governments, civil society organisations, and bilateral and multilateral organisations working on gender and education. See [here](#) for more information. In this workshop, the AGEE team engaged with the Kenya-based teams in consultation around the AGEE framework, and how it might facilitate measuring and sustaining girls’ education projects in Kenya. The goal of the workshop was not to review specific GEC projects, but for workshop participants to share their experiences and lessons learned delivering GEC projects, and generate wider thinking about gender equality and sustainability in education in Kenya.

The aims and activities of the workshop included:

- Provide an overview of the AGEE project and framework, including how it was developed and where it is going.
- Discuss how the AGEE framework could support girls’ education projects in Kenya, with a group activity to discuss and share initial comments and feedback on key concepts.
- Discuss opportunities and challenges for developing a project level dashboard for evaluating gender equality in education in Kenya, with a group activity to discuss some of the measures/ indicators projects could select, under each domain, in Kenya.
- Discuss sustainability and the different ways to understand, measure, and support sustaining girls’ education in Kenya.

During **introductions**, workshop participants outlined **key priorities for girls’ education in Kenya**, which included:

- Addressing the complex barriers that girls face at multiple levels (individual, school, community and systems) that present different challenges at different magnitudes.
- Addressing negative gender cultural norms that prioritise girls doing household chores or generating income for the household rather than learning or going to school.
- Recognising that multiple stakeholders and community support is critical; there needs to be holistic approaches and timely interventions, such as incremental delivery, to keep girls in education and their communities engaged.
- Including girls more meaningfully in project/ programme planning; not implementing projects without first talking directly to girls; not acting without asking about their interests, needs, and experiences.

- Providing opportunities and safe places, such as girls' clubs, that build confidence, self-esteem and address challenges unique to gender.
- Acknowledging that we must address issues of climate change and livelihoods to achieve gender and social inclusion, especially when working with the most marginalised populations in Kenya.
- Recognising that one solution may not apply across the entire country due to vast differences in, for example, cultural practices or economic barriers; Context matters and what may apply in one region may not work in another region in Kenya.
- Engaging young women and girls as social actors and change agents rather than treating them as victims or beneficiaries; support opportunities for girls to generate their ideas, pathways and solutions.
- Recognising that access to education alone will not generate desired impact, especially among out-of-school girls; there are needs for holistic approaches and grassroots movements that address, for example, girls' caring responsibilities, community support, school dropout culture, sexual and reproductive health information, psychical support and skills training, environmental impacts, etc.

Following a brief overview presentation of the AGEE project and framework, participants were divided into breakout groups to discuss **initial comments and feedback** on the AGEE framework, the six domains, and key concepts. General and domain specific comments were shared, which are outlined below.

General comments on framework structure, governance and mechanisms:

While most found the framework useful, some also raised questions about data collection and management of a dashboard. It was shared that some of the indicators, especially in the outcomes domain, may be out of project scope, or managed by different government departments, which could create challenges for project teams.

Additional questions were raised about governance and oversight responsibilities, including who will coordinate, update and verify the information in a dashboard.

Several participants felt that the AGEE framework, and a dashboard, will require 'buy-in' from government, and politicians will need to create policy to support its implementation. Political resistance could create challenges to implement and maintain a dashboard.

Specific comments related to each domain:

Some highlighted **resources** as an important domain, citing that resources often determine how outcomes and results are achieved. It was shared that a focus on resources seems particularly important to achieve a wide scope of aims, such as those set out by the AGEE framework but that projects may have less oversight over some of these processes.

Some highlighted **values** as a useful domain because of its focus on challenging social norms and social barriers that may hinder girls' access to education projects in Kenya.

Participants underscored the importance of the **opportunities** domain, and particularly its aspects on policy. It was noted that opportunities domain captures vital aspects of girls' education project level work in Kenya.

It was further suggested that the opportunities domain should be expanded to also capture threats or barriers to opportunities. It was noted these are not well considered in the domain at present.

Some noted that the **participation in education** domain could also consider girls' voices, how girls are able to influence policy, and have their priorities/interests addressed in education.

Some participants underscored the importance of addressing teachers and teacher trainings within the **knowledge, understanding and skills** domain, especially at the project level, and the role of teachers in deciding what is taught, how it is taught, and how gender stereotypes in education can be perpetuated by teachers.

Participants shared that there was not sufficient time to discuss all aspects of the **outcomes** domain but many made general points concerning difficulties around data collection and governance related to this domain at the project level.

Mapping GEC MEL to AGEE domains and measurement:

After a break, the AGEE team presented some initial findings based on an early review of the GEC FM's 2022 monitoring and evaluation (log) framework and some GEC reporting documents. This exercise resulted in a list of suggestive project-level indicators for each AGEE domain.

Participants were divided into two breakout groups to **discuss indicators and measurement** in specific domains, and how these may be applied to projects in Kenya. Participants were asked to consider any relevant and known measures/ indicators available at project level, any potential or missing measures/ indicators that could be included in current or future projects, and any 'out of scope' or irrelevant measures/ indicators at the project level. Group 1 discussed resources, values and opportunities and Group 2 discussed participation in education, knowledge, understanding and skills, and outcomes.

Group 1 shared that each of the three domains, **resources, values and opportunities**, should be expanded to include measures on parental involvement and household support, and how caregivers are involved in access to quality education for girls.

Group 1 commented on the measure for financing education (e.g., allocated budget as % of GDP), noting this requires additional indicators on utilisation that capture when resources are allocated and how allocations are spent (e.g., on curriculum development, WASH facilities, sanitary towels, etc.). It was shared how delays in resource allocation can deny services that interfere with quality education for girls, and how projects operated.

Group 1 also noted that the **values** and **opportunities** domains need to reference child and girls' safeguarding, and the school policies needed to support it.

In discussions on **opportunities**, the group shared how various stakeholders influence policy decisions and delivery of education at different levels (national, regional, local). This raised questions around how different stakeholders, and their conflicting perspectives, may create data collection issues for the framework.

Some participants in Group 1 shared how the framework's holistic data set could support project teams if it provided clear, context-specific information relating to crises. For example, a common question among project teams working with out-of-schools girls is: *at what point does school drop-out occur?* The AGEE framework could collect this data (which is not captured by national education databases), which could then be shared between projects in counties facing similar challenges.

Group 2 discussed **participation in education, knowledge, understanding and skills, and outcomes**. The group noted available data for **participation in education** such as school enrolment and completion rates at different levels (e.g., primary, secondary, tertiary), but also shared that this domain should capture barriers faced by girls at each level, such as the soft skills required to transition between levels, and access to sexual and reproductive health education. Missing indicators raised by Group 2 related to girls' agency to participate in education, TVET and alternative pathways, and girls' preparedness for work and employability.

When discussing the **knowledge, understanding and skills** domain, Group 2 noted existing indicators on numeracy and literacy rates, sexual and reproductive health, and life skills education (e.g., self-esteem and aspirations). The "[My Better World](#)" project was shared as a good practice example. The group also explained that since the pandemic, some project teams are considering measures on mental health, mental preparedness and effective mentorship, which seem to sit under the knowledge, understanding and skills domain.

There was some discussion on individualised data on children's skillsets or abilities, which is currently missing and could be useful to track progress and outcomes of each child. It was noted that specialised health and psychological tests are available at the individual level, but these seem out of scope for a girls' education project.

Group 2 participants noted insufficient time to discuss the **outcomes** domain because it includes a myriad of intersecting issues and factors. While wider social determinants influence project design and delivery, and must be considered, the collection of this data seemed out of scope and beyond the capabilities of project level staff.

In **closing**, the AGEE team provided a brief introduction and some initial thinking around how the AGEE framework may facilitate efforts to sustain girls' education projects in Kenya. Workshop participants were asked if they would be willing to engage in next steps of the research and most agreed to continue with the collaboration.

The agreed **next steps** include:

- (i) A working paper on measuring and sustaining girls' education in Kenya, based on reflections and learnings from this workshop and future engagements. The working paper will be published on the AGEE website and promoted in global education forums and conferences such as the UK Education and Development Forum (UKFIET);
- (ii) Further exploration for potentially piloting an AGEE project dashboard in Kenya; and
- (iii) Any other ideas suggested by workshop participants.

Participants were thanked and the workshop closed.

Appendix E: Semi-structured interview guide

Note: The questions in this semi-structured interview guide were adapted for global, UK-based and Kenya-based participants

Name:

Title:

of years working at the organization:

Specializations/ areas of focus within organisation:

Specializations/ areas of focus of organisation:

- 1) **How did your organization get involved with the GEC and girls' education work? Are you still working in girls' education, why or why not?**
- 2) **Describe generally the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) processes for measuring and evaluating the work of your organisation and/or the GEC project in particular (especially if the processes are different).**
 - Who is involved? How does it work? What processes are involved?
- 3) **Describe your experience of managing the GEC project before and during the pandemic, commenting specifically on the MEL tools used.**
 - How did the pandemic alter/change the context in which you worked?
 - In what ways did you change or adapt your activities during the pandemic? After the pandemic?
 - Did you make any changes to the MEL processes/framework? Yes/no, and why?
 - Do you have any key lessons learned from these experiences? Have any lessons changed how you design/delivery/manage/measure girls' education projects today?
- 4) **Have your understandings or meanings of 'sustainability' changed over the course of the GEC project? During your time at the organisation?**
 - Do you have projects today with specific goals/objectives to address sustainability? If yes, please explain. Ask for specific examples where possible.
 - Are any of these goals/objectives reflected in your MEL Framework? If yes, please explain.
- 5) **Have your understandings or meanings of 'gender equality' changed over the course of the GEC project? During your time at the organisation?**
 - Do you have projects today with specific goals/objectives to address gender equality? If yes, please explain. Ask for specific examples where possible.
 - Are any of these goals/objectives reflected in your MEL Framework? If yes, please explain.
- 6) **Are there any metrics/measures you use that have been particularly useful (either for attracting funding or for reflecting desired outcomes, or both) in measuring sustainability and/or gender equality in education?**
 - How and when did you start using these measures?
- 7) **What does sustaining gender equality in education projects look like in Kenya, what should be sustained (e.g., gender relationships/power dynamics, social norms) and who/what is needed to accomplish this?**
 - What inputs and resources are needed?
 - Specific priorities and aims?
 - Types of activities?
 - Who needs to be involved?
 - What are the key barriers/ what needs to change to accomplish these aims?

- 8) **[Show AGEE Framework] This is the Framework that we have developed, which aims to capture data and information that could improve accountability around gender equality in education. Thinking specifically about your project measures/metrics and how you described sustaining girls' education projects, does this framework seem useful/ related to your work?**
- Does it support your vision and needs for achieving sustainability?
 - Which domains are helpful or problematic, and why?
 - What other data would they like to see collected / what needs to be collected, part of the monitoring on gender equality in education?
- 9) **If the AGEE framework was implemented in Kenya, how could it be used by individuals and organisations at the project level?**
- How could the framework fit into project level MEL processes?
 - Any suggestions for how it could be used by project level staff? NGOs? others?
 - Is there anything you are currently doing in relation to accountability in the SDGs that it could be interesting for us to know about?
- 10) **Is there anything else you would like to add, or comment on, that is important to this discussion on sustainability and gender equality but was not addressed in my questions?**