



# Transformational Empowerment of Adolescent Marginalised Girls in Malawi – TEAM Girl Malawi

## Midline Evaluation Report Summary

August 2022



## About TEAM

TEAM Girl Malawi focuses on the most marginalised girls and the unique support they need. The 5,000 girls enrolled in the project face complex barriers to education, including extreme poverty, early marriage and motherhood, household responsibilities, child labour, and disability. In community-based classes these out-of-school girls learn basic literacy, numeracy and livelihoods, while Girls' Clubs impart sexual and reproductive health knowledge, and develop resilience and self-esteem.

We are working with school leaders and government staff to make schools safer and more inclusive spaces. Community engagement is raising aspirations for marginalised girls while protecting them from abuse and child marriage. Our holistic support is empowering girls to choose their own pathway into mainstream education, vocational training or employment. By working through local government and in partnership with communities, we are creating the foundations for these changes to be sustained in the long term.

TEAM is a five-year project which began in 2018 and will run through until 2023. It is implemented by 5 partner organisations: Link Education International, Theatre for a Change, Supreme Sanitary Pads, CUMO Microfinance Ltd and CGA Technologies. It is funded by the UK Government through the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Girls' Education Challenge fund.

## The External Evaluation

In 2021, we invited School to School International, an external evaluator, to visit our project and explore where we have been most effective. The evaluation was designed to be forward looking, answering questions which would inform planning and implementation in the final 18 months of the project.

The evaluators focused on our first cohort of girls who had recently graduated from the two-year community-based education programme and were choosing their next steps. These girls were also evaluated at the beginning of the project so we were able to understand how far they've come despite the challenges of COVID-19 and school closures in addition to their existing barriers to education. While the project also enrolls some boys, girls' experiences are the primary focus of the evaluation because of the unique challenges they face in accessing a quality education.

Through surveys and interviews with girls, carers, teachers, community members and government officials, the evaluators gained a deep and reliable snapshot of the project's progress. We have summarised the results of their report study here.

## Report Findings

### Teaching and Learning

*Intervention:* Foundational literacy, numeracy and life skills are key to improved life chances. TEAM has worked with the Ministry of Education to develop an accelerated curriculum which is delivered for three hours a day, four days a week. Meeting times and places were arranged in collaboration with the local community, based on what works best for learners.

The project engages secondary school graduates from the local community to become facilitators, and provides them with training to teach marginalised learners. This includes a focus on gender and disability, using locally available resources in lesson delivery and adapting their approach to support each child. Ongoing mentorship of facilitators by project staff and local trained primary school teachers, along with the provision of guidance and materials, allows for continuous reflection and improvement. The teacher-student ratio was set at a maximum of 1-15 to allow for individualised support.

Disability assessments were conducted and assistive devices distributed to support learners with impairments to engage in learning. Provision of childcare, food and sanitary wear is also integrated. During COVID-19 we developed home learning materials and small group classes to ensure continuation of learning.

*Findings - Learning:* The evaluation found that **88% of girls improved in reading and 86% improved in maths**, which is particularly notable given the challenges and upheaval posed by COVID-19 and school closures.

*“I didn’t even know how to write my own name, but now, I know how to write it”  
- Learner*

Perhaps unsurprisingly the learning gains were not distributed equally, with girls performing at a higher level in maths than they do in reading and older girls generally performing better than younger girls. Girls with at least one functional disability registered slightly lower scores than the average for the overall group but still made good improvements in both literacy and numeracy. Explanations offered for why some learners might be struggling more than others included learner absenteeism and having little or no prior schooling, as well as the teaching proficiency of facilitators, particularly in relation to supporting learners with disabilities.

*Findings - Attendance:* Learners faced complex barriers to education prior to enrolling in TEAM. **96% of girls and 89% of community members reported that the project had increased access to education** by removing or reducing some of these barriers.

They cited that TEAM has helped overcome challenges including not having money for school, needing to work, having a child or being pregnant, health conditions, personal safety and the perception of being too old for school. When the girls and their caregivers were asked about the top programme activities were which supported regular attendance at lessons, they cited take-home work, teachers accommodating learners needing extra support, and the flexible location and timing of classes. Additionally, girls cited the importance of small group study during Covid-19 closures and caregivers cited provision of childcare.

*Findings - Teaching:* The project had a marked impact on facilitators' ability to teach in a participatory, inclusive and varied manner to support the engagement of all children. **80% of the sampled facilitators reported using at least one of these child-centred teaching methods**, with a particular focus on developing activities for different learning styles. Respondents also recognised the great emphasis the project has placed on supporting and integrating children with disabilities and how this contributes to delivering a quality education. Despite receiving training and follow-up support on inclusive teaching methods, facilitators noted that they continue to find this aspect of their role challenging.

*"The programme has really helped...to reveal those disabled that were kept in houses instead of going to school. Disabled children know that they have the right to education, and to play" – Community Member*

*Reflection:* We believe that our approach to inclusive education, in addition to our adaptations to learning during COVID-19, were effective in supporting learning in the classroom, at home and throughout school closures. However, we must ensure that no learner gets left behind, and we have made a number of adaptations in response to the evaluation findings. To support learners who have not made progress in Chichewa and English, we extended daily learning time specifically for reading and writing practice. To strengthen teaching quality, we developed a comprehensive capacity strengthening plan for facilitators including specific support for learners with disabilities. Finally, we continue to address absenteeism through learner follow up and community sensitisation.

## Wellbeing

*Intervention:* Confidence and self-esteem are essential for girls to pursue their education. Learners enrolled in TEAM are supported to realise their sexual and reproductive health rights through delivery of weekly Girls' Club workshops. The clubs use an interactive approach to promote personal development skills and resilience, with topics covered ranging from early pregnancy to child rights, HIV prevention and menstruation. The clubs are taught by local primary school teachers who have been specially trained in delivering life skills in a participatory and engaging manner.

*Findings:* the evaluation found that **83% of girls showed improved life skills**. This echoes project data which registered improvement across self-confidence, self-esteem and sexual and reproductive health knowledge, attitudes and skills.

Similarly to findings in literacy and numeracy, older girls had a greater improvement in life skills than younger girls. Interestingly, girls who had a lot of responsibilities in the home or experienced bullying prior to joining the TEAM programme showed less improvement. It is reasonable to assume that low attendance of these girls at Girls Clubs is one of the contributing factors.

Many respondents viewed the training on sexual reproductive health to be valuable and impactful in reducing pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. However, this content is sensitive within the Malawian context and some community members were concerned that the material was either not age appropriate or was encouraging girls to engage in sex because they knew how to do so safely.

*Reflections:* We believe that building life skills knowledge, agency and resilience is imperative to improve girls' life chances. The project is very mindful of the sensitivities around some of the Girls Club content and has separate sessions for older girls on some topics. We will continue to consult extensively on the curriculum and age-appropriate delivery.

## Keeping Girls Safe

*Intervention:* As part of a holistic package of support to learners and to leave a positive legacy after the end of the project, TEAM strengthens community-based child protection systems. Through training and assisted case management we are building the capacity of community and district structures to undertake reporting and support of children who experience abuse. We also use interactive radio and drama to build community support for the rights of marginalised young people and promote good safeguarding practices.

*Findings:* **94% of girls believed that they would be supported if they reported abuse**, suggesting that the project's wider interventions to keep girls safe and support their wellbeing are having an impact. **Include stats from IO 3.2 Percentage of community members who show improvement in support for Child Protection and IO 3.4 Percentage of girls who report an increase in 'agreeing they would report abuse if they experienced it' once STS update the logframe.**

*"The data provided a wealth of clear, unequivocal responses about how child protection had improved since TEAM Girl Malawi began operating... Respondents provided detailed, specific examples and stories which make this one of the most dependable, evidence-supported areas of the qualitative investigation." – External Evaluation*

*Reflection:* We are delighted to find that improving child protection is where community members have most clearly felt the project's impact, and will continue to work at community and district level to embed the sustainability of the intervention.

## Sustainability

*Intervention:* TEAM strives to engage local communities and work through existing community and district structures when implementing and adapting the project, which we hope translates to a high level of community ownership and support for girls' education. At community level we undertake sensitisation meetings, feedback sessions, open days, training on child protection and specific engagement with key groups like community leaders, parents and spouses. At national level we work with the Ministry of Education to develop and adapt the curriculum, learning materials, and facilitator training, and to ensure we are aligned with government policies and priorities. We also share learning with the government and other partners at technical working groups.

*Findings:* The evaluation found that **TEAM activities are embedded in community-level and district-level processes, structure and staffing**. Nearly all respondents felt positive about community ownership over improving education for girls. They gave examples of community engagement activities and the ways in which community-based institutions are directly involved in the project. These included following up on

learner absenteeism, engaging parents to support girls' education and intervening in early marriage arrangements.

While district level stakeholders were seen to be working hand in hand with project staff, there appeared to be a knowledge gap at national level. Ministry of Education stakeholders did not know the details of how the project worked at district and community level, and these levels understood little of how the project engaged at national level.

*"We are part of these teams as they train the facilitators and as we work with the communities, they are always together, and they are making an impact together---they are just one in the work" – District Official*

**Reflection:** We are pleased that our efforts at community and district level appear to be making a real difference - supporting TEAM girls to access a safe, quality education as well as shifting attitudes towards girls' education in the future. We recognise we have more to do to engage national-level stakeholders and will continue to engage in technical working groups, meetings and conferences on complementary basic education. At the next evaluation point, we will ensure that the key individuals who we partner with at national level are included in data collection so sustainability at national level is captured fully.

## Next Steps

TEAM staff have worked with the external evaluator to draw out the key lessons of the midline evaluation, where we can celebrate success and where we have more to do. Findings have been presented to national and district government stakeholders, and recommendations have been fed into our existing adaptive management process. A summarised version of the report has been presented to TEAM learners and teachers for their knowledge and feedback. We look forward to developing the project over the coming 18 months in support of some of Malawi's most marginalised out of school girls.