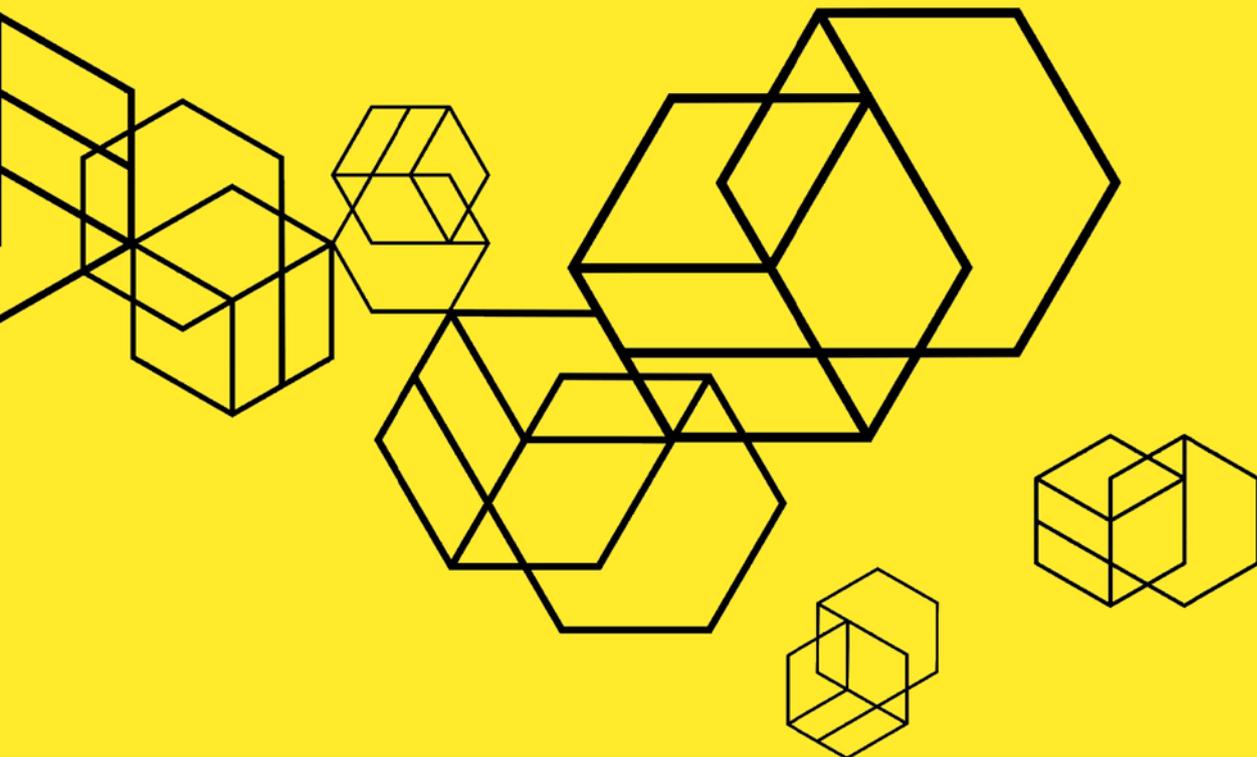




**SOCIAL
INNOVATION
COMMUNITY**

T4.1: Girls' Education Challenge

Young Foundation





T4.1: Girls' Education Challenge

ABSTRACT

This case analyses the processes of learning by which the UK Department for International Development has evaluated the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC). The Challenge Fund was launched in 2012 with the intention to disburse £300 million to 37 different projects across 18 different countries. This is an example of where a government intervention is utilising the tools and methods of social innovation- namely the challenge fund model- in order to engender social change. It is therefore an example of government operating as a social innovation 'intermediary'. This is a very large project constituting the largest donor funded programme on girls' education. The initial business case for the project stated that the monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEAL) processes were planned to be ambitious because of the size of the project, its innovative character and the opportunities to fill gaps in knowledge for future policy makers and donors.

The MEAL had three different dimensions¹: (1) An independent external evaluation conducted by a consortium led by COFFEY International- selected through competitive tender (2) The Fund Manager, a consortium led by PwC, who will support projects in monitoring and evaluation (3) Individual projects also have the responsibility to collect some of their own monitoring and evaluation data.

The programme was subject to logical frameworks from the start and the business case defined a set of expected results and critical success criteria. The project was also subject to continual learning and adaptation processes which meant that learning could inform the functioning of the project, this has been managed through an annual review process.

Key aspects of learning have been:

- Assisting in developing the broader evidence base around best practice in extending educational provision in developing country contexts.
- Understanding emerging critical intervention areas within education
- Learning from the programme implementation and in order to be able to adapt the programme to achieve better outcomes. In particular learning how to better adapt frameworks to context.

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE

¹ Girls Education Challenge (2012) Business Case v.4. http://iati.dfid.gov.uk/iati_documents/3717197.odt



THE CONTEXT

The Girls' Education Challenge is a £355 million fund provided by the Department for International Development. The fund was established in order to help improve the lives of up to one million of the world's most marginalised girls and young women².

Globally 62 million girls between the ages of 6 and 15 are not in school³. Indeed 16 million girls between the ages 6 and 11 will never enter school, compared to 8 million boys⁴. This inequity provides a very clear reason to focus on the gaps in educational provision. Moreover there is a sizeable literature suggesting that the benefits of educating young women outweighs the benefits of educating young men, particularly when the impact on fertility and the next generation is taken into account⁵⁶.

It is estimated that in low income countries every dollar invested in schooling, and particularly in educating girls, generates \$10 dollars in earnings and health benefits⁷. In addition there is some evidence (based on Solow-growth frameworks) that gender gaps in education have a large and statistically significant impact upon GDP⁸⁹.

We must caveat these findings to acknowledge the inherent difficulties in trying to quantify the social and economic benefits of women's education, however there is now significant data available on this issue to suggest that there are indeed positive impacts.

With this in mind, the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) was developed. The business case for the project states:

"The rationale for this proposal to invest an additional £355 million on girls' education rests on a large body of evidence suggesting that improved female education is causally related to economic growth, reduced poverty, significant reductions in under 5 and maternal mortality and a range of other social and

²Griffiths, Craft, Batran, & Edouard. (2015) Girls' Education Challenge Fund: Process Review Briefing. Coffey.

³ World Bank Group Education (2016) Global Practice Smarter Education Systems for Brighter Futures. Reaching Girls, Transforming Lives

⁴ World Bank Group Education (2016) Global Practice Smarter Education Systems for Brighter Futures. Reaching Girls, Transforming Lives

⁵Klasen, S., & Lamanna, F. (2009). The impact of gender inequality in education and employment on economic growth: new evidence for a panel of countries. *Feminist economics*, 15(3), 91-132.

⁶Hill, M. A., & King, E. (1995). Women's education and economic well-being. *Feminist Economics*, 1(2), 21-46.

⁷ The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity (2016) The Learning Generation: Investing in education for a changing world. Executive Summary. Available here: http://report.educationcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Learning_Generation_Exec_Summary.pdf

⁸King, E. M., & Hill, M. A. (Eds.). (1997). *Women's education in developing countries: Barriers, benefits, and policies*. World Bank Publications.

⁹Knowles, S., Lorgelly, P. K., & Owen, P. D. (2002). Are educational gender gaps a brake on economic development? Some cross-country empirical evidence. *Oxford economic papers*, 54(1), 118-149.



*environmental benefits.*¹⁰

The project has been implemented in 18 different countries, many of which exhibit characteristics of complex emergencies (such as conflict and/or disasters). The project attempts to target some of the worlds most marginalised girls and therefore almost half of the girls targeted live in unstable contexts, such as Afghanistan, Somalia and South Sudan, in which access to education is tied to issues of security.

In addition the GEC has had to adapt some very extreme conditions including the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa and the earthquakes in Nepal¹¹. The difficulty of negotiating some of these situations has called for a particularly adaptive approach to management of projects, as well as to MEAL¹².

From a UK Government perspective DFID has been one of the most progressive departments when it comes to building an evidence base with which to make decisions. The UK's aid budget is consistently under scrutiny and therefore looking to demonstrate value for money. In 2011 the Independent Commission on Aid Impact (ICAI) was developed in order to scrutinise British aid. This combined with the stewardship of Chris Whitty, DFID's Director of Research and Evidence, has led the department to take an approach, particularly to this flagship programme, which is focused on learning and on evidence generation and use.

This case, then in line with the departmental context and the wider need to facilitate greater access to and quality of education for girls, has put in place an intricate and multifaceted process of monitoring, evaluation and learning.

THE CASE

The Girls' Education Challenge project began in 2012 when the Department for International Development pledged a challenge fund in order to improve educational provision for one million girls and young women.

The GEC is a form of intermediary support that focuses particularly on supporting and scaling innovative ways of improving access to and quality of education. The articulation of support in the form of a challenge fund can be viewed as the direct use of a common social innovation tool. Challenge Funds are frequently used along with approaches like acceleration, incubation, and co-design in order to foster social innovation.

¹⁰ Girls Education Challenge (2012) Business Case v.4.

http://iati.dfid.gov.uk/iati_documents/3717197.odt

¹¹ Girls Education Challenge (2015) Annual Review- Summary Sheet. DFID

¹² Girls' Education Challenge (2016) What we are learning about learning. DFID



The fund operates a four-year implementation cycle and is designed to try and ensure that high quality delivery and monitoring are built into the delivery of each project.

The structure of the project includes:

- **Fund managers:** The funds are outsourced to a consortium, a common donor practice, due to the high administration costs. Outsourcing is conducted through competitive bidding. DFID has selected management consulting companies such as PwC, KPMG, Landon Mills, Coffey International and Nathan Associates. There are two consortiums working on the project: one is responsible for management and the other for external evaluation and therefore learning.
- **Internal GEC team in DFID:** The DFID team provides strategic oversight. An independent provider is contracted to monitor and evaluate the functions of the Fund and assess its effectiveness.
- **Evaluation consortium:** An external consortium was convened in order to analyse programme performance from an external position.

The DFID contract for the GEC sets out clear design principles for the Fund, with justifications. It is supposed to be administered in a way that is¹³:

- Competitive – to drive high performance
- Responsive – so the GEC can adapt to emerging evidence and fund a variety of projects
- Structured – with clear criteria and incentives to derive the full benefits of scale
- Straight-forward – with a clear rationale for its model and approach, keeping the level of complexity to the minimum compatible with achieving the Fund's aims.

This project operates on a payment-by-result dimension wherein projects must achieve certain targets in order to access the full funds. This additionally pushes up the need to ensure that a robust way of measuring outcomes is delivered. It also increases the need for projects to learn from the various monitoring and evaluating processes (e.g. the baselining).

The fund is administered in three streams, or 'windows' across 37 projects in 18 countries. Whilst each of these windows work towards the same high-level GEC outcomes around improved retention, attendance and learning for marginalised girls, each window has a specific focus on a particular way or stage of innovating

In order to build an innovation eco-system the GEC approach recognises that different kinds of innovation are necessary. In the first place support is required for approaches that are totally new. Secondly support is needed for those ideas that are looking to scale. Thirdly support is needed in order to build partnerships of people who wouldn't ordinarily work together, as collaboration of unlikely

¹³ Murray et. al (2015) Case Study 6: The Girls' Education Challenge. Kings Fund.
<http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/making-change-possible/girls-education-challenge-fund>



partners can be a key driver of social innovation. The GEC recognises that stimulation may be necessary to encourage new partners to engage and that some projects need lower, initial levels of support to demonstrate their effectiveness. This is why GEC adopted the multi-window approach which are structured as:

INNOVATION:

Within the Innovation Window, the GEC awarded £30 million across 19 projects that test new ideas to support marginalised girls to learn.

These innovations could include technological solutions, the development of new partnerships, applying successful approaches to new contexts, communities or age groups, and engaging women in decision-making.

The innovation window aims to support 246,000 marginalised girls across 12 of the GEC target countries¹⁴.

STEP CHANGE:

The step-change stream scales up successful interventions that are already having a positive impact. Projects are chosen that complement innovative and well-evidenced projects that already have agreement from state authorities and demonstrate sustainability beyond the life of the Girls' Education Challenge.

As of 2015 there were 14 step-change programmes put in place through ngos and charities (including: CARE International; Save the Children UK; PLAN International)

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS:

This stream is focused on creating new partnerships with the private sector including: Discovery Communications; The Coca-Cola Company; Avanti Communication; and Ericsson.

Up to £15m of match-funding is provided to support Strategic Partnerships between Department for International Development (DFID) and private sector Lead Partners

¹⁴ Griffiths, Bisiaux, Poli, & Greenwood (2015) Girls Education Challenge, Innovation Window Baseline Report. Coffey.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/425338/innovation-window-Baseline-Report-fulla2.pdf



working with other organisations who want to engage in this important area. This has proved to be a challenging stream and as of a review in September 2015 there will be further consideration of how to take this further.

The projects that are supported are selected through a process that has been designed for transparency. They are each assessed according to their ability to develop and implement innovative ways to:

- 01 Increase the number of girls in school
- 02 Increase the amount of time girls spend in school
- 03 Improve the quality of the education that is received.

The GEC funds a wide range of stakeholders from NGOs and charities to the private sector and has a particular focus on establishing partnerships, particularly with the private sector.

This project was originally envisaged as an 8-year programme, with the first phase planned to span from 2012-2016, however the first stage has now been extended to 2017 in order to adjust for delays in delivering the monitoring and evaluation requirements.

The aim of the project is not just to find new and innovative ways of tackling the gaps in girls' education but also to capture and share significant learning on how to improve access and quality of education for girls. As a result of this, significant time and resource has been put in to understanding the performance of the challenge funds, learning and adapting to that knowledge.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE LEARNING PROCESS

The project is an example of a very rigorous analysis of intermediary support. It has not only put in place good processes for baselining and for capacity building but it has also built in scope for adaptation to interim findings. We are currently at the stage where findings have formed the basis for recommendations and these must feed in to the project.

AIMS OF THE LEARNING

From the very earliest stage of the project there has been in-depth consideration of how the monitoring and learning functions should work. This led to a programme design which had highly embedded research and learning. This was put in place in order to feed first three of the main learning aims:



- Assisting in developing the broader evidence base around best practice in extending educational provision in developing country contexts.
- Understanding emerging critical needs within all of the education projects
- Learning from the programme implementation in order to be able to adapt the programme to achieve better outcomes. In particular learning how to better adapt frameworks to context.
- Applying learning to future projects.

METHODOLOGY

The structure of the monitoring, evaluation and learning of this project appears like this:

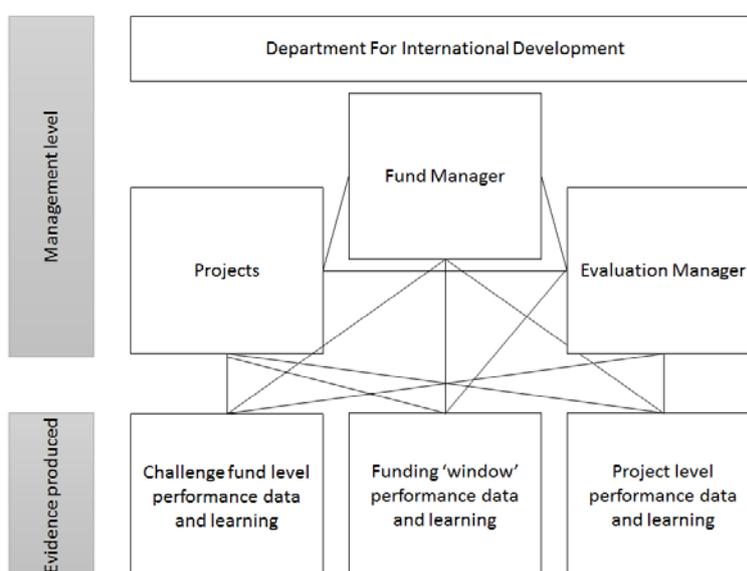


Figure 1: Evidence gathering structures

The monitoring, evaluation and learning works at multiple levels in this project. It happens at the fund level as well as at the programme level. The MEAL framework, therefore, had three different dimensions¹⁵:

- 01 **The Fund Manager** is in place to support projects in monitoring and evaluation. They lay out acceptable methodologies for each programme evaluation which is tailored to the kind of project. In addition managers lay out requirements on issues like sample sizes and targets.
- 02 **Individual projects** have a responsibility to collect some of their own monitoring and evaluation data. Each project must have a clear theory of change by which their

¹⁵ Ibid.



intervention will deliver and specify a number of realistic outcomes over a given timeframe. These outcomes form the basis of a payment-by-results framework. Projects are kept under regular review to ensure that inputs in their project application's theory of change are in place. These take the form of quantitative measures like the number of school textbooks purchased and qualitative measures like gender-specific teaching. Innovation window projects and partnership projects are not subjected to the same payment by results requirements, because they focus on discovering new approaches that could be scaled up and rolled out in the future.

- 03 **Independent Evaluation Manager**, this was conducted by a consortium led by COFFEY International- selected through competitive tender. The evaluation managers conduct baselining across the different windows as well as supporting the projects and providing a broader view across the project as a whole.

These three streams work together in order to ensure that there is enough data to analyse the following three dimensions of the project:

- 01 Project performance: Information and learning is collected that focuses on the performance of projects and the extent to which the projects meet the objectives of the fund, namely increasing access to and quality of girls' education. It also seeks, where appropriate, to understand project context and reasons behind projects struggling to meet their objectives or to fulfil their monitoring obligations.
- 02 Funding window performance: Each funding window goes through a baselining and evaluation process in order to learn how each of the funding windows are performing and to gather learning on the processes required in order to effectively foster the types of projects in each window.
- 03 Challenge fund performance: The fund is also reviewed on a higher level in order to understand how the project is functioning.

The mission to build the evidence base out of this work means that there are attempts to include programme level customised research methodologies as well as cross project comparable data and higher level process based evidence. In addition, the external evaluators use a customised approach at the funding 'window' level. This means in practice that different types of methodologies are used for the different kinds of projects being funded. A project in the step-change window can be subjected to more rigorous testing than one in the 'innovation' window. As a result of this different methodological approaches are used in both.

The independent evaluation, conducted by the independent evaluation manager, as already stated, uses a number of different methods including case studies, qualitative interviews, quantitative surveys and ethnographic thematic research in four countries. In some cases randomised control trials have been used in order to try and establish the effect size of interventions. However, this has been used where appropriate and was clearly not applicable to every setting or for every window.

LEARNING AND FINDINGS



Whilst the project has not yet been completed it is the case that a number of findings have been reported both in annual review and in the external evaluation. This learning is being incorporated into the project in order to improve performance. Below are a selection of findings from the project up to this stage¹⁶¹⁷.

Four intervention areas have emerged in early learning as critical across all projects. They are:

- Securing foundational learning skills in literacy and numeracy
- Ensuring teachers have appropriate skills, positive attitudes and continued support to improve
- Increasing girls' self-esteem to engender support from peers and family
- Providing economic support for communities, parents and girls.

Projects have struggled to understand and address the complexities of educational marginalisation.

Projects were supposed to target the 'most' marginalised however there was a lack of information about levels of marginalisation. Where projects defined their target groups narrowly this, in some cases, resulted in difficulties addressing the full complexity of marginalisation.

An inception phase was badly needed in order to meet the demands of the anticipated outcomes.

The inception phase would have been useful from both an evaluation and a management perspective. When a complex programme is in place that demands multiple levels of monitoring and evaluation, it is necessary to design and set up the management systems from the start in order to facilitate this. The time scale on this programme meant that this was not in place and this presented problems including confusion for applicants as well as knock on effects throughout the contracting and baseline stages.

Monitoring and evaluation can be conducted even in challenging contexts as long as it is properly managed and the capacity is present.

Consistent application of rigorous standards is possible even in the most difficult settings. However, it is often resource intensive and can require significant amounts of 'hand holding'. M&E capacity has in some cases been lacking and this has had the potential to undermine the quality of the evidence produced.

¹⁶Griffiths, Craft, Batran, & Edouard. (2015) Girls' Education Challenge Fund: Process Review Briefing. Coffey.

¹⁷ Girls Education Challenge (2015) Annual Review- Summary Sheet. DFID



Involving DFID Country offices is beneficial, even in this centrally funded project.

Country offices are frequently sources of knowledge. There was little role for country offices in the initial plans for the project however it was found that when officers from country offices were engaged there were positive outcomes.

The strategic partnerships window has been difficult to implement and new approaches are needed for engaging with private stakeholders.

Private companies frequently have different methods and processes of working than INGOs and this will require that there are adaptations made to the way that they are engaged with.

Payment by results can lead to robust evidence of results but context must be considered in implementation.

Whilst payment-by-results was an effective way of raising the level of rigour in evaluation, many smaller organisations, or those working in fragile contexts, struggle with payment-by-results. Some had worries about the ethical, security and practical issues surrounding payment-by-results requirements such as around the use of control groups.

LEARNING PROCESSES

The GEC has a number of processes by which learning takes place. First of all, this occurs through the work that the fund managers do with programmes. This is supplemented with reporting that takes place along the way, both external and internal.

In addition, the GEC, along with the Centre for Education Innovations is hosting an online community of practice for members of GEC-funded projects to share knowledge and learning from their own experiences. Members can contact one another, ask questions and participate in discussions.

There are also indications that the learning from this programme is being incorporated into the development of future projects.¹⁸

3. DISCUSSION

There is very little research that looks to analyse the monitoring, evaluation and learning practices of intermediary support for social innovation. The social innovation community is relatively new and whilst

¹⁸ Girls' Education Challenge (2016) What we are learning about learning. DFID



there is now a greater focus on understanding processes and practices there are few tools in place to help people to do this more effectively. The EU 'Tepsie' project looked at research on intermediaries and found:

*"Within the literature we reviewed there is a lack of research on the role of intermediaries, federations and umbrella organisations in the spread and growth of social innovations. In particular it is important to understand how best to structure these intermediary organisations so that they can be most effective."*¹⁹

There are some fields within social innovation where there is a greater emphasis on monitoring, evaluation and learning. If we look for example at impact investing there are a large number of tools available that help people to learn. IRIS metrics, for example provides a large number of tools that impact investors can use to understand the performance of an enterprise. However other forms of intermediary support have less well developed monitoring, evaluation and learning tools available.

The EU funded project Transition utilised a case study based analysis in order to draw lessons about how best to support and scale social innovation transnationally. Indeed the case study approach has tended to be the most popular form of data used when attempting to understand how social innovation intermediaries are performing. This is perhaps understandable given the very context specific nature of innovative projects. Certainly if we look at the GEC there has been an understanding that the innovation window requires different approaches to monitoring and learning that, for example, the step change window which is more focused upon scaling.

In addition, participatory and action research techniques are sometimes used in order to address issues that innovators may be facing throughout their support process. What is interesting in the way that the learning has functioned in this project is that it appears to have used case studies and an action learning style approach but they have also combined this with other qualitative and quantitative methods (including RCTs) and log-framing in order to build up a multifaceted evidence base that not only measures progress but vets the nature of that progress.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning processes are increasingly embedded into the development community. Development researchers have long utilised a wide variety of qualitative, quantitative and participatory methods to try and capture an understanding of how projects are implemented. This case

¹⁹TEPSIE, 'Social Innovation Theory and Research: A Summary of the Findings from TEPSIE.' A deliverable of the project: "The theoretical, empirical and policy foundations for building social innovation in Europe" (TEPSIE), European Commission – 7th Framework Programme, Brussels: European Commission, DG Research.



study can be seen to be a thorough- even by international development standards- analysis of intermediary support.

This case demonstrates the leading edge role that can be taken by government departments in producing evidence and learning around projects. The process of monitoring, evaluating and learning using the methods required by this project can be costly, and often is too expensive for organisations to bear. In the case of the GEC the cost of the M&E represents 5% of total grant disbursement²⁰ Operations of this size can be an efficient way of delivering learning for a number of other stakeholders when efforts to monitor and evaluate are effectively coordinated.

²⁰Brain, A., Gulrajani, N., & Mitchell, J. (2014). Meeting the challenge: How can enterprise challenge funds be made to work better. *Retrieved, 14, 2016.*