



# Evidence On Programmes That Have Supported School Return for Disadvantaged Adolescent Girls

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## Question

*What can we learn and what is the strength of evidence from programmes that have helped acutely marginalized out-of-school adolescent girls including young mothers and those with disabilities:*

- *Return to school*
- *Stay in schools*
- *Develop other foundational, vocational, or technical skills.*

## Contents

1. Summary
2. Background
3. Evidence from past practice and research
4. Conclusion
5. References

## 1. Summary

This paper collates evidence on promising programmes that have supported school return for disadvantaged out-of-school girls in Rwanda and in other comparable low-and-middle-income country contexts. The review found evidence showing that interventions that address financial barriers which keep girls out of school delivered through **cash transfers, stipends/fee waivers, and girls only scholarships can be effective in enhancing school return for disadvantaged girls**. In addition, there is a strong evidence base showing that **multi-faceted programmes** that integrate health education, foundational skill training, vocational training, and financial literacy are effective in supporting school return for disadvantaged adolescent girls. While results from systematic reviews show that girls clubs can be effective in supporting school retention for disadvantaged girls, there is limited evidence on effectiveness of clubs in supporting school return for disadvantaged girls. The review found very limited evidence on effectiveness of financial and multi-faceted interventions in supporting school return for disadvantaged girls with disabilities.

There is strong evidence from systematic reviews that **interventions addressing the inability of households to afford tuition and fees are effective in enhancing enrolment and attainment outcomes for disadvantaged adolescent girls** (Unterhalter, et al, 2014; Psaki, et al, 2022; Carvalho and Evans, 2022). Results from the evaluation of the Zomba cash transfer program in Malawi showed that the program had strong effects on re-enrolment of girls who had dropped out (Baird, Chirwa, Hoop Özler, 2016). In Ghana, findings from the Free Secondary Education Scholarship show that girls who received funding not only completed their secondary education but were also likely to enroll for tertiary education (Duflo, Dupas and Kremer, 2017).

**Multifaceted programmes that address multiple barriers disadvantaged out-of-school adolescent girls face are effective in enhancing school return and retention.** Such programmes integrate health education, foundational skill training, vocational training, and financial incentives to help girls re-enroll and stay in school (Rose, 2021, Firelight, 2019). In Rwanda for example, results from the evaluation of the Adolescent Girls Empowerment Initiative show that more than 115 girls who had dropped out due to early pregnancies were supported to re-enrol in formal education. In addition, 20 of girls with disabilities were enrolled in special schools, where they were taught basic literacy and sign language (Firelight, 2019).

Results from systematic reviews show that accelerated education programmes hold promise to improve learning outcomes especially foundational literacy and numeracy skills (Psaki, Haberland, Mench, Woyczynski, and Chuang, 2022). **However, there is limited evidence on their effectiveness in supporting school return for disadvantaged out-of-school girls.**

Key lessons learnt from systematic reviews and programmes that have supported school return for disadvantaged adolescent girls:

- Multifaceted interventions are more effective in supporting school return as they combine different interventions that address multiple vulnerabilities. However, it is difficult to separate and measure impact of each intervention component (Psaki, et al., 2022; Carvalho and Evans, 2022).
- There is limited evidence on programmes that have supported school return for girls with disabilities as well as those with children and this area needs further research.

## 2. Background

Realization of universal basic education for all is one of the key social development commitments for the Government of Rwanda in line with the constitutional requirement on the inherent right to education. To achieve this commitment, a nine-year Basic Education Policy was introduced in 2006, which expanded free and compulsory education from 6 years (P1-P6) to 9 years (P1-S3). This was broadened once more in 2011, with the Twelve-Year Basic Education Policy which ensured the provision of 12 years of free basic education (Navarrete & Omarshah, 2018). In 2008, the Government of Rwanda launched a girls' education policy with a view of promoting sustainable actions aimed at progressive elimination of gender disparities in education. While these initiatives have contributed to rapid quantitative gains in enrolment and transition rates, Rwanda is among the countries with the highest drop-out rates for girls in the region (ibid).

The overall aim of this review was to collate evidence on promising programmes that have supported school return and retention of disadvantaged out-of-school girls including those with disabilities and child mothers. The review draws on evidence from recent systematic reviews (Psaki, Haberland, Mench, Woyczynski, and Chuang, 2022; Unterhalter, North, Arnot, Lloyd, Moletsane, Murphy-Graham, Parkes, Saito, 2014; Rose, 2021; World Bank, 2020; Carvalho and Evans, 2022, Marcus, Gupta-Archer, Darcy, and Page, 2017; Population Council, 2018;) that provides a synthesis on **what works** to get girls into school and help them learn. A commentary on strength of evidence from each of the programmes reviewed in relation to findings from the systematic reviews is provided in each section.

## 3. International evidence

### What works in girls' education: evidence from systematic reviews

Disadvantaged adolescent girls face a number of challenges that affect their schooling and development of skills necessary for transition to secure and productive livelihoods. In low resource settings, gender discrimination and social norms take a heavy toll on marginalized girls' schooling opportunities leading to early marriage and drop out from school. Even when in school, girls are often vulnerable to gender-based violence which increases their risk of dropout and educational underachievement. As opportunities for development of technical and vocational skills often come towards the end or after secondary education, many marginalized girls are less likely to develop critical skills needed to for work. Supporting re-enrolment of out-of-school disadvantaged girls and their development of relevant technical and vocational skills is an important policy priority (Rose, 2021; Carvalho and Evans, 2022; Unterhalter, North, Arnot, Lloyd, Moletsane, Murphy-Graham, Parkes, Saito, 2014)

Results from recent systematic reviews about effective approaches to improving education outcomes for disadvantaged adolescent girls in low-and-middle-income countries show that interventions that **address financial barriers to schooling** such as inability to afford school levies are effective at addressing gender-related barriers to girls education and improving education outcomes for girls specifically on enrollment and attainment outcomes (Psaki, Haberland, Mench, Woyczynski, and Chuang, 2022). There is considerable evidence on how financial interventions should be delivered: These includes stipends, cash transfers, fee waivers, and provision of scholarships targeted specifically to disadvantaged adolescent girls (Carvalho and Evans, 2022). Such interventions can be more effective in enhancing enrolment and learning outcomes when supplemented with health interventions (Unterhalter, North, Arnot, Lloyd, Moletsane, Murphy-

Graham, Parkes, Saito, 2014). However, there is limited evidence on impact of financial incentives in supporting school return for adolescent girls with disabilities.

There is strong evidence showing that **school-based interventions** in the form of remedial/catch up programmes, in-kind support through scholastic materials and interventions fostering gender-sensitive school environments can be effective in supporting retention and learning outcomes especially among disadvantaged girls (Psaki, Haberland, Mench, Woyczynski, and Chuang, 2022). However, most of the school-based interventions are usually embedded as part of multicomponent programmes which sometimes makes it difficult to isolate impact (ibid). In addition, they predominantly target in-school children which makes it difficult to estimate potential impact for out-of-school adolescent girls including those with disabilities.

**Multisectoral interventions** that address multiple areas, such as socioeconomic disadvantage, education, and health, and that are able to target overlapping vulnerabilities have been shown to be effective in supporting schooling and skill development for disadvantaged girls (Kangwana , Austrian , Soler Hampejsek , Maddox, Sapire, Wado, et al., 2022). There is a strong evidence base (including in Rwanda) showing that programmes which combine health education, foundational skill training, vocational training, and financial literacy are particularly effective in supporting disadvantaged girls' transition to secure and positive livelihoods (Rose, 2021, Firelight, 2019). However, there is limited evidence on how multifaced interventions targeting out-of-school girls with disabilities function and impact of such interventions.

**Interventions addressing child marriages and adolescent pregnancy** are becoming increasingly popular owing to recent findings showing strong associations between early marriage/marital aspirations and school dropout in settings where marriage before the age 18 is common (Prakash; Raj et al cited in Psaki, Haberland, Mench, Woyczynski, and Chuang, 2022). Interventions to delay marriage and adolescent pregnancy varies from school-based life skill curriculum, financial incentives to delay marriage, to community mobilization and safe space groups, and increasing girl's agency through mentors who serve as a role model (Psaki, Haberland, Mench, Woyczynski, and Chuang, 2022). Such interventions have been found to have a positive impact on enrolment and school attainment (Psaki, Haberland, Mench, Woyczynski, and Chuang, 2022). However, there is a low certainty of evidence due to a limited number of studies focusing on direct educational outcomes (ibid).

There are mixed results on educational impact of programmes that promote **safe spaces/girls' clubs** and life skill development through female mentors. Psaki, Haberland, Mench, Woyczynski, and Chuang, 2022 and Ashraf cited in Psaki et al., 2020 found a small but statistically significant effect sizes of safe spaces on enrolment, though they observe that there no effects on absenteeism or academic skills. While providing a space for girls to meet with female mentors may reduce the isolation disadvantaged adolescent girls face in many settings and build their social assets, there is limited evidence that mentored groups alone can improve educational outcomes, especially academic skills unless key components on literacy, numeracy and financial training are integrated in such programmes (ibid). This review found no evidence impact of safe spaces on re-enrolment and retention for child mothers and girls with disabilities.

This review found limited evidence on programmes which have supported school return or skill development for disadvantaged girls' with disabilities particularly in Rwanda.

## **Interventions that address financial barriers**

Reduction of financial burden of education on households through fee waivers, cash transfers or girls only scholarships can have dramatic positive impacts on girls' access to schooling (Carvalho and Evans, 2022). Findings from systematic reviews show that addressing the inability of households to afford tuition and fees appear effective in enhancing enrolment and attainment outcomes for disadvantaged adolescent girls (Unterhalter, North, Arnot, Lloyd, Moletsane, Murphy-Graham, Parkes, and Saito, 2014; Psaki, Haberland, Mench, Woyczynski, and Chuang, 2022; Carvalho and Evans, 2022). However, there is limited evidence on effectiveness of financial incentives in supporting school return or skill development for disadvantaged out-of-school girls' with disabilities.

### **i. The Zomba Cash Transfer Program (ZCTP), Malawi**

The Zomba Cash Transfer Program (ZCTP) was a randomized control intervention that provided initially never-married young females aged thirteen to twenty-two years with financial support in the form of monthly cash transfers for two academic years. The intervention had two arms: (1) Conditional Cash Transfer arm subject to regular school attendance and (2) Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT) arm that transferred cash unconditionally. Recipients of cash transfers included girls that had dropped out of school by the time the program started. The cash transfers were made to the parents, girls, and through payment of school fees for girls who attended secondary school. Monthly school attendance of all the conditional cash transfer recipients was monitored and payment for the following month was withheld for any student whose attendance was below 80 percent of the number of days that the school was in session for the previous month. Baird, Chirwa, Hoop Özler (2016) conducted a study to assess the impact of the program through analysis of intention-to-treat effects of the intervention using cross-sectional regressions. Results showed that the CCT program had strong effects on school enrolment among schoolgirls with:

- the average number of terms enrolled increasing by 0.54.
- proportion of girls<sup>1</sup> that re-enrolled in school more than tripled
- significant reduction in teen pregnancy. Baseline dropouts were 5.1 percentage points less likely to ever have been pregnant in round 2 and 8.2 percentage points in round 3.

While the program had a positive impact on enrolment, there is no evidence on outcomes for girls with disabilities and child mothers.

### **ii. Free Secondary Education Scholarships, Ghana**

The scholarship program was implemented by Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) in Ghana, in partnership with the Ghana Education Services (GES), the implementing arm of Ghana's Ministry of Education, and Senior High School staff. The scholarship covered the full tuition and fees for a "day" student for four years and was paid directly to the schools. Duflo, Dupas and Kremer (2017) conducted a follow up survey involving 2,064 youth drawn from both treatment and control to assess medium-term impact of the program. Findings from the study showed that:

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<sup>1</sup> Those that had dropped out by the time the baseline was conducted

- scholarship winners were 26 percentage points (55%) more likely to complete secondary school.
- women who received a scholarship had 0.217 fewer children by age 25.
- scholarship winners were also 3 percentage points (30%) more likely to have ever enrolled in tertiary education.
- women doubled their rate of tertiary enrolment. (Duflo, Dupas and Kremer, 2017).

## **1. Multifaceted interventions**

Multi-sectoral interventions that target overlapping vulnerabilities have been shown to have a positive impact on adolescent girls' schooling and wellbeing (Kangwana, Austrian, SolerHampejsek, Maddox, Sapire, Wado, et al., 2022). Such programmes usually integrate multiple interventions such as financial subsidies, vocational training, sexual and reproductive health, and development of foundational skills with a view of addressing various barriers adolescent girls face. While evidence from recent systematic reviews show that such programmes are effective in addressing schooling challenges faced by disadvantaged adolescent girls (Rose, 2021; Psaki, Haberland, Mench, Woyczynski, and Chuang, 2022), it is often difficult to isolate the impact of individual components.

### **i. Rwanda Adolescent Girls' Empowerment Initiative**

Implemented in Rwanda from 2006 to 2018 as part of the Grassroots Girls' Initiative, focusing on deeply marginalized and vulnerable girls. Implementation was led by local partner, Action pour le Developement du Peuple (ADEPE). Program design focused on an asset-based model that aimed to build girls' financial, physical, personal, and social assets. The model provided a framework for implementing multiple activities that responded to the many challenges and risk factors that affect girls- such as unplanned pregnancy, for instance, focused not just on avoiding unplanned pregnancy but also on helping girls re-enrol in school and earn an income (Firelight, 2019). Results from the program evaluation showed that:

- Throughout the program, more than 115 girls who had dropped out due to early pregnancies were supported to re-enrol in formal education
- 20 of girls with disabilities were enrolled in special schools, where they were taught basic literacy and sign language
- Proportion of girls who reported to have acquired skills in earning income increased from 55.7% in Year 1 to 77.3% in Year 2

### **ii. Care Rwanda's Safe Schools for Girls (SS4G) Rwanda**

CARE Rwanda's Safe Schools for Girls (SS4G) program was part of a 5-year (2015 – 2020) multi-country initiative aimed at improving the quality of education for marginalized adolescents in Cambodia, Kenya, Mali, India, Nepal, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe. The program aimed to support 50,797 girls from low socio-economic backgrounds to pursue their education by reducing school drop-out and increasing transition from lower to upper secondary education. To address financial barriers that disadvantaged girls face, the SS4G program adapted CARE's Village Savings and Loans (VSLA) methodology to support students to form savings and loans groups. VSLA provided students with an avenue to build and practice financial skills such as saving, budgeting, and

entrepreneurship. Thereafter, students were coached on how to invest in small income-generating activities, taking care not to divert their attention from schooling. The income generated was used to help girls to take care of their immediate needs such as school and hygiene materials hence enabling them to stay in school (Care, 2019).

The SS4G mid-term evaluation found that the proportion of adolescent girls that had saved some money within a twelve-month period increased from 28% to 69%. Access to basic needs and in particular money for school-related costs was found to be one of the strongest predictors of educational outcomes. Students who were confident in their ability to find money for school fees were found to be:

- 12 percentage points less likely to have dropped out of school
- 13 percentage points more likely to say that if they needed money for schooling fees, they would be able to find the fees.
- 17.5 percentage points less likely to have missed class over the past month.

The clubs were particularly successful in making girls and boys aspire towards increased self-reliance and economic empowerment and resulted in more students are saving and taking loans to become entrepreneurs and meet basic schooling needs (ibid).

### iii. Education subsidy and HIV education program-Kenya

The study was a randomized evaluation involving 328 schools in western Kenya to compare effectiveness of two programmes run independently or jointly. **Education Subsidy program** subsidized the cost of education for upper primary school students by providing two free school uniforms over the last three years of primary school. Under the **HIV Education program**, three teachers in each of the targeted primary schools were trained to help deliver Kenya's national HIV/AIDS curriculum, which, emphasizes abstinence until marriage as the way to prevent infection. All students enrolled in sixth grade in 2003 were sampled for the study and followed for 7 years, from age 13.5 to 20.5 on average (Duflo, Dupas and Kremer, 2015).

Results from the evaluation show that when implemented alone, the education subsidy program significantly reduced primary school dropouts for both boys and girls and delayed the onset of girls' fertility:

- reduced the dropout rate after 3 years from 19 percent to 16 percent for girls and from 13 percent to 10 percent for boys
- girls' pregnancy rate fell from 16 percent to 13 percent (Duflo, Dupas and Kremer, 2015, p2758).
- By year 7, there was a 7 percent gap in the childbearing rate between girls exposed to the education subsidy program and those in the control group (46 percent versus 49 percent).

#### iv. **Adolescent Girls Initiative-Kenya (AGI-K): Multi-sectoral cash plus program**

The AGI-K program was a randomized control trial<sup>2</sup> aimed at testing the impact of two-year multisectoral and multilevel “cash plus” intervention for young adolescent girls aged 11 to 14 years based on exposure levels in two challenging contexts: Kibera (an urban informal settlement located in Nairobi and Wajir, a predominantly arid county in Kenya’s north-eastern region. In both contexts, young adolescent girls are often at increased risk of violence and early childbearing which is a key contributor to school dropout. The AGI-K program had four interventions namely:

1. **violence prevention** through community conversations to address sexual and physical violence and the devaluation of girls and women
2. **education intervention** in the form of cash and in-kind transfers conditioned on school enrolment and attendance
3. **health and life skills intervention** provided through mentor-led group meetings
4. **wealth creation** through financial education and savings activities integrated into girls’ group meetings.

Kangwana, Austrian, SolerHampejsek, Maddox, Sapire, Wado, et al. (2022) examined long-term impacts of the program, leveraging on analysis of covariance to estimate intent-to-treat (ITT) impacts of each study arm and of pooled study arms. Findings from the study show that:

- Largest impact on education (access and retention) was among girls that were exposed to the educational intervention
- Girls exposed to all the four interventions demonstrated improved financial savings skills

#### v. **Child marriage prevention programmes in Burkina Faso and Tanzania**

Erulkar, Medhin, Weissman, Kabore, and Ouedraogo (2020) conducted a study that tested and costed streamlined interventions to delay the age at marriage in Burkina Faso and Tanzania. In each country, four approaches were implemented: (1) addressing community attitudes related to child marriage through community dialogue (2) providing unmarried girls aged 12 to 17 years with school materials, (3) offering a conditional asset transfer in the form of a goat, both conditioned on the 12-to-17-year-old girl remaining unmarried and in school for the duration of the pilot period (27–28 months), and (4) offering all components: community dialogue, school supplies and a conditional asset transfer. A fifth area served as a control where no intervention took place.

Community dialogue intervention training of community groups<sup>3</sup> followed a 16-week curriculum that included education sessions such as negative impact of early marriage and value of girls’ education. Action oriented sessions provided a space for group members to devise home grown solutions to child marriage and develop strategies to address it such as house-to-house campaigns, or systems of punishments or rewards for community members (Erulkar, Medhin, Weissman, Kabore, and Ouedraogo, 2020, p71). Under the second treatment arm, both in-school and out-of-school girls aged 12 to 17 years who were unmarried were eligible for the provision of school supplies, with out-of-school girls encouraged to return to school or join nonformal education. In school promotion locations community-based mentors, who were recruited and trained by the

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<sup>2</sup> Implemented by Plan International with oversight by Population Council from 2015 to 2017

<sup>3</sup> Adult men, adult women, adolescent men, and adolescent women



project, identified eligible girls by going house-to-house. Girls who confirmed school attendance and remained unmarried were eligible for subsequent allocation of supplies once per year (ibid) . Results from the evaluation showed that:

- Burkinabe girls aged 12 to 14 years residing in the community dialogue site had a greater chance of being in school (RR=1.2; 95% CI=1.07, 1.29) compared to their counterparts in the control
- In Tanzania, all the interventions tested were associated with increased risk of girls aged 12 to 14 years being in school. The educational promotion arm was also associated with a 30% increased likelihood of being in-school among girls aged 15 to 17 years (RR=1.3; 95% CI=1.01, 1.67).

#### vi. **Girls' Empowerment through Education and Health (ASPIRE) program, Malawi**

The USAID funded Girls' Empowerment through Education Activity was a cross-sector investment aimed to improve the achievement of girls in upper primary and secondary school in Malawi. The program targeted all primary and secondary schools in Malawi's Balaka, Machinga, and Zomba districts. The overall goal of the program was to improve the reading skills for girls in upper primary school, facilitate adoption of positive sexual and healthcare-seeking behaviours, and support elimination of key structural and cultural barriers for girls aged 10 to 19 years.

The multi-sectoral interventions were implemented at classroom, school, and community levels to increase girls' life skills knowledge and self-efficacy, with a particular goal of empowering girls and boys to avoid and mitigate risks related to sexual behaviours that affect school retention. The program directly reached 54,828 learners aged 10 years and above through Life Skills Education. Teachers were trained and coached to improve their capacity in life skills instruction and in-school support for HIV positive learners. The program also invested in Mothers' Groups (MGs) and female role models in order to increase girls' access to correct information, mentoring, and support to return and stay in school. Most of the orphans and vulnerable children in ASPIRE's target schools received support from mothers' groups that included school fees, uniforms, scholastic materials, and counselling. The program also worked with stakeholders at school, community, and district level to make the learning environment girl-friendly, while actively promoting awareness, reflection, dialogue, and action to address entrenched cultural beliefs, norms, and practices that created barriers to girls' participation and performance in school (USAID, 2019).

- Overall findings from the external evaluation report shows that **1,844 girls re-enrolled in primary school** after having dropped out (USAID, 2019).

#### **2. School-based interventions**

School-based interventions mainly focus on academic support in settings where girls are falling behind academically. This may include provision of remedial education in core skills, individual tutoring to girls struggling in class and counselling to address problems related to school attendance (Psaki, Haberland, Mench, Woyczynski, and Chuang, 2022). Evidence from systematic reviews show that remedial support with integrated technology is effective at improving learning outcomes for girls. However, there is insufficient direct evidence as to whether these interventions can improve school-return or retention for disadvantaged adolescent girls (ibid).

Non-formal accelerated/catch up learning programmes (run either by NGOs or by the government) are increasingly gaining traction in low-income contexts characterized by high proportion of out-of-

school youth. Catch up programmes serve a variety of roles for the disadvantaged adolescent girls population. First, they provide a means for those girls who missed out on school at the right age to catch up and reenter the formal system in the later grades of primary school or enter secondary school directly. In addition, they can also address a range of needs, not only for the foundational skills, but also for life skills and vocational skills, including leadership training for girls (Lloyd, 2009). Results from systematic reviews show that remedial/catch up programmes can be effective at improving academic skills for girls. However, there is weak/insufficient evidence for effects of remedial interventions on enrolment and school participation for disadvantaged girls (Psaki, Haberland, Mench, Woyczynski, and Chuang, 2022).

#### **i. MINEDUC pilot catch up program, Rwanda**

A remedial program initiated by Rwanda's Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) and UNICEF in 2007 to support school return for disadvantaged adolescent boys and girls who have never been to school or dropped out before completion of a cycle. The program aimed at integrating children<sup>4</sup> who were over the legal enrolment age back into the formal education system. (Kanamugire & Rutakamize, 2009, p238). The remedial program was organized into three levels:

- **Level 1:** Children who dropped out during the first or second year of primary school and those who have never been to school.
- **Level 2:** Children who dropped out during the third or fourth year of primary school and those who had completed Level 1 but did not want to go back into the formal system. Upon completing Level 2, the children transitioned to the fifth year of the primary school system
- **Level 3:** A special level reserve for children in difficult circumstances, especially girls and orphans who were heads of households.

Learners in Level 3 were eligible to: (i) sit for the National Test held at the end of the sixth year of primary school on the same footing as the children enrolled in the formal system; (ii) join one of the trade apprenticeships centres- Youth Training Centres (YTCs), particularly those learners who could not proceed to secondary education for various social reasons; and (iii) go back into employment and thus provide for themselves. Out of the 28,792 pupils enrolled up to 2007, at least **10,004 returned to the formal system** (Kanamugire & Rutakamize, 2009, p238)

#### **ii. The Ishraq catch up program for out-of-school girls in Egypt**

A multi-dimensional program for 12- to 15-year-old out-of-school girls in Egypt, launched in 2001 by the population council in collaboration with other agencies. The program combined traditional tested program elements (literacy, life skills, nutrition) with more innovative ones (sports, financial education). Program staff focused on building a multi-layered platform to support and institutionalize the program by educating and mobilizing communities around issues of importance to adolescent girls, forging partnerships between international NGOs, government institutions, and local NGOs, and building capacities of local facilitators and partners to implement the program (Selim, Tawab-Abdel, Elsayed, El-Badawy and ElKalaawy, 2013, p2).

Program evaluation results showed that:

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<sup>4</sup> In particular working children and girls between eight and sixteen years who had never been to school or had dropped out

- 92% of participants who took the government literacy exam passed and 69% of participants who completed the Ishraq programme entered or re-entered school (Marcus, Archer-Gupta, Darcy, and Page, 2017).

### iii. Supporting school retention through girls' clubs

Girls' Clubs and youth development clubs have become increasingly common features of both school and community-based programmes that aim to improve the wellbeing, capacity, and empowerment of girls. Marcus, Archer-Gupta, Darcy, and Page (2017) conducted a rigorous review to explore effectiveness of girls clubs in promoting adolescent girls' empowerment. Out of the 44 programmes reviewed, twelve were associated with positive impacts on school retention, transition and learning outcomes. Ten led to enhanced vocational skills attributed to economic empowerment components of the clubs such as financial literacy, loans and entrepreneurship education and life skill development (ibid).

Power Within Club (PW) was a school-based girls' club run by teacher matrons as part of the Improving Girls' Access through Transforming Education (IGATE) program in Zimbabwe. The clubs were aimed at creating an enabling environment to support girls in the completion of primary school, and to foster leadership skills, and their knowledge and understanding of girls' rights. The clubs also worked to boost girls' self-confidence and enable discussions of taboo issues such as pregnancy, menstruation, early marriage, household chores, and time burdens (Miske Witt & Associates, 2017). A longitudinal, mixed method evaluation that included a randomized control trial found that:

- Girls with a PW club at school were significantly more likely to be enrolled at endline (95% versus 91.3%).
- Girls who joined the PW club were significantly more likely to have higher enrolment at endline (96.7% versus 92.6%) with spillover effects to secondary school.

In Tanzania, girls' clubs were implemented as part of the New Equilibrium for Girls project implemented by Camfed. The clubs were delivered through a curriculum that aimed at building self-confidence, resilience, and life skills besides supporting girls with study skills and mentorship. Evaluation results showed that girls benefiting from the bursary program were 18% less likely to drop out of the school, club activities partly contributed to retention of girls in school (Page, 2020).

While providing safe spaces for girls appears to yield positive schooling outcomes for girls, there is no evidence on effectiveness of the clubs in supporting school return for disadvantaged adolescent girls. Evidence is also limited on impact of the clubs in supporting acutely marginalized adolescent girls with disabilities and child mothers.

## 4. Lessons learnt

The review has identified programmes that have shown positive impacts in supporting school-return for disadvantaged out-of-school girls. In low-resource settings, school levies place an additional financial burden to families of out-of-school girls and thus blocks their chances of school return. In addition, risks of early pregnancy and marriage often stifle educational chances for disadvantaged out-of-school girls. Therefore, for programmes to be effective in supporting school return for disadvantaged out-of-school girls, they should simultaneously address the complex and multi-dimensional barriers girls face (Psaki, Haberland, Mench, Woyczynski, and Chuang, 2022).

**Interventions which focus on addressing financial barriers can be delivered through stipends, scholarships, cash transfers or fee waivers** (Unterhalter, North, Arnot, Lloyd, Moletsane, Murphy-Graham, Parkes, Saito, 2014). Recent RCTs have compared the effects of cash transfers on educational participation rates for disadvantaged girls. Results show that **cash transfers conditional on school attendance** are effective in improving enrolment and retention for disadvantaged girls (ibid). In-kind support through provision of school items such as uniforms and books can also be effective in enhancing school retention. There is limited evidence on effectiveness of cash transfers/financial incentives in supporting school return for disadvantaged out-of-school adolescent girls with disabilities.

**Multi-faceted programmes** that combine health education, foundational skill training, vocational training, and financial literacy are relatively expensive and complex to implement compared to single facet programmes. However, they are **more effective in supporting school return for disadvantaged adolescent girls** given that standalone interventions are unlikely to overcome a wide range of vulnerabilities girls face (Carvalho and Evans, 2022; Rose, 2021). A major challenge in assessing impact of multi-faceted programmes is the inability to separate impact of individual components.

**School-based interventions delivered** through remedial education in core foundational skills, individual tutoring to girls struggling in class and counselling to address problems related to school attendance are more effective in improving learning outcomes (Psaki, Haberland, Mench, Woyczynski, and Chuang, 2022). There is a limited evidence base showing that catch up programmes can support school return for adolescent girls with children. Effectiveness of catch-up programmes in supporting school return for disadvantaged adolescent girls is contingent on:

- Having clear transition plan from catch up centers to formal school
- Goodwill from communities to encourage enrolment
- Strategic placement of catch-up centers near/within formal schools to support smooth transition
- Having well qualified teachers especially in literacy and numeracy

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- List all contributors who responded with any useful information, even if it was just some literature suggestions
- Include only their name and the organisation they are affiliated with. Do not include their email address.
- If nobody at all contributed, then leave this section out of the report
- The expert appendix, if you have one, should only include substantial comments; don't bother including the whole email message sent by someone who only provided links to some papers.

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