



Emerging issues for girls' education in East Africa

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About this report

The K4D Emerging Issues Report series highlights research and emerging evidence to policymakers to help inform policies that are more resilient to the future. K4D staff researchers work with thematic experts and the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) to identify where new or emerging research can inform and influence policy.

This report is based on 15 days of desk-based research, carried out during November 2021.

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Contents

List of abbreviations	4
1. Executive Summary	5
2. Introduction	9
3. Approach	10
4. Analytical Framing	11
5. Girls' Education Outcomes	12
Direct Outcomes.....	12
Indirect Learning Outcomes.....	18
Data Availability and Systems.....	20
6. Gendered Norms at Home and in the Community	22
7. Gendered Institutions and Girls' Participation	24
8. Education Authorities and Schools	26
9. National Government: Policy and Education Systems	29
10. Global Challenges: Climate Change and Conflict	36
Climate Change and Girls' Education.....	36
Conflict and Girls' Education.....	38
11. Conclusion and Regional Entry Points	39
References	42
Annexes	48

List of abbreviations

CBO	community-based organisation
CSO	civil society organisation
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FCDO	Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office
FGM/C	female genital mutilation/cutting
GAGE	Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence
GBV	gender-based violence
GEQIP-E	General Education Quality Improvement Programme – Equity [Ethiopia]
GDP	gross domestic product
HDI	Human Development Index
HLO	Harmonised Learning Outcomes
IDP	internally displaced person
ICT	information and communications technology
NGO	non-governmental organisation
SRGBV	school-related gender-based violence
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
WASH	water, sanitation, and hygiene
WIDE	World Inequality Database on Education

1. Executive Summary

Despite progress on girls' education in the past 25 years, many girls in East Africa are still facing profound education challenges. When combined with gender norms, poverty, location, and disability, girls are likely to struggle with accessing and remaining in education. External pressures such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate-related disasters, and conflict all exacerbate existing inequalities.

The potential of investing in girls' education and encouraging girls' meaningful participation in education system decisions has been shown to be a key factor in enabling girls to realise their education potential and building communities who are resilient to shocks related to climate and conflict.

This report draws together evidence on the current status of girls' education in Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, and South Sudan, based on 15 days of desk-based research and key informant interviews. Using a combination of education systems thinking and the socio-ecological model, it examines and emphasises the importance of feedback loops, relationships between different actors in the education system and social norms and power which influence education systems and girls' educational outcomes.

Direct and indirect learning outcomes

This analysis illustrates a region with some relatively high performers – such as Kenya and Rwanda – when looking at national-level primary completion statistics. However, alongside these countries are, for example, South Sudan where girls' primary completion rates are just 19%, and Ethiopia which has 29% of girls in secondary education.

Additionally, all countries reveal a discrepancy in terms of years of schooling and adjusted learning scores, which points to questions around the quality of the education offered and learning environments. Sudan, Ethiopia, and Tanzania all record girls achieving the equivalent of only four years of learning despite spending more years in school.

When data are analysed using location, wealth, and ethnicity, major variations in completion rates are found. In Kenya there is a significant drop in girls' secondary completion rates compared to their male counterparts when combined with poverty, location, and ethnicity. Low levels of learning and delayed progression through grades is also seen as a contributory factor in girls' dropout from education (Kaffenberger, Sobol, & Spindelman, 2021).

Women's enrolment rates in tertiary education in the region are usually lower than those of their male contemporaries, with the anomaly of Sudan. Yet, even if women have achieved tertiary education their unemployment rates are much lower than those of men. Data on labour market participation are known to mask the reality of the levels of informal work done by women at the household level. The pandemic has also exacerbated the pre-existing responsibilities of childcare that disproportionately affect women's engagement in the workforce (UN Women, 2020).

Additionally, reliable education data systems are fundamental to being able to track and improve education systems, particularly around education quality. However, standardised assessment practices are yet to be implemented across the region. Furthermore, Sudan and Somalia's education data systems are both weak, making education planning that is suited to varied language, ethnicity, or disability characteristics difficult. Even more robust data systems in Kenya and Ethiopia need to be developed to include pastoralist communities and out-of-school children.

More detailed qualitative data are vital to complement these more quantitative systems to provide a more detailed picture of girls' contexts and reasons for lower learning levels and dropout. The pandemic has disrupted many of these systems which will be vital to measure learning status and how to re-engage learners at the right levels.

Gendered norms

Gender norms and poverty are deeply entwined, as boys are often prioritised over girls as a better investment in education due to the belief that boys will have more earning potential for the household. Girls are also required to support domestic responsibilities. Despite many of the countries in the region being signatories to regional and national policies banning early marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), the prevalence rates remain high with weak systems to enforce this legislation. Early marriage can be the cause or consequence of dropping out of school, with some studies showing that girls who become pregnant or who marry have already been underperforming at school (Birchall, 2018). Many girls struggle to return to school if they become pregnant due to stigma around teen pregnancy. With rates of pregnancies likely to increase due to COVID-19 pandemic school closures, re-entry policies, such as the one introduced in Kenya, are important to re-engage girls in education.

Gendered institutions and girls' participation

The G7 declaration on girls' education highlights the importance of collaboration with girl-led groups and youth leaders. Engaging more girls to feed into decision making creates projects that are more suited to their needs and interests. A growing body of evidence from the region also highlights the connection between girls' confidence, leadership skills, and successful learning outcomes for all girls. With substantial youth populations in all these countries and active youth networks in the region, there is enormous potential for engaging young people in challenging gender norms, promoting information around sexual and reproductive health, and engaging with climate activism, which all have a role in enabling girls' education.

Education authorities and schools

Schools reflect the attitudes to gender and violence of the community within which they are situated. Therefore, efforts to address these gender biases through gender-sensitive pedagogy training are important. The approaches of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) rolled out in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda aim to create more equitable classrooms where teachers have similar expectations for boys and girls and respect is established between girls and boys. Addressing school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is also fundamental to creating environments where girls can learn and thrive. Despite all countries being signatories to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, there is mixed progress on implementing the intentions of this policy; for example, corporal punishment is still prevalent in many countries. School-based studies in Kenya, for example, indicate that the response system are often weak with staff and welfare providers given little training to deal with school-related violence (Parkes et al., 2013).

National government: Policy and education systems

Despite gender being featured in education policies or as stand-alone policy in the four priority countries for this report (Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, and Ethiopia), political will to translate these into quality delivery of girls' education requires consistent political effort and engagement (Rose et al., 2020).

Somalia's education system is characterised as being delivered by a mix of providers: only 6% of education provision across the country is provided by the state, with the remainder being provided by private (77%) and community (20%) sources (Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education, 2021). New policies on accelerated basic education, banning FGM, and recognition of the role of Community Education Committees will all contribute to improving girls' education if rolled out successfully. In this shared system of accountability for quality education, however, consistency and equity are major challenges to overcome.

Sudan's transitional government had committed to promising policy and legal reforms to support girls' education. The recent legislative change on child marriage and the right of pregnant girls that was developed into strategy and action plans by the Ministry of Labour and Social Development is a sign of great progress but with an insufficient education and social protection system, practical delivery of these policies into meaningful change for girls may take some time to deliver. Due to the unstable political situation in late 2021, it is also unclear when and how this progress on girls' education will be sustained.

Kenya has been at the forefront of education reforms in the region with free access to primary and secondary school and curriculum reform to address the quality of education, which have resulted in considerable progress for all children, including girls. Policies on the distribution of free sanitary wear and support for pregnant girls to re-enter school are being rolled out, but are yet to deliver consistent coverage nationally. However, geographical and demographic disparities remain, which means that for many girls from rural or poorer families learning is still a challenge. The education system in northeast Kenya, for example, is historically weak and is also being further undermined by targeted cross-border attacks.

Ethiopia has been investing in regular Education Sector Development plans since 1997. The current GEQIP-E¹ includes equity in its intentions to revise the curriculum and textbooks, and provide teachers with gender-sensitive pedagogy training. This has been initiated but may be delayed due to the pandemic. The lack of strong leadership on girls' education and a high turnover in the Ministry of Education means that girls' education intentions are still yet to be fully realised.

Global challenges: Climate change and conflict

The impact of climate-related disasters in the region have exacerbated existing gender inequalities, putting the most disadvantaged women and girls at greater risk. Estimates are that in 2021 at least four million girls from low- and lower-middle-income countries will be prevented from completing education due to climate-related events (Fry & Lei, 2021).

Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia are currently facing severe drought conditions, whilst Sudan also recently experienced its worst flooding for 100 years. These environmental shocks have a direct impact on girls' learning through displacement, withdrawal from school, and early marriage. However, studies show that investing in girls' education is proven to be a powerful force to build resilience and be part of climate solutions (Kwauk et al., 2019).

Climate-related disasters create tensions around natural resources and are contributing to conflicts in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan. Currently in northern Ethiopia 9.4 million people need food assistance, and 2.7 million children are missing school (UNICEF Sudan, 2021a, 2021b).

¹ GEQIP-E – General Education Quality Improvement Programme – Equity.

The unprecedented overlap of natural and man-made disasters in East Africa creates a uniquely challenging environment for delivering on promises to achieving girls' education. When these factors combine, they impact poverty, migration, and health. In these circumstances education is often deprioritised and social norms about girls' expectations to support the family rather than achieve an education come to the fore.

Conclusion and entry points

More resilient communities that can drive development are built on improving foundational skills and challenging restrictive social norms. Education, confidence, and leadership skills create more prosperous and peaceful societies that shift norms around gender equality and are more resilient to the growing number of pandemics, conflicts, or climate-related shocks – all UK ambitions outlined in the recent integrated review.

Country-level innovation and strong leadership is needed to deliver on policies and promises that contribute to creating safer schools and communities that support girls to achieve education. With large youth populations and an active youth movement in each country there is real potential to support young people to address the issues that affect them.

The countries covered in this study are at different stages of education system evolution. Further detailed research is needed to find specific entry points for girls' education support by country. The following entry points for potential support, however, have emerged as common themes across the four priority countries.

System strengthening

- Strengthening of education data systems disaggregated by age, gender, disability, and location is vital to inform policy decisions.
- Identification of high-level champions in influential positions are needed to raise the profile of, and deliver on, reforms to accelerate girls' education.
- Investment and capacity building of gender units within ministries can deliver much needed cross-sector coordination.
- Investment in more flexible education modalities to support girls who are out of school, or are at risk of being so, can reach the large numbers of these girls.

Enabling environments

- Creating more robust links between schools and communities can shift attitudes and encourage buy-in to systems that can eliminate violence against children. This is needed alongside investment and capacity building of local protection systems.
- Engaging men and boys in social norm change initiatives is an effective way to shift restrictive gender norms for girls and boys.
- Strengthening local networks to support re-entry programmes for girls who have had children or are pregnant will challenge stigma and allow girls to continue their education.

Girls' agency

- Engaging girls in project governance structures is necessary to ensure projects are designed to respond to the needs of girls they intend to serve.
- Investment in life skills and leadership opportunities to build self-esteem can improve learning outcomes and build resilient communities.

- Investment in girl-led groups and networks can be a valuable part of education system accountability mechanisms. Strengthening these groups creates role models for girls and a pipeline of future leaders.

2. Introduction

Gender equality in and through education is a core principle within the human rights agenda and a vital part of delivering Sustainable Development Goal 4 on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. In the past 25 years there has been considerable progress on girls' access to education, and in some locations in East Africa girls' attendance and learning has overtaken that of boys. Yet these statistics disguise the reality that in East Africa many girls are still facing profound education challenges. Gender combined with characteristics such as poverty, disability, conflict, and living in rural locations all have a powerful influence on education outcomes (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020). Even if girls do attend school, they may struggle with regular attendance, meaningful participation, and steady progress through grade levels as their educational aspirations are in direct competition with societal expectations on their roles as domestic support in family homes and gender norms related to expectations to become wives and mothers (Unterhalter et al., 2014).

External pressures including the effects of climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and conflict have all exacerbated existing challenges for girls' education. These environmental, global, and national forces all have a direct impact on poverty, migration, health, and access to education. History has proven that discriminatory gender norms reassert themselves in a crisis, with progress on gender norms often reversed (Harper et al., 2020). Evidence from previous crises shows that increased rates of early marriage, teen pregnancy, domestic responsibilities, and gender-based violence often result in many girls failing to return to school once they reopen (Harper et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2021b).

As schools begin to reopen after considerable disruption, actors involved with girls' education are counting the cost, but are hoping to use this education reset as an opportunity to install more inclusive practices in education. This post-pandemic era is also characterised by the growing mobilisation of young people who are engaging in communities, at national and global levels, advocating for climate justice and their right to education (UNESCO, 2021a; UNGEI, 2020). These groups represent huge potential for accelerating girls' educational opportunities at global and local levels and, if mobilised through meaningful participation methods, can also act as an accountability mechanism to girls' education agendas at policy level.

This report is a rapid review of the current status of girls' education in Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan. Section 5 provides an overview of girls' education outcomes in these countries. Sections 6, 7 and 8 present the challenges for girls' education, underpinned by restrictive gender norms at the community and school levels, with examples shared of these issues in the four priority countries for this report (Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, and Ethiopia). Section 9 provides more detailed information on the status of national government engagement with girls' education for the four countries. Section 10 provides an overview of the global challenges facing girls' education, drawing on evidence from the region.

The conclusion (Section 11) draws together the evidence from the report with regional entry points for FCDO's future work in the region.

3. Approach

This report explores the context and actors that influence girls' learning outcomes. It focuses on Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, and Ethiopia, identified by FCDO as the four priority countries for this report. Information about girls' education in Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, and South Sudan is also included where possible.

The first stage of the work for this report comprised collecting data on girls' education. These data were primarily drawn from the World Bank database. The notable gaps in in this database were data from Somalia and Sudan. However, relevant data were secured utilising the World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) and unpublished education sector analysis reports, which are noted throughout.

The second stage of the study comprised a literature review which focused on existing publications on the countries noted above. The starting point was from key comprehensive sources focused on girls' education, with a snowball approach used to find further studies and detail where necessary.

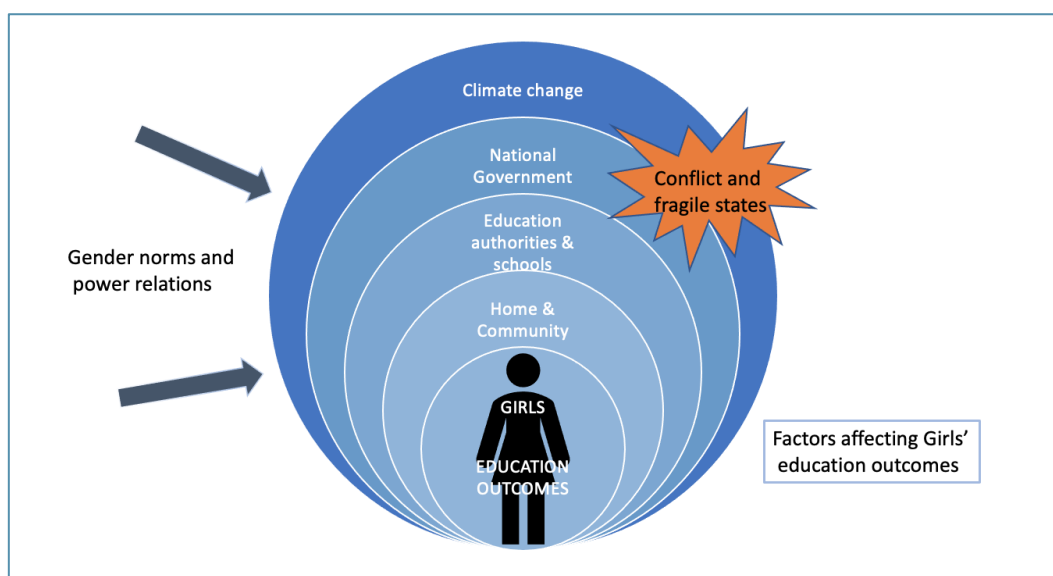
The approach for the national government policy and plan sections was a blend of searches on the Right to Education and UNESCO education profile sites and through stakeholder interviews. Key stakeholders with deep knowledge of girls' education were proposed by FCDO for Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya. One interview was held per country. These interviews also generated several suggested reports – published and unpublished – that provided more detail on education sector planning per country.

4. Analytical Framing

The RISE systems framework is used in this report to analyse the role of various actors at different levels played in effective education systems (Spivack, 2021). Systems thinking is particularly valuable in education contexts as it acknowledges how elements are connected through feedback loops across actors, within education systems, and across society. The recognition of relationships and feedback loops used in systems thinking models complements the current approach to gender and development that acknowledges people and relationships are informed by gender norms that create visible or invisible power structures that can limit girls' educational achievements. Systems and actors involved with girls' education are surrounded by deeply entrenched patriarchal forces which often act as invisible and institutionalised "brakes" to shifting norms around girls' education and life chances beyond (Harper et al., 2020).

The socio-ecological model is used to structure this report as it illustrates how various actors and elements exert influence on the success of girls' education. With growing awareness of the link between climate change and girls' education this is positioned around the socio-ecological model to illustrate the universal pressure it exerts on all actors involved in girls' educational outcomes.

Figure 1: Analytical framing of girls' education review: Factors affecting girls' education outcomes



Source: Authors own adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological systems theory (1974).

Recognising education as a system that is infused with gender norms and power relations allows a more complex analysis of what might be the cause of an issue that goes beyond identifying an action to treat an immediate symptom. For example, designing programmes to address the symptoms of girls' learning-related challenges and dropout through the provision of books, scholarships, or improvement of WASH facilities fails to acknowledge that these symptoms exist in a much larger web of interconnected issues.

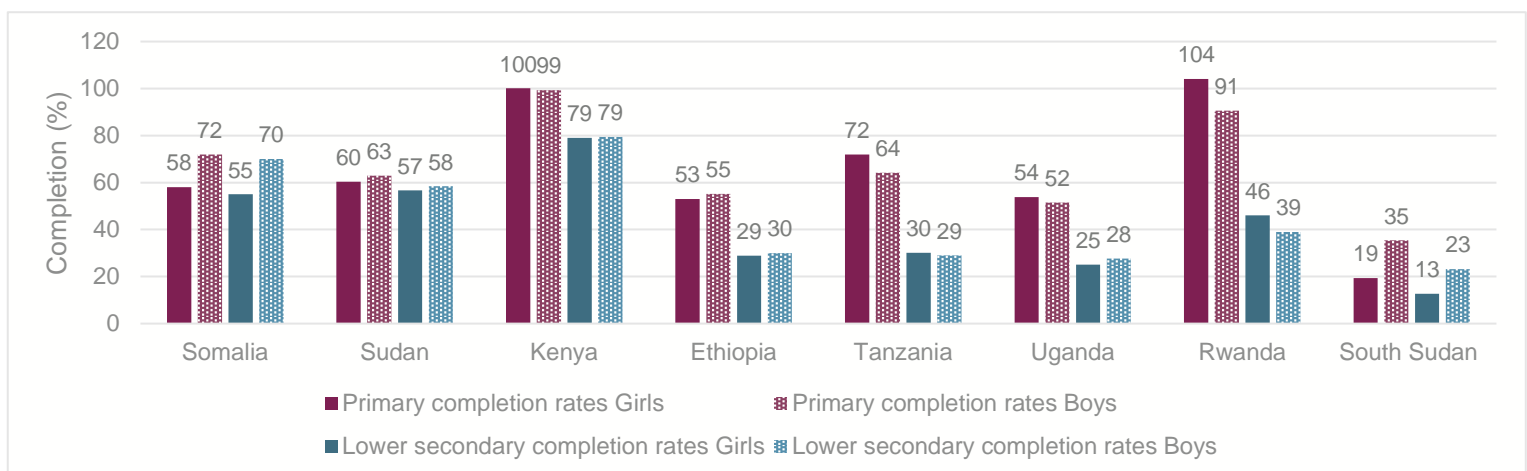
5. Girls' Education Outcomes

Direct Outcomes

Girls' absolute education outcomes

Girls' primary completion rates vary significantly across the region, with only 19% of girls in South Sudan, 53% in Ethiopia, and 54% in Uganda completing primary school. In contrast, however, primary completion rates in Rwanda and Kenya for girls are 104%² and 100% respectively. Lower rates of school completion for girls are replicated in secondary schools in South Sudan (13%), in Uganda (25%), and Ethiopia (29%). Of note, however, is the significant drop-off in countries with high rates of completion at primary level when girls transition to secondary school; for example, Rwanda's completion rate for girls at secondary school drops to 46%. Tanzania also has a significant drop-off, with 42% of the girls who completed primary education dropping to just 30% completing secondary education. This transition phase from primary to secondary usually corresponds with puberty for girls where certain gender norms and social factors become more likely to influence girls' education prospects. It also marks the transition from mother tongue to English language instruction in many secondary contexts, which has been shown to adversely affect learning and dropout (Tikly, 2016).

Figure 2: Primary and secondary completion rates by country



Source: World Development Indicators in World Bank Database (<https://databank.worldbank.org> – see Annex 1 for the links for each data point). Data for Somalia is from WIDE (<https://www.education-inequalities.org>).

Data on learning adjusted years of school for Sudan, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Rwanda all record girls achieving the equivalent of only four years of learning despite all having higher expected years in school.³ These figures expose the challenges with learning revealed in the last 10 years that look beyond access to the quality of education and the need for serious examination of what is happening in classrooms (Sperling & Winthrop, 2016). As a result, learning metrics have become more commonly utilised than years of schooling to give a more accurate predictor of girls' outcomes in education. Another challenge with utilising years of

² Various reasons can lead to a figure that exceeds 100% completion – see <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.CMPT.ZS> for further explanation.

³ Data on learning adjusted years for other focus countries are not available from the Human Capital Index 2020.

schooling is that many girls are attending grades below those expected for their age. Therefore, they may be marked as attending, or even completing but their educational outcomes may not correspond with the equivalent grade for their age.

Out-of-school populations of girls are notoriously hard to track but are recorded as 53% of primary school-aged girls in Somalia, 39% in Sudan, and 67% in South Sudan. Countries reporting fewer girls out of school include Uganda and Rwanda, which record 3% and 6% respectively. Where data are available, gaps do seem to widen for secondary school-aged girls, with South Sudan and Ethiopia reporting 63% and 49% of girls out of school respectively.

Girls' relative education outcomes

Examining data relative to boys allows analysis of whether disparities in access and learning exist for all children or have a gender dimension.

Many of the countries featured in this report have shown significant acceleration in girls' education in the last decade. In Rwanda girls' completion rates have improved, with 13% more girls completing primary school than boys. This relative advantage drops a little in secondary school, but girls still are more likely to complete secondary education than boys by 7%. Tanzania also has more girls completing primary and secondary education, but by a smaller margin. Data from other countries in the region indicate that boys have a small advantage in completion rates. South Sudan has the largest gender gap at both primary and secondary levels, with boys' completion rates being higher than those of girls by 16% at primary and 10% at secondary. These figures are at national level, so also mask any regional variations within countries which are likely to have a different gendered pattern to school completion.

Harmonised Learning Outcome (HLO) scores, which were available for six of the countries covered by this report, illustrate a mixed pattern of gender performance in learning (Angrist et al., 2021). In Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, and Rwanda girls are outperforming boys in HLO reading calculations, whilst boys in Ethiopia have a significant lead. Looking at learning results alongside expected years of school does not always create a parallel pattern, which implies that more years at school does not always translate into corresponding improved reading scores for girls or boys. Girls in Sudan, for example, outperform boys in the HLO scores, yet girls' expected years of school are 6.9 years against boys' 7.2 years. This indicates a context that needs further research to understand why girls may be performing better despite lower exposure to education.

Overall, this analysis illustrates a region with some relatively high performers such as Kenya and Rwanda when looking at national-level primary completion statistics. Other learning patterns noted are:

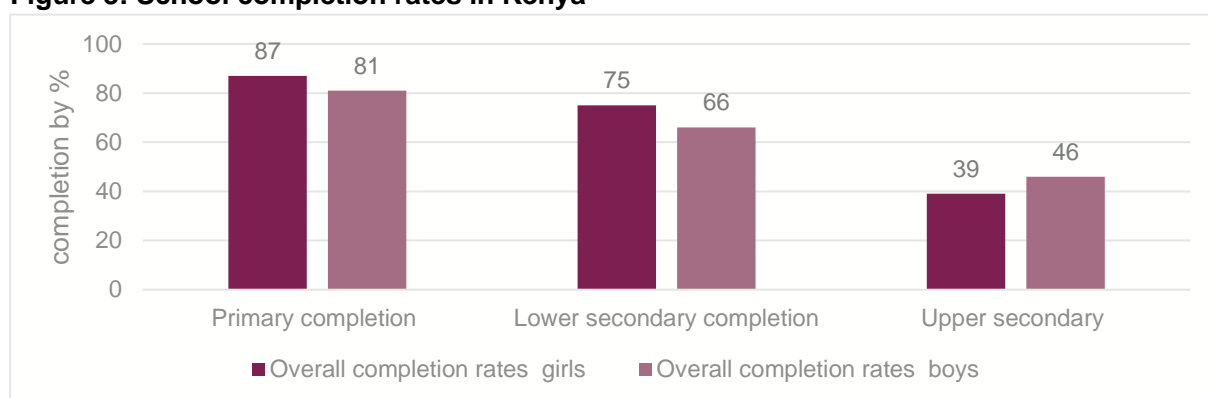
- Higher levels of girls' completion at primary level in Tanzania and Rwanda, although both drop off significantly at secondary level.
- A discrepancy in terms of years of schooling and adjusted learning scores in all countries, which points to questions around the quality of the education offered when children are in school, or challenges related to the learning environment which are likely gendered.
- Girls' secondary completion is lower and out-of-school rates are still higher than those of boys, even though many countries have improved their gender disparities in education and learning in the past decade.

Inequities in education

Whilst great progress can be celebrated at the national level in many of the East African countries, it can mask the reality of many girls who are still being left behind. Education progression is deeply influenced by factors such as age, location, wealth, ethnicity, and disability. This section draws on information from the World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) on Kenya, which allows for greater disaggregated examination than the World Bank data used above.

The overall completion rates for girls and boys in Kenya indicate that girls are completing primary and lower secondary levels at higher rates than boys nationally, but this shifts at upper secondary. This clearly shows the point at which girls' learning progression stalls and they start to fall behind their male counterparts (see Figure 3).

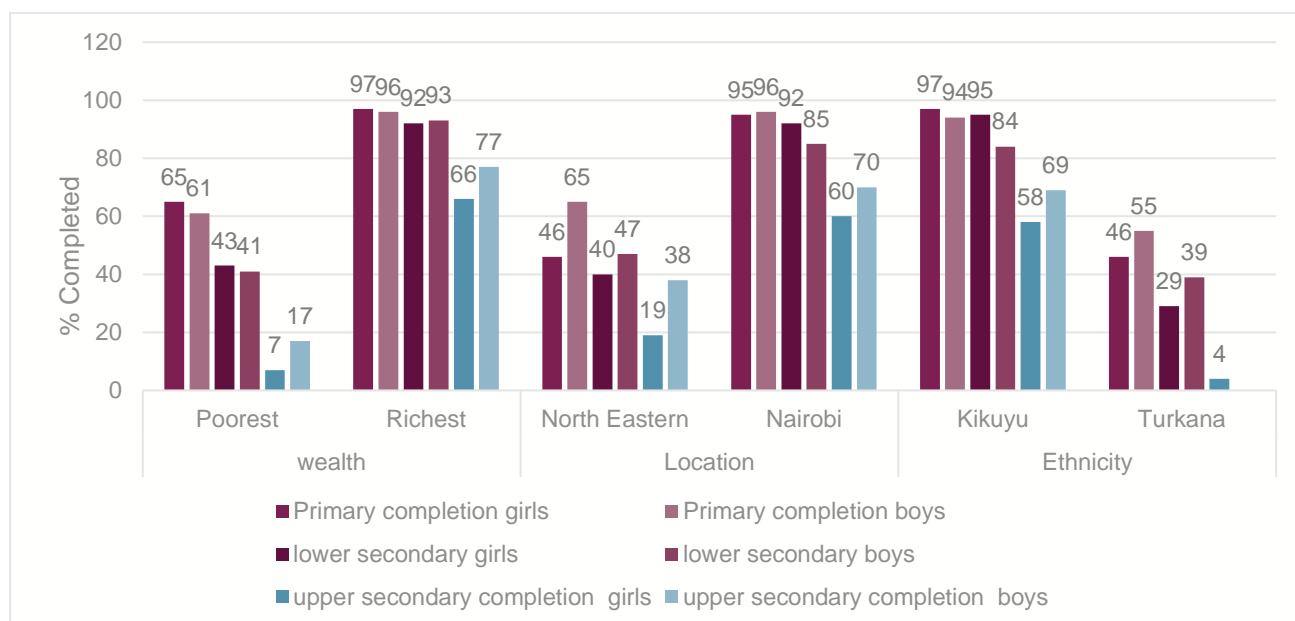
Figure 3: School completion rates in Kenya



Source: WIDE (<https://www.education-inequalities.org>).

Additionally, poverty, geographical location, and ethnicity have a profound impact on completion rates for all children that get more pronounced as children progress through each level of school. Examining the data with a gender lens indicates that girls' school completion rates appear to be better at primary and lower secondary levels, but the completion rates of the poorest girls in upper secondary fall to 7%. Girls from the northeast are at a constant disadvantage, whereas in Nairobi they seem to maintain completion rates closer to those of boys until upper secondary where it dips again by 10% behind boys (see Figure 4). Kikuyu girls seem to outperform boys at lower secondary, but again hit the upper secondary threshold and are completing school at lower rates than boys. Turkana girls experience a consistent disadvantage throughout school. Despite the lack of data for boys at upper secondary, the data for girls from Turkana families record that only 4% complete upper secondary education.

Figure 4: Completion rates in primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education across wealth, locality, and ethnicity in Kenya



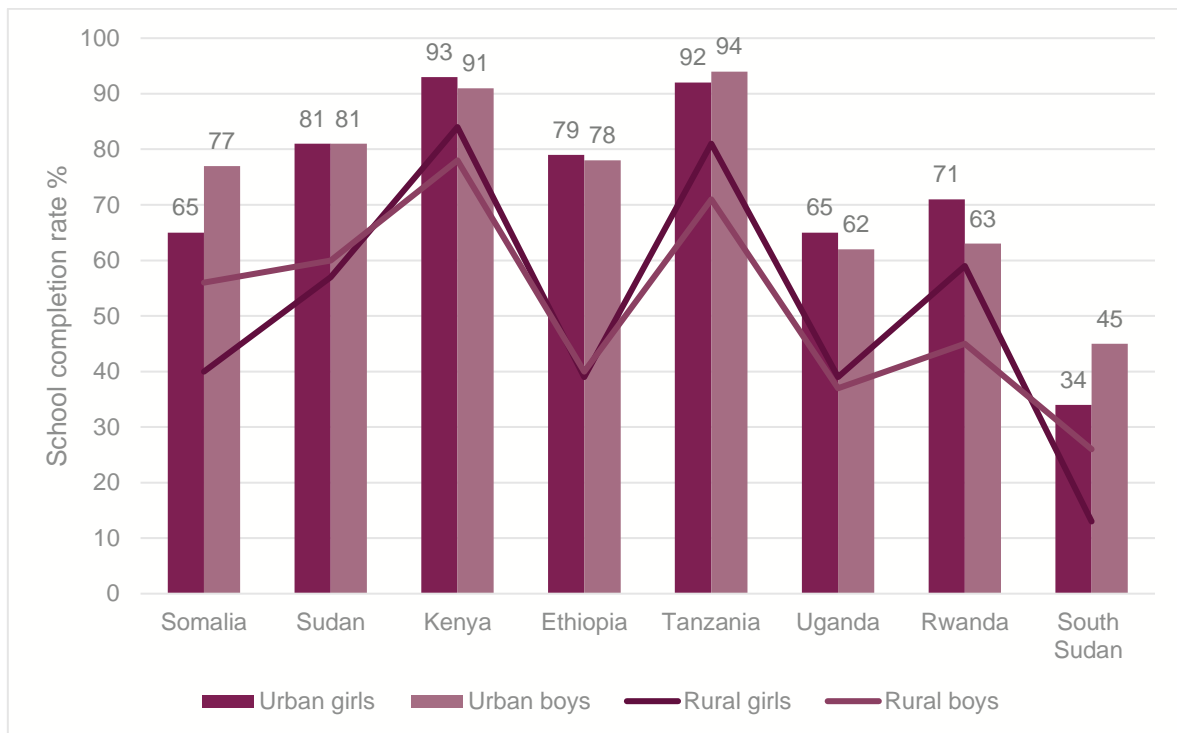
Source: WIDE (<https://www.education-inequalities.org>). Location and ethnicity choices are based on the most diverse data sets within these domains. No data are available for Turkana boys at upper secondary.

Regional variations in-country

Examination of regional variations in girls' enrolment and completion rates provide key information about what barriers may exist in areas to access and learning progression. However, even data that provide an urban versus rural perspective are the amalgamation of data across mixed rural and urban settings that will have their own individual patterns of engagement.

The largest disparities in this data set are seen in Somalia and South Sudan with a much higher percentage of urban boys completing primary education than girls. Girls living in rural areas in Kenya, Tanzania, and Rwanda have higher completion rates than their male counterparts, although are at a disadvantage in Somalia and South Sudan.

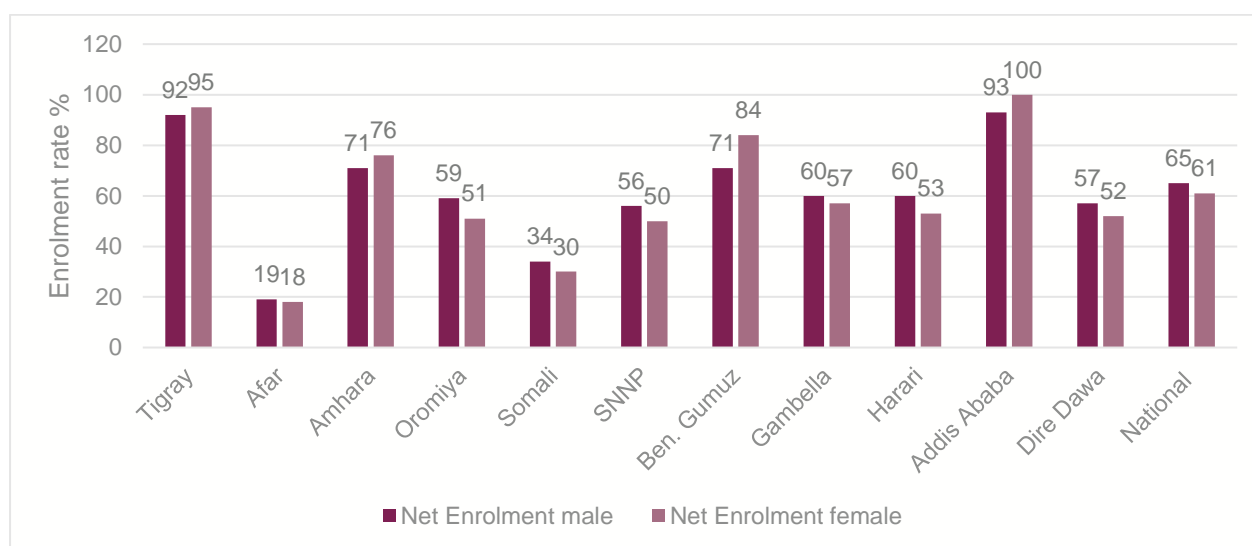
Figure 5: Primary school completion rates for girls and boys living in rural and urban areas



Source: World Development Indicators in World Bank Database (<https://databank.worldbank.org> – see Annex 1 for the links for each data point). Data for Somalia is from WIDE (<https://www.education-inequalities.org>).

In Ethiopia, the regional split indicates a huge variation in girls' upper primary enrolment across the country. Whilst the Afar region is significantly lower than others, the disparity between girls and boys is not as large, indicating that contextual barriers exist for both girls and boys. Four regions indicate a female advantage in enrolment, compared to eight where boys' net enrolment is higher. However, enrolment data are only part of the picture and may portray an optimistic view of girls' learning and progression.

Figure 6: Upper primary net enrolment by region in Ethiopia

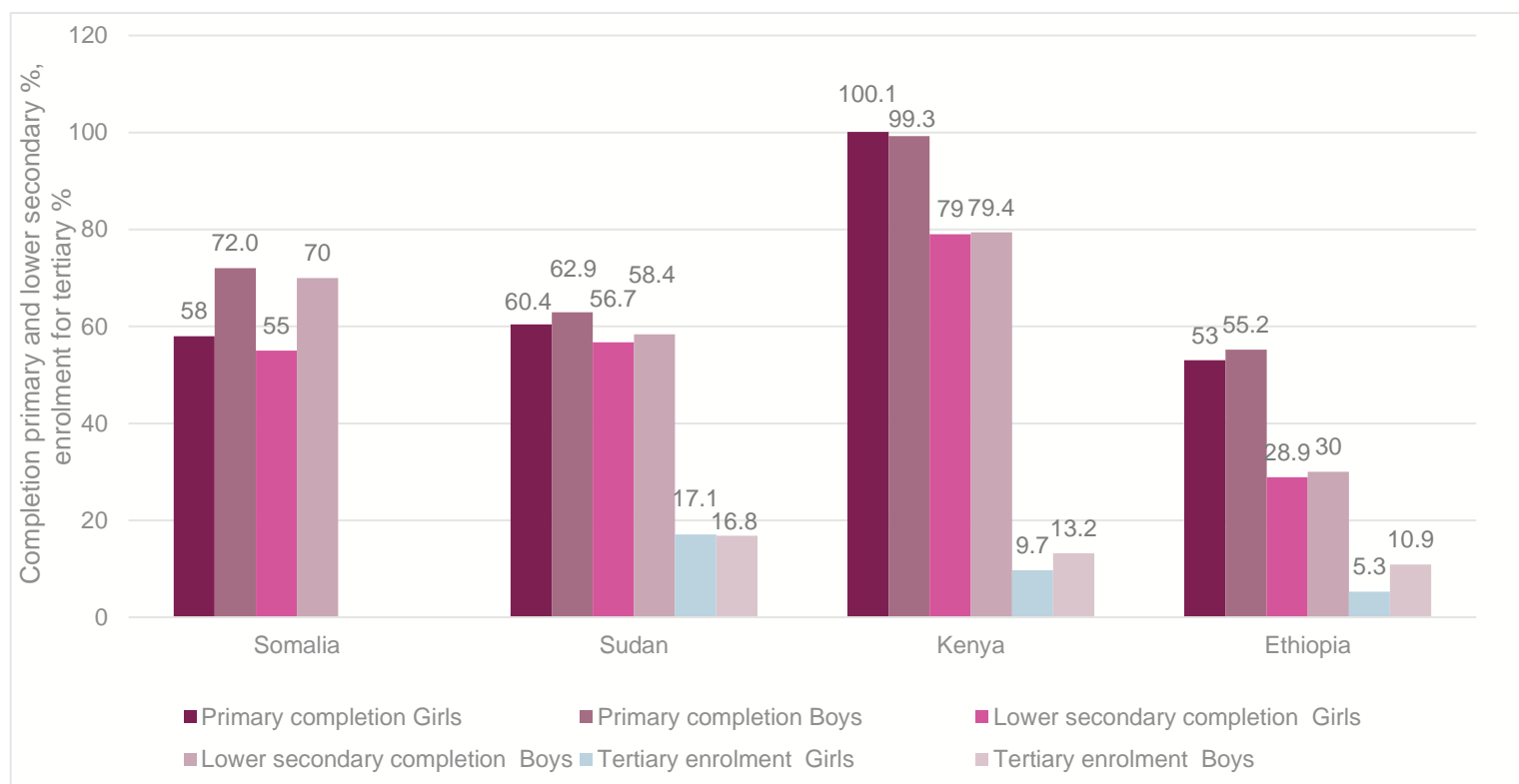


Source: Ethiopia Ministry of Education (2018), in Rose & Yorke (2021).

Progression

Progression through grades has varied patterns across the priority countries. In some education systems, students need to pass end-of-year exams to move to the next level, whereas others have a policy of automatic progression to the next grade. Both patterns present challenges for girls whose attendance and engagement may mean they are not able to learn. Research has demonstrated that low learning levels are a major contributor to dropout (Kaffenberger et al., 2021). The pattern of dropout takes some time to evolve and cannot be seen as a singular event but, due to large class sizes, teachers are often unaware of the warning signs of dropout or are unable to address them in time to keep children engaged (UNICEF, 2018). As shown by Figure 7, in all countries, progression decreases by school level, although the shift is similar for both boys and girls.

Figure 7: Progression through primary, secondary, and tertiary education by country



Source: World Development Indicators in World Bank Database (<https://databank.worldbank.org> – see Annex 1 for the links for each data point). Data for Somalia is from WIDE (<https://www.education-inequalities.org>). No tertiary completion data available – enrolment data used here. No tertiary data found for Somalia.

The Ethiopian Ministry of Education reports that there is a high level of grade repetition across the country with many children being over age for the grade within which they study. As a result, many children drop out temporarily or permanently. Primary school repetition rates in 2016/17 were 7.5% for boys and 6.8% for girls, with dropout rates at 11.4% for boys and 11.9% for girls (MoE 2017 quoted in Tafare & Tiumelissan, 2020). Enrolment rates should be examined alongside data on rates of repetition, dropout, learning, and completion to give a fuller picture and understand where girls may be dropping out of the education system and how learning levels and education quality may be a cause or effect of these patterns. Reasons for slow progression include health problems, the need to balance paid work through school, and for girls the pressure to get married before they complete their secondary education. The most notable differences in progression varied by location and socioeconomic status more than gender (Tafare & Tiumelissan, 2020). Due to slower progression, over half the children were already behind their expected grade at aged 12 (Tafare & Tiumelissan, 2020). Being significantly over age for the grade in which girls are enrolled is noted as a contributory factor in adolescent girls’ poor attendance and subsequent dropout.

Indirect Learning Outcomes

Employment and tertiary education

Tertiary education enrolment data exist for just six of the eight countries covered by this report and reveal a clear male advantage; the most significant disparity is in Ethiopia

where 11% of men and 5% of women enrol in tertiary education. Across Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda the rates of women enrolling in tertiary education are all below 10%, and all lower than their male counterparts in these countries. Sudan is the regional anomaly with 17% of girls enrolling in university-level education, marginally higher than the rate of boys. Translating this level of education into employment is not always guaranteed, and the data on unemployment for people with advanced education indicate significant gender disparities, which could be due to discrimination at the recruitment stage or other social or cultural barriers for women to enter the workforce at this level (Rose et al., 2020). The starkest example of this is in Sudan where the unemployment rate for girls who have achieved advanced education is 49%, whereas only 26% of similarly qualified men are unemployed.

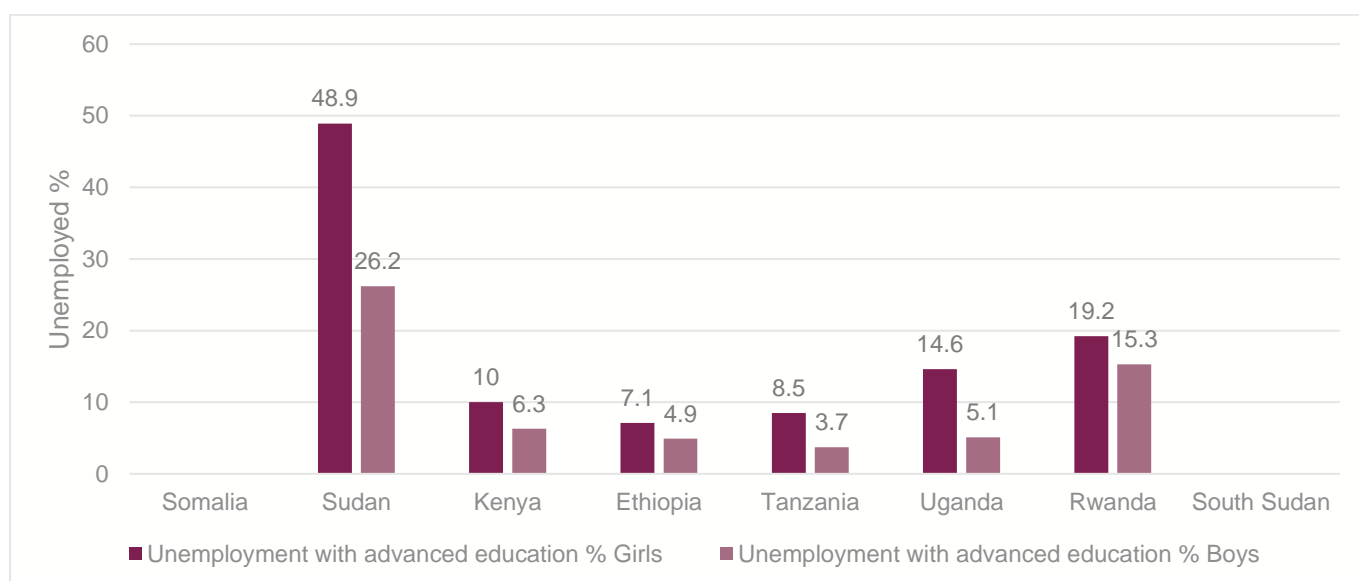
Labour market participation⁴

The labour force participation rate (national estimate) of girls aged 15–24 for countries in this region range from 20% in Sudan to 70% in Ethiopia and Tanzania. However, these do not provide an accurate picture of the engagement of women and girls in agriculture or informal economic activities, which is often missed in the formal data capture process and is known to be considerably higher in the countries covered in this study (Rose et al., 2020).

Data on the female working population with higher education in these countries indicate there is not necessarily a beneficial relationship between educational attainment and higher workforce engagement. In both Kenya and Rwanda labour force participation rates of women overall are 72% and 84% respectively, which are higher than the percentage of the female working population who have attained advanced education, reported as 68% and 66% respectively. Further examination of these data would be needed to understand the employment patterns of women and what the profile of employment looks like in these countries specifically. Unemployment rates of people with advanced education indicate a very clear pattern across all countries with men being significantly less likely to be unemployed if they have achieved higher education qualifications – nearly 50% of women with higher education in Sudan are unemployed compared to 26% of men.

⁴ The data on labour market participation for women with advanced education were drawn from World Development Indicators and ILOSTAT database (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.ADVN.FE.ZS>). However, there are anomalies in the data which must be acknowledged and may indicate challenges with the data collection process.

Figure 8: Unemployment with advanced education (%)



Source: World Development Indicators in World Bank Database (<https://databank.worldbank.org> – see Annex 1 for the links for each data point). Data for Somalia is from WIDE (<https://www.education-inequalities.org>). No data available for Somalia or South Sudan.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on women’s economic autonomy, exacerbating existing gender imbalances in the labour market. The pandemic has highlighted how the burden of childcare disproportionately affects women’s engagement in the workforce, which sees women globally doing three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men (UN Women, 2020). This imbalance of care responsibilities existed before the pandemic, but has been accentuated with school closures and strains on health systems that have seen women and girls stepping in to cover the gap in care and education (Bolis, 2020).

Data Availability and Systems

Meeting the global goals on education and responding to the G7 Declaration on Girls’ Education, which aims to get 40 million more girls in school and 20 million more girls reading by the age of 10 by 2026, relies on robust research and reliable data capture systems (FCDO, 2021). Countries with good education data systems have been able to show considerable progress in girls’ educational access and have highlighted low levels of learning, which reinvigorated the debate about the quality of education when children do attend school. However, many countries still have weak data capture methodologies in more remote settings serving more marginalised populations (see Annex 1).

With reliable data policy makers, school managers, teachers, and communities can identify problems, design solutions, and direct resources where they are most needed.

Key initiatives such as Data Must Speak are highlighting the need for strengthening education data systems across Africa. Ethiopia is part of this global initiative showcasing nationally owned, disaggregated data that are shared through user-friendly dashboards that allow timely community engagement. Having more accessible data formats that can engage community members has reduced dropout rates, raised exam pass rates, and improved nutrition and WASH facilities at school (UNICEF, 2021b).

However, gaps in learning data for Somalia and South Sudan made comparison of learning outcomes across the regions challenging. Analysis of participation in various assessment programmes reveals that three countries – Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda – use the SACMEQ⁵ regional assessment techniques (Varly, 2020). Citizen-led assessments such as the Uwezo⁶ techniques are also used in Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya to help drive improvement in teaching through feeding data back into the system on how to improve learning (Elks, 2016). The EGRA⁷ and EGMA⁸ assessments are the most used donor-led techniques utilised across East Africa, which form the basis of the World Bank database education analysis. However, as seen in Annex 1, data on Somalia and South Sudan were not available in the HLO database, and others quoted are quite historic even though we are aware that learning assessments are happening but using different systems that are not comparable at regional level.⁹

The existence of national assessment policies for the priority countries are inconsistent, with only Ethiopia and Tanzania currently having one in place. Somalia’s policy is currently in progress (Varly, 2020). The presence of these assessment policies within education policies is significant and has played out in the reliability and presence of data across the region. Without the investment and presence of these systems and skills, data on standardised learning assessments are inevitably unpredictable.

Strength of data systems: Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, and Ethiopia

- **Very weak education data collection systems.** Somalia’s data system, Education Management Information System (EMIS), is significantly behind others in the region. Data management at all levels of the education system – from teachers to ministries – is weak, resulting in patchy or absent data sources used at national levels. Sudan’s education data system is also weak. An investment to strengthen EMIS systems in Sudan by the World Bank is currently underway.
- **Validation of data mechanisms is still necessary** in environments where there is an incentive to inflate numbers to gain larger ministry grants for numbers of students. In Kenya, whose EMIS and Bureau for National Statistics have made significant progress on education data, strong validation and accountability mechanisms would help ensure that consistency of data are improved. Ethiopia’s annual education digest provides considerable data but it would benefit from triangulation and validation to ensure accuracy.
- **Disaggregation by disability and language is often missing.** A lack of consistent data collection by these factors within education indicators prevents insights into who may be struggling with learning, and how education resources and teaching methodologies should be designed to meet children’s learning needs. Estimates of people with

⁵ SACMEQ – Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality.

⁶ Uwezo is the Kiswahili word for ‘capability’ – it is an East African initiative to improve education quality through competency measurement to inform changes in education policy and practice.

⁷ EGRA – Early Grade Reading Assessment.

⁸ EGMA – Early Grade Maths Assessment.

⁹ South Sudan had Harmonised Learning Outcome (HLO) data from 2017 but were not disaggregated by sex, so they cannot be used to show gendered education progress.

disabilities in Somalia, for example, vary greatly with the Somali Health and Demographic Survey in 2019 recording just 3%, versus the Somali Institute of Special Educational Needs and Disability identifying 60% of households reporting at least one child with a disability (Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education, 2021).

- **Out-of-school populations are a high-level estimate within education data sets.** Out-of-school population calculations are made by subtracting the number of primary school-age children from the total population for the same age group. In many of the contexts in this study, therefore, there are likely to be many children who may be unregistered in population data due to migration or a lack of connection to government services. Understanding the proportion of out-of-school girls with disabilities is consequently even harder to estimate as it is acknowledged that many girls with disabilities are hidden from mainstream education systems due to stigma.
- **Pastoralist and migrant populations are often missed in education data systems.** There is inconsistent data on mobile populations such as pastoralists in northern Kenya and Somalia and migrant populations in Sudan, which has led to policies and education provision that do not accommodate their needs.
- **Practicalities and costs of data entry in remote areas can delay data processing.** Costs of electricity and internet connectivity to upload data onto Ministry of Education databases in remote schools in Kenya can delay or interrupt data flows from more remote locations.
- **Many gaps still remain in the non-formal, vocational, and ICT skills** which all form part of young people's success (Guglielmi, Neumeister, & Jones, 2021a).
- **Refugee education data are often held in separate data systems managed by refugee agencies** or are not differentiated in host community data sets. Ethiopia engaged with this challenge in 2019 through the launch of a refugee EMIS that works with the existing EMIS in a partnership across the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, UNHCR, and the national Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) (UNHCR, 2020).

Qualitative data collection must also be included in this analysis. Significant variations occur across remote or marginalised contexts where intersecting identities, context, and politics create a more complex picture of access to and experience of education for boys and girls that cannot be understood by quantitative data alone (Unterhalter, Robinson, & Balsera, 2020).

The pandemic has also interrupted timely and quality data. Given the challenges related to the impact of COVID-19 on learning globally, these data are needed to understand the potential/predicted profound effect on learning, progress, and educational outcomes. The next sections draw on relevant literature and research from the four priority countries to explore the barriers and challenges related to girls' education.

6. Gendered Norms at Home and in the Community

Poverty and gender norms are deeply entwined with the potential for girls to achieve education in low- and middle-income countries. There are the directly evident constraints of poverty on access to education through the inability to pay for fees, or indirect costs of schooling such as uniform, books, and transportation. However, the interplay of gender norms and poverty in these settings may lead to boys being prioritised over girls as a better investment in education due to the belief that boys will have more earning potential for the household, and girls being required to support domestic responsibilities in the home. The current pandemic and ongoing

effects of conflict in East Africa are also drivers of increasing levels of poverty which have the potential to undermine progress on gender inequality and norms, which have started to change in favour of girls' education (Harper et al., 2020). The Human Development Index rating that uses composite data on education, life expectancy, and income ranks countries in this study as some of the lowest in the world (see Annex 1).

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child signed by all eight countries in this study requires signatories to ban early marriage and guarantee pregnant girls have access to education. However, early marriage is still widespread in the region. Rates that had started to decline over the last 25 years have started to slow in the past 10, and the data on the impact of COVID-19 on these statistics are as yet unknown (UNICEF, 2021a). Ethiopia, once among the top five countries for early marriage in sub-Saharan Africa has reduced rates by a third since 2006 (UNICEF, 2021a). Setting the legal age of marriage to 18 makes a crucial difference in progress to eliminate child marriage. Yet in countries where there are loopholes in the law – such as in Somalia where children are allowed to marry under the age of 18 with parental consent – or where there are no sanctions and weak legal systems to follow up on early marriages, legislation is not enough to make real progress on eliminating these practices (UNICEF, 2021a).

Early marriage is most prevalent in low-income countries and can often be the cause or consequence of dropping out of school. Studies have shown that girls who become pregnant or marry have already been underperforming at school or started late (Birchall, 2018). Research is revealing the complex factors that trigger child marriage or prevent its occurrence are connected to factors such as poverty, disability, and access to work, indicating the need for policy making on this topic to be rooted in contextual understanding (Birchall, 2018; Malhotra & Elnakib, 2021). Econometric analyses on the impact of child marriage on education for girls has shown that in Ethiopia, for example, each additional year of secondary education reduces the risk of marrying before the age of 18 by 5.4% and the risk of having a first child by age 18 by 6% (Wodon et al., 2017).

Despite policies banning FGM/C in the region, including the recent criminalisation of the practice in Sudan, data indicate that the practice is still prevalent (UNICEF Sudan, 2021b). In Somalia 97% and Sudan 84% of girls aged 15–19 have undergone FGM. In Kenya and Ethiopia, even though the overall averages are lower (74% in Ethiopia and 21% in Kenya) in the most affected ethnic groups in each country, prevalence rates are over 90% (see Table 1). There are also reports of COVID-19 lockdowns being seen as an opportune time for girls to have this procedure carried out in their homes with ample time for healing (Plan International, 2020)

Direct physical trauma and health complications of FGM/C make learning and school attendance difficult in the short term and it plays a role in gendered expectations about marriage and girls' roles within the household in the longer term. Research has also shown a strong relationship between education levels and those affected by FGM/C – 54% of women with no education report they have undergone FGM/C compared to 19% of women who had some level of secondary education (UNICEF and UN Women, 2013).

Table 1: Prevalence rates of FGM

	Prevalence of FGM among women and girls aged 15–49 (%)	Prevalence of FGM among girls aged 15–19 (%)	FGM prevalence rate in most affected ethnic group in country (%)
Ethiopia	74	62	97
Kenya	21	11	94
Somalia	98	97	No regional variation noted
Sudan	88	84	No regional variation noted

Source: UNFPA FGM dashboard latest data (accessed November 2021).

Early or unintended pregnancies are prevalent in the region. For example, the 2014 Kenyan Demographic Health Survey showed that one in five adolescent girls aged 15–19 (18%) had either given birth or were pregnant (Ministry of Education, 2020). This has a direct impact on girls’ education due to stigma, the practicalities of childcare, or school policies that ban return to school after childbirth (UNESCO, 2021b). A key recommendation from UNESCO on reopening schools after the COVID-19 pandemic was for investment in re-entry policies to support girls who have got pregnant while schools were shut (UNESCO, 2021b). However, re-entry policies in the region have not yet translated into better support. Kenya’s re-entry policy launched in 2020 requires considerable engagement of communities to address the stigmatisation of teen pregnancy and the provision of childcare, emotional, financial, and material support. For example, due to its elevated rates of pregnancy, Kilifi county has been host to a number of initiatives to support girls’ return to school. Project assessments have highlighted the need for comprehensive programmes that address attitudes at school and in the community, alongside the practical support necessary to allow girls time for school (EDT, 2019; UNFPA Kenya, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on children’s mental health with direct consequences for their educational engagement. School closures, economic insecurities and family conflict associated with COVID-19 in Kenya resulted in high levels of anxiety and depression in adolescents, particularly for girls, that was somewhat alleviated by the return to school in 2021 as schools reopened (Population Council, 2021). Girls in education programmes in Ethiopia and Somalia also reported increased feelings of anxiety and depression and increased social isolation due to uncertain environments and lack of access to basic needs (Girls’ Education Challenge, 2021).

7. Gendered Institutions and Girls’ Participation

Socially constructed gender norms and power relations within institutions play a significant role in how policy is made and the way resources are distributed. All formal institutions operate with their own culture and gendered norms, which due to the history of

women's subordination in public life has resulted in a legacy of male-dominated bureaucracies (Celis, Kantola, Waylen, & Weldon, 2013). However, various studies have shown that when women have a greater voice in local government and political forums, and are engaged under the remit of progressing gender equality, there is more likely to be progress on policies and budgets that address gender inequalities and accountability mechanisms (Nazneen, 2016; Nazneen & Hickey, 2019).

Research from the region demonstrates that women are underrepresented in decision-making positions, including within education systems. For example, in Ethiopia, women reported discrimination within the education system and constraints when trying to engage other stakeholders and resources on a progressive agenda to accelerate girls' education initiatives (Rose & Yorke, 2021). However, it is important to note that progress on more gender-equitable reforms is not exclusively delivered by women and girls; well-placed male allies also have the potential to take forward more progressive policies that influence girls' education (Nazneen & Hickey, 2019).

The G7 declaration on girls' education also highlights the importance of collaboration with girl-led groups and youth leaders to listen to their specific needs and views in pursuit of their objectives to deliver on girls' education (FCDO, 2021). Without meaningful engagement of marginalised girls in project decision making in countries in this region, projects will fail (Johnson, Lewin, & Cannon, 2020). Comprehensive studies that have amplified adolescent voices have been conducted by the Population Council in Kenya and the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) project in Ethiopia, providing rich qualitative content that can inform policy making and project design (Guglielmi, Neumeister, & Jones, 2021b; Population Council, 2021).

Engaging girls in leadership roles within education initiatives also has a powerful impact on education outcomes for themselves and girls around them. Recruitment of former beneficiaries of the WUSC¹⁰ girls' education programme project in refugee and IDP camps in northern Kenya resulted in a significant increase in parents' belief in the transformative power of educating girls. Girls were employed and trained to bridge the gap between school, home, communities, and religious leaders to talk about supporting girls' education (INEE, 2019). Involving those affected by education initiatives in design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation creates a more accountable system to those it is intending to serve. Strengthening engagement and self-sufficiency means education solutions are more relevant and sustainable in the long term (INEE, 2019). In Tanzania, Camfed's "learner guide" programme similarly supports girls who have completed their education to become mentors to younger girls, which has demonstrated improved learning outcomes, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Camfed, 2016).

A growing body of evidence from the region highlights the connection between girls' confidence and leadership skills with successful learning outcomes. Care Somalia has seen positive association between girls' self-esteem, engagement in education, and better learning results. In its current initiative on girls' education Care Somalia is using a youth leadership index as an indicator to measure the role of these skills alongside learning outcomes for girls (Miettunen, Machova, & Peterson, 2020). UNICEF Sudan has been building confidence and leadership skills through its support of girls' clubs which are led and managed by an

10 WUSC – World University Service of Canada.

executive committee of girls who plan and run club activities, which include awareness raising of girls' education issues, peace building, and care of the environment (UNICEF Sudan, 2021b).

There are several country-level youth initiatives in this region taking the lead on promoting the role of young people in decision making, advocating for gender equality and addressing issues that impact girls' education. With substantial youth populations in all of the countries in this study, there is huge potential in engaging youth movements on girls' education and related issues. For example, Sudan's Youth Peer Education Network (Y-PEER Sudan) embodies the gender-equitable approach it promotes with six out of 11 state coordinators leading activities to address sexual and reproductive health and GBV and is coordinating community-led research and advocacy on COVID-19 (Elhameed Ahmed, 2021). The youth-led NGO, TaYA, in Ethiopia is also mobilising young people to challenge issues that impact girls' education such as early marriage, FGM, and GBV and the youth role in climate policy (TaYA, 2021).

8. Education Authorities and Schools

This section seeks to highlight regional barriers and innovations related to girls' education at the school level.

Gender norms and approaches to teaching

There have been innovative responses in the region to address the gender sensitivity of teaching. Research has demonstrated that patriarchal values upheld by many teachers in the region subsequently employ teaching methods that do not provide spaces that allow equal participation for girls and boys (Sperling & Winthrop, 2016). In response to this, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) designed a Gender-Responsive Pedagogy model which trains teachers to enable more gender-sensitive classroom practices that include equal participation for boys and girls, promote similar expectations in learning performance, and encourage respect between boys and girls. These techniques rolled out in schools in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda have been shown to be linked to better learning outcomes for girls and boys (FAWE, 2020).

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV)

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is recognised as a human rights violation perpetrated through corporal punishment, physical and psychological violence abuse, bullying, and sexual violence and harassment (Ginestra, 2020). Progress has been made in identifying the dimensions and prevalence of SRGBV with many countries signing up to global and regional commitments to eradicate this behaviour (End Violence Against Children, 2021). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child addresses many aspects of SRGBV, with 50 out of 55 African states signing up. Corporal punishment, however, has been a contested area within initiatives to address SRGBV, with only eight African states officially prohibiting corporal punishment in all settings, including Kenya. Ethiopia has prohibited corporal punishment in schools but not at home, and Sudan and Somalia are yet to ban corporal punishment in any setting (End Violence Against Children, 2021). Progress to deliver on the accompanied legal frameworks and build public support to ban corporal punishment in Kenya has suffered significant setbacks with the current Ministry of Education Cabinet Secretary expressing his support to bring back corporal violence to instil better discipline in schools (Obebo, 2021).

Girls often have little faith in the system to support them if incidences of violence do occur (Parkes et al., 2013). The 2019 violence against children survey in Kenya reported that nine out of 10 girls aged 18–24 would not seek help if they experienced sexual violence in school (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, 2019b). School-based studies indicate that the response systems are often weak with staff and welfare providers given little training to deal with school-related violence (Parkes et al., 2013).

However, there has been promising leadership by governments to prioritise integrated plans to address these issues in the region. For example, the *National Prevention and Response Plan on Violence Against Children in Kenya 2019–2023* shows promising engagement with this issue, seeing prevalence and acceptance of violence as a wider societal issue to be addressed at domestic, public, and school environment levels (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, 2019a). Additionally, work by NGOs has piloted innovative responses to SRGBV in the region. For example, Raising Voices proposes systemic approaches that recognise the broader culture of violence that allows school-related violence to continue through its Good Schools Toolkit, which was developed in Uganda and Kenya and engages teachers, students, and parents to work together to create a school-wide culture that will not tolerate violence (Naker, 2019). Other projects in Kenya have focused on engaging boys in a life skills programme promoting more gender-equitable relationships and encouraging boys to challenge the apathy and tolerance of peers' GBV behaviours (Keller et al., 2017). Experience from the Girls' Education Challenge programme, which includes Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia, shows that support for building more comprehensive safeguarding systems through international programmes not only helps girls to achieve their education potential without fear, but can strengthen government safeguarding systems for future generations (Cornish-Spencer, 2021).

Indirect cost of schooling

Despite progress within the region to make primary and secondary education free for all, the indirect costs of schooling (including books, uniforms, and transportation) mean many poorer families are still not able to afford education. The opportunity costs of additional labour that girls provide in the household when they are not at school is also a factor in these finely balanced financial decisions for poorer households (Sperling & Winthrop, 2016). Studies in Kenya showed that the provision of free uniform and school supplies to girls had a significant effect on dropout and teen pregnancy rates over a four-year period (Sperling & Winthrop, 2016). There is a growing body of research that is capturing lessons on selection criteria and how this support can be done to greatest effect without creating tension with other students (Sperling & Winthrop, 2016).

WASH systems and menstrual hygiene management

Poor WASH facilities and the lack of menstrual hygiene support can influence girls' attendance and academic performance, but studies show that this plays a less significant role in girls' attendance than previously assumed (Sperling & Winthrop, 2016). The Kenyan policy of supplying sanitary towels to all school-aged girls launched in 2016 was seen as a practical engagement to support girls' school attendance. However, reports suggest that supplies are not reaching all areas, with many education stakeholders calling for better accountability mechanisms to assess where there might be an issue in the supply chain (Population Council, 2021). A randomised controlled trial in Kilifi, Kenya, highlighted how sanitary pad distribution or reproductive health education on their own or in combination are not enough to improve primary

school attendance, suggesting these interventions need to be positioned in a more comprehensive programme to support girls' education (Austrian et al., 2021).

COVID-19 education response and gendered dimensions of COVID-19

As across the world, **COVID-19 has presented new challenges for education systems across East Africa, with school closures** (see Table 2). Indeed, this is particularly acute in some countries in the region, with Uganda's school closures now being the longest in the world. These school closures have numerous implications for girls' education including: the likelihood of girls not returning to school, and the likelihood that girls have been particularly disadvantaged by distance-learning strategies and by the economic impacts of the pandemic more broadly.

Table 2: Weeks of school closure by country

	Weeks fully closed	Weeks partially open
Somalia	19	0
Sudan	15	7
Kenya	27	9
Ethiopia	21	9
Tanzania	11	4
Uganda	58	23
Rwanda	32	20
South Sudan	33	21

Source: UNESCO global monitoring of school closures caused by COVID-19 (<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse#schoolclosures>), latest data October 2021.

Girls are particularly vulnerable to not returning after the effects of the pandemic subside as school closure makes them more likely to be affected by early marriage, pregnancy, and GBV (United Nations, 2020). Qualitative interviews with girls in the GAGE study in Ethiopia noted early marriage as a reason that many girls were not returning to school, with marriage being valued over education for girls in many of these communities (Jones et al., 2021). Gaining access to the "bride price" generated from child marriage is often a desperate coping strategy for vulnerable households who do not have other resources to respond to the impact of shocks on livelihoods and resources, meaning an abrupt end to education for many girls (Plan International, 2019). Caregivers in Ethiopia also recognised the vulnerability of girls' return after school closures, with many noting concern that their daughters were less likely to return to education compared to their sons, due to increased pressure on the household and the consequent expectations for girls to take on care roles (Jones et al., 2021).

Distance-learning strategies through various technology mediums were promoted by Ethiopia and Kenya (no data are available yet on Somalia and Sudan) during the pandemic. Ethiopia's Ministry of Education continued providing educational content through TV, radio and social media, but due to electricity and internet connectivity, uptake of this facility

outside urban areas was limited (Jones et al., 2021). Where technology solutions were used, these were recognised to exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities. Studies have shown that girls often have unequal access to technology in households due to socio-cultural norms about girls' use of technology and they may be reluctant to engage with it due to lack of confidence or time due to other domestic responsibilities (Webb et al., 2020). Some Kenyan NGOs accommodated the lack of internet connectivity in remote or poorer areas through the provision of printed materials, supporting local teachers and community volunteers, and setting up book borrowing systems (Girls' Education Challenge, 2021).

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on national and household economic status has exerted a significant indirect impact on girls' education in the countries in this study.

Somalia's economy is projected to contract by 2.5% in 2020, with declining remittances from abroad, falling exports, and closure of businesses meaning a reduction in household income, which influences choices made to prioritise girls education or not (World Bank, 2020b). See Section 6 on poverty as a key driver in reducing girls' access and engagement in education.

9. National Government: Policy and Education Systems

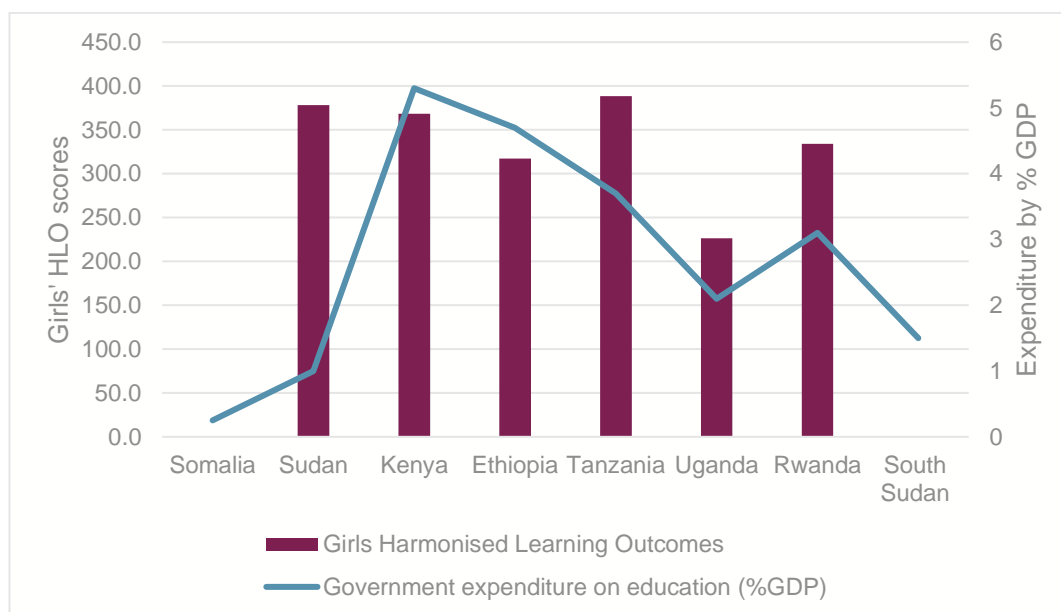
Despite gender being featured in education policies or having a stand-alone gender policy in all four FCDO priority countries, political will to translate these into quality delivery of girls' education requires consistent political effort and engagement (Rose et al., 2020). There are three important areas of government focus that have the potential for a large impact on girls' education: government expenditure, resources (in particular, teachers), and government policies and plans. See Annex 2 for country-level plans and policies.

Government expenditure on education

The Framework for Action on SDG 4 recognises varied national contexts but recommends an allocation of at least 4% of GDP to education. The average African government currently spends 4.1%, which is close to the global average of 4.3% (African Union and UNICEF, 2021). Although this figure indicates that spending in African countries is approaching the global average, this does not accommodate for the large proportions of school-aged children and the challenges in delivering quality inclusive education. As the countries of focus are also low- or lower-middle-income contexts, this percentage also corresponds with lower funding volumes per student.

Increased education spending needs to be accompanied by comprehensive gender analysis and plans to address blockers and drivers of gender inequalities to improve girls' education (Emara & Hegazy, 2017). Data in this study also confirm the position that increased government education spending does not directly result in better education outcomes for girls. For example, HLO scores for girls in Sudan outperform girls in Kenya despite the much higher percentage of government investment in education in Kenya. However, when looking at expected years of schooling, Kenya's higher investment of over 5% of GDP expenditure in education does translate into higher levels of girls' and boys' expected years of school relative to its regional counterparts. In contrast, Somalia's expected years of school are the lowest in sub-Saharan African countries with boys' slightly better than girls' at 1.55 to 1.24 expected years at school, appearing to match Somalia's education spending – which is well below average at only 0.25% of GDP.

Figure 9: Government expenditure on education % GDP against girls HLO scores, by country



Sources: Expenditure data – World Development Indicators in World Bank Database (<https://databank.worldbank.org> – see Annex 1 for the links for each data point). Data for Somalia from Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education (2021). HLO data from World Bank Data Catalogue, Angrist et al. (2021) (<https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/search/dataset/0038001>).

It is also important to consider how this overall spend on education is divided between the different education levels, particularly given the data provided in Figure 7, which indicate that many girls in the four countries of focus do not complete secondary education. There are some data available which show government spend by education level, for Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and South Sudan; however, these data are not available consistently across the region. Table 3 indicates that Ethiopia and South Sudan governments spend higher on tertiary education than on other education levels. Kenya’s and Rwanda’s highest spend is on secondary education. Spending on tertiary and secondary education is least likely to benefit girls, due to the high levels of dropout and low levels of completion rates for girls’ post-primary. With the considerable contribution of private and community bodies in the education sector in Somalia, and the government only running 6% of schools, it is harder to establish where the distributions of funds lie across the different levels of schooling (Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education, 2021).

Table 3: Government expenditure on different levels of education as a % of GDP

	Pre-primary	Primary	Secondary	Post-secondary non-tertiary	Tertiary
Kenya	0.09	1.92	2.2	0.27	0.69
Ethiopia	0.09	1.3	0.86	0.22	2.27
Rwanda	0.04	0.88	1.18	0.26	0.61
South Sudan	0.01	0.56	0.19	0.01	0.78

Source: UNESCO UIS (<http://data.uis.unesco.org>). Comparable data not available for Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, or Uganda.

Teachers

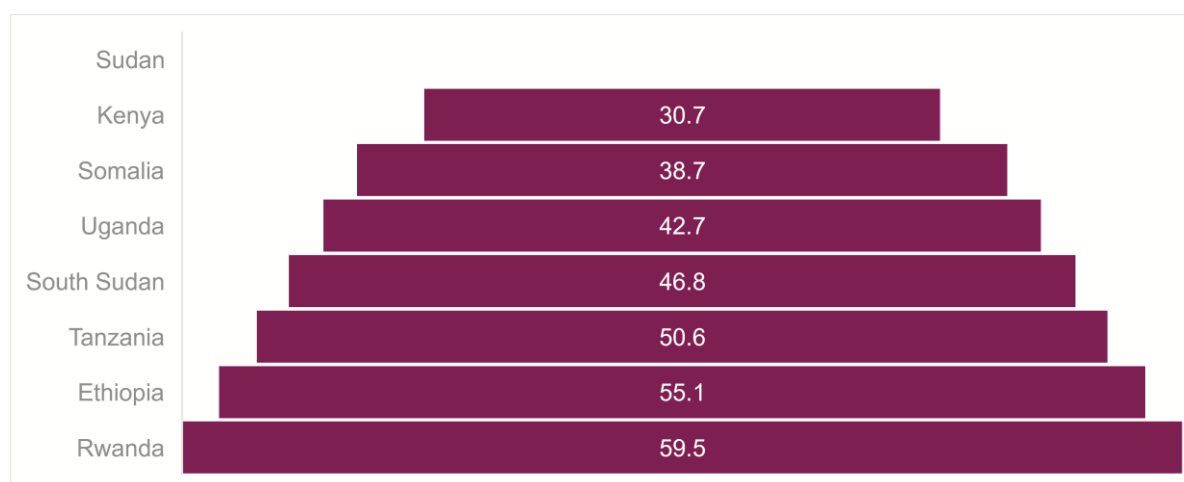
Student–teacher ratios are an important indicator of resources dedicated to education, but they are not necessarily an indication of quality of teaching. Kenya’s higher investment in education has translated into a better pupil–teacher ratio in primary schools, resulting in average class sizes of 30.7 compared to 55 students per teacher in primary schools in Ethiopia.¹¹ Indeed, overall, the student–teacher ratio across the region varies (see Figure 10).

Additionally, regional variations exist in Kenya’s education system with pupil–teacher ratios in the Turkana population as high as 77:1 (UNICEF Kenya, 2020). In Somalia, the student–teacher ratio in community primary education shifts dramatically when calculated by qualified versus unqualified teachers per student – from 38.7 to 122.4 (Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education, 2021).

Teachers are the backbone of any public education system, with evidence showing that in some contexts girls benefit from being taught by female teachers and having female role models in the school leadership (Sperling & Winthrop, 2016). However, analysis of studies looking at women teachers as role models illustrates that in other contexts hiring more qualified, gender-sensitive, and engaged teachers is more important (Sperling & Winthrop, 2016). Proportions of female teachers in Somalia are particularly low, with only 14% of primary school teachers and 3% of secondary school teachers being women (Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education, 2021). This underrepresentation of female teachers is in a context where female enrolment in secondary education continues to be very low and barriers to girls’ engagement with education exist at all levels of the system.

¹¹ World Bank databases do not have data on pupil–teacher ratios in Sudan or Somalia, or secondary school data on Kenya.

Figure 10: Pupil–teacher ratio for primary education by country



Teaching workforces often rely on unqualified teachers and volunteers. Data from Sudan’s Ministry of Education identified 3,692 unqualified teachers in South and East Darfur out of a total 7,315 employed teachers. Many of these untrained teachers were under supervised and unevenly distributed between rural and urban areas (UNICEF Sudan, 2021a). Within Sudan’s education system the Global Partnership for Education also estimates that 24,000 teachers in basic government schools are volunteers (GPE, 2021).

Government policy and engagement with girls’ education

Somalia

The Somali National Development Plan 2020–2024 characterises the education sector as having poor infrastructure, weak capacity, and poor accountability. Somalia’s lower-than-average education spending of only 0.25% of GDP needs to be seen in the context of the decades of conflict and fragmentation of the education system that has resulted in several other actors being involved in the education sector. International remittances are a key factor in the education funding landscape. Sixty-two per cent of Somali households receive remittances once a month, which is often channelled into education costs (Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education, 2021). The government funds only 6% of education provision across the country, with the remainder being provided by private (77%) and community (20%) sources (Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education, 2021).¹² This broad ownership of education presents challenges in terms of equity and quality of the education system; even though private schools have relatively low fees, for families with severe resource constraints, education is inaccessible. This funding environment also creates a difficult accountability mechanism and consistency across the education sector. Despite this challenging context, there are encouraging signs that this picture is improving for the Somali education sector. The General Education Law, adopted in 2021, enshrined education as a fundamental human right and outlined the government strategy for free, inclusive, and equitable education. A new accelerated basic education policy is also in progress which recognises the need to address the large out-of-school populations with

¹² These data cover five of the six federal member states: Bandir, Galmadug, Hirashabelle, Jubaland, and Southwest states.

alternative education modalities. Given the national funding deficit in education, however, this goal will require considerable support to realise.

Federal-level education planning has benefited from two rounds of education sector analyses and education sector strategic plans in the last 10 years and has put in place several progressive initiatives that directly affect girls' education potential.¹³ Additional policies to support girls' access to education have been launched in the past 10 years – the ban of FGM 2012, the Somali Women's Charter of 2019, and the special education needs and education policy in 2018. The new Community Education Committee Policy in 2019 is a valuable recognition of a community network and accountability mechanism that has proven instrumental in supporting girls' education and preventing dropout. Implementation of these policies, however, is at various stages of delivery. The Department of Gender within the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development is responsible for delivering the 10-year gender policy from 2015 that aims to mainstream gender into education. Gender units within state Ministries of Education are characterised as weak and underfunded.

Women's rights groups in Somalia are active and have played a significant role in raising awareness about issues, such as the recent Sexual Intercourse Related Crimes Bill including a clause with a loophole on child marriage if there is parental consent. With the planned election delayed until early 2022, however, many processes are inevitably on hold.

Due to the current status of girls' learning in the country being so low, there are multiple potential entry points for funding. System-level support of the Department of Gender and state-level Gender Units would create a more robust network to support the various programmes initiated by the Ministry of Education such as the accelerated learning, teacher training, and support to community education committees, which would all contribute to girls' learning outcomes. Continued support for girls' leadership in community networks to support girls' education has the double impact of better retention and a growing network of future leaders.

Sudan

The transitional government of Sudan had committed to promising policy and legal reforms to support girls' education. However, due to the unstable political situation in late 2021, it is unclear when and how this progress on girls' education will be sustained.

Sudan's national constitution of 2005 recognised the right to education, including a commitment to compulsory, free primary education without discrimination. Sudan's education system features private sector participation in some areas – in Khartoum 28% of providers are private, although countrywide the overall average is approximately 2.4% (UNESCO, 2018). This joint ownership of education inevitably compromises accountability mechanisms of federal-level plans.

Sudan's Ministry of Education established the Girls' Education Department in 2000. A Girls' Education Sub-Sector Strategy is in development and there are plans to establish a Girls' Education Network Forum. The lifting of reservations in November 2020 to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child concerning child marriage and the right of pregnant girls to education was a positive move to release some of the statutory limitations on girls' education. This legislative change has been accompanied by a child marriage strategy and action plan that has a minimum age for marriage, and has been approved by the Minister of Labour and Social

¹³ Somalia Education Sector Analysis 2021 – not yet published.

Development. Whilst these laws and regulations are a sign of great progress, in an education and social protection system that is so weak, the practical delivery of these policies into meaningful change for girls may take some time to deliver. High turnover of staff in the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Social Development and Labour means that several of these policies are victim to delays in implementation and institutional memory loss (UNICEF Sudan, 2021b).

Due to the low level of education across all school-age populations, potential entry points to support education benefit both girls and boys but would need robust gender analysis to understand the different dynamics that exist for girls and how these interventions should be designed to address their needs in particular. At an education systems level, investment and strengthening of EMIS, local-level girls' education departments, teacher training, and the policy for free education are key starting points. With the volume of displaced communities and out-of-school populations, alternative education modalities would also be key to reaching high volumes of out-of-school girls. In this complex environment consistent engagement with girls to inform decisions on education provision will be key to education success.

Kenya

Kenya has been at the forefront of education reforms in the region. As the co-host of the Global Partnership for Education replenishment in 2021, Kenya is seen as a global champion for the value of education in development. The government established free access to primary and secondary school in 2003 and 2008, and in 2015 launched a curriculum reform policy to address the quality of education. These initiatives have seen a notable rise in girls' attendance and learning in the past decade, yet barriers remain for many adolescent girls from more disadvantaged areas and socioeconomic groups. The most recent government initiative concerning girls is the "school re-entry policy", which specifically aims to address reintegration after early pregnancy and other causes of dropout. Although this policy is in the early stages of being rolled out, it gives a clear indication of the government's willingness to engage with broader issues facing girls accessing their right to education. As indicated above, the policy to distribute sanitary wear to all schools in 2017 is notable but is still yet to have reliable countrywide coverage.

Within this picture, however, there remain key regions of concern where education disparities are still significant for girls. The education system in the northeast of the country has been undermined by conflict and attacks on schools and teachers since 2018. The Kenya National Union of Teachers has campaigned to stop the state posting non-local teachers to the area until security can be restored. Compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, hundreds of schools were closed (International Crisis Group, 2020). The weak education system in this area is rooted in a historic marginalisation and exclusion evident through poor development indicators in education, health, and infrastructure (Haider, 2020).

The National Gender and Equality Commission set up in 2011 has been a key advocate for promoting initiatives such as the prevention of school-related and general rates of GBV. The National Prevention and Response Plan on Violence Against Children in Kenya presents a key opportunity for cross-sector coordination to create more accountable reporting and support systems as part of a move to shift embedded attitudes to GBV.

Due to its relative stability and progressive engagement with education, Kenya is host to a vibrant community of international and local NGOs and civil society groups, so there are good opportunities for local partnership engagement.

With the devolution of early childhood education and village polytechnics management to regions, the Government of Kenya is beginning to invite greater civic engagement with education. Coupled with the Youth Development Policy 2019, this is a great opportunity for girls to be involved in greater civic roles to inform the quality and suitability of education solutions that would meet their needs.

Whilst pushing the agenda for girls' education, there is also an awareness of the engagement rates of boys' deprivation due to child labour and engagement in conflict which directly competes with boys' educational achievements. Delivery of gender policies must maintain a lens on the unique challenges that both boys and girls face in their contexts.

Although Kenya has one of the more robust education systems within the region, in more remote of conflict-affected locations there is still a struggle with attendance and quality instruction for girls' education. Entry points include supporting the ministries to implement promising initiatives on the ground such as re-entry policies, menstrual hygiene management, and robust systems that deliver on SRGBV commitments. Youth networks are also active and likely to be easily mobilised to engage with promotion of girls' education at the local level, addressing social norms and the opportunities gained through learning progression.

Ethiopia

The maturity of Ethiopia's education system has benefited from several iterations of the Education Sector Development Programme, which started in 1997. These encompass ambitious plans in education, through political, economic, and social reforms. The current GEQIP-E programme with its numerous international and government stakeholders is an ambitious plan to improve education quality across the country. With its wide-ranging deliverables it is recognised to be quite a heavy process that lacks focus in areas that need particular attention. Girls' education is included within this plan under the "equity" element, featuring investment in life skills and girls' clubs, but in the range of other concerns does not stand out as a priority (Rose & Yorke, 2019). The delivery of this model has also been criticised for the top-down manner in which it is being delivered with little space for participation or input from woreda-level (district) education offices, schools, teachers, parents, and students (Rose & Yorke, 2019). To translate these ambitions into practice, however, requires stakeholders to feel engaged and for feedback loops to be established so that real progress can be made. A high turnover of ministers of education has meant the delivery of education system strengthening has been vulnerable to differing interests as new ministers arrive. Without a nominated girls' education champion within the Ethiopian government, it is often external UN and donor bodies which raise the profile of this work.

A Gender directorate responsible for gender mainstreaming in education is situated within the Ministry of Education and is supported by the National Gender Forum which convenes partners working on girls' education and includes the Girls' Education Advisory Committee. However, these bodies are known to be underfunded and lack influence in institutional decision making. Ethiopia has shown commitment to reducing gender inequalities through revision of the curriculum and textbooks and providing teachers with gender-sensitive professional development programmes and mainstreaming gender-responsive pedagogy in teacher education colleges (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020). This initiative was in the early stages of roll-out. The pandemic may delay the embedding of these practices.

Behaviours of NGOs and CBOs have been quite firmly controlled until the law changed in 2019 to allow much more engagement in education by CSOs including many youth networks.

Key entry points in Ethiopia to accelerate girls' education include: working at a more regional level to assist capacity to deliver on high-level gender policy and commitments, and strengthening gender-sensitive school leadership and teacher training. Youth networks are expanding and have great potential to develop girls' leadership and promote social norm change around girls' education at local or regional levels on issues such as FGM and child marriage.

10. Global Challenges: Climate Change and Conflict

East Africa is uniquely positioned to experience the mutual shocks of increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters combined with ongoing conflict, both of which have profound impacts on education systems.

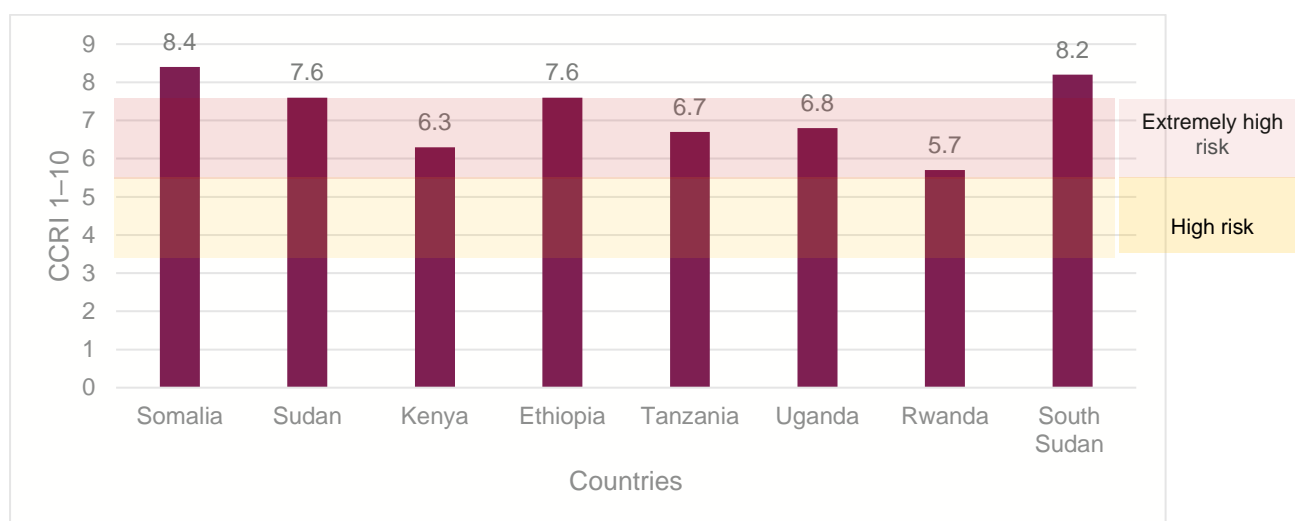
Climate Change and Girls' Education

Globally, climate change exacerbates existing gender inequalities, putting the most disadvantaged women and girls at greater risk. Evidence suggests that women and girls' mortality rates are likely to be higher than men's during climate-related disasters, and they are more likely to experience human rights abuses in the form of trafficking, sexual violence in temporary shelters, and reduced access to sexual and reproductive health services (Kwauk et al., 2019). These impacts are also likely to influence girls' education, with estimates that in 2021 at least four million girls from low- and lower-middle income countries will be prevented from completing education due to climate-related events, which could rise to more than 12.5 million girls by 2025 (Fry & Lei, 2021).

Children in East Africa are particularly vulnerable to the risks of climate change. UNICEF's (2021c) climate risk index ranks children's exposure to climate and environmental shocks against their vulnerability. Anything graded over five out of 10 is seen to be a location of "high risk" for children, with over seven being "extremely high risk". As Figure 11 demonstrates, all countries in this report are high risk, with four out of the eight countries being deemed extremely high risk.

In a region where most of the population depend on agriculture, the climate change-related locust infestations have had a profound effect on poverty and nutrition and potential displacement for large populations in the region (André, Hajžmanová, & Espinosa, 2020). Floods in Sudan in 2020 were ranked as the most severe floods recorded in the country for over 100 years. Schools were destroyed, and families lost their houses and livelihoods leading to further impoverishment for many households already living in poverty and reducing their ability to cover the costs of education (Ashii, 2021). These historic floods followed those in 2019 which had already affected Central and Southern Somalia with an estimated 100 schools being destroyed (World Bank, 2020a).

Figure 11: Children’s Climate Risk Index (CCRI)



Source: UNICEF Children’s Climate Risk Index, 2021.

These regional climate shocks have direct impacts on girls’ educational prospects through early marriage and sexual harassment.

After successive flooding and droughts in Somalia in 2018–2019 internal displacement resulted in a dramatic fall in girls’ school enrolment compared to an increase for boys. This notable change in education engagement is explained as boys no longer needing to be engaged in agricultural labour as they were in rural areas, families prioritising boys’ schooling costs, and a concern about girls’ safety from sexual harassment in new settings (Cazabat, 2020). Sexual harassment and violence for girls is also a feature of climate-induced internal migration. A study in Kenya revealed that insecure housing and temporary education facilities are often accompanied by the threat of girls being exposed to sexual harassment and violence (Cazabat, 2020). Studies have recorded families responding to increased levels of sexual harassment and violence in crisis settings by marrying girls early as a way of “preserving their honour” (Greene & Stiefvater, 2019).

Poor access to water and natural resources has a disproportionate effect on girls’ time to attend school and study.

In Ethiopia, water shortages and droughts mean that girls are often pulled out of school to help with domestic tasks such as daily water collection as it becomes more time intensive (Devonald, Jones, & Yadete, 2020). Qualitative research from GAGE in Ethiopia recorded a father intervening in the marriage of his daughter, as it would result in their household being deprived of their “water carrier” (Devonald et al., 2020).

These challenges are likely to continue and worsen with Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia currently facing severe drought conditions after the failure of several consecutive rainfall seasons.

With another failed season imminent, this will add greater stress to a region that is also managing locust infestations resulting in severe food shortages (WFP, 2021). Heavy seasonal rains and flash flooding have also been the cause of widespread disruption in parts of Sudan and Ethiopia, causing damage to agriculture resulting in significant price increases in food and levels of malnutrition (WFP, 2021). The outlook for 2022 is that these extreme weather conditions are likely to continue, with knock-on effects to children’s education outcomes that are undermined by poverty, poor nutrition, displacement, and conflict (WFP, 2021)

Potential for girls' education to build climate resilience

Gender equality in and through education is a powerful force to build resilience and be part of climate change solutions. More educated populations can make more informed decisions about weather conditions and risk, and are more able to recover from economic shocks caused by environmental events. Studies looking at past disasters and analysing various Human Development Index indicators have shown that investing in girls' education is the single biggest factor to significantly reduce vulnerability to natural disasters, more important than the country's health system or GDP (Striessnig, Lutz, & Patt, 2013). However, investing in girls' education to equip them as current and future agents of change in climate activism is yet to translate into being featured in country-level climate change strategies or policies (Kwauk et al., 2019).

However, the link between higher rates of girls' education and lower rates of fertility when used to justify girls' education as a route to potential climate impact mitigation can lead to serious moral and ethical dilemmas (Kwauk & Braga, 2017). This solution sees women in the global South having to pay the price of the current climate emergency fuelled largely by impacts of industrialisation driven by the global North. Research examining the relationship between education, fertility rates, and emissions is revealing that a relationship between education and emissions, may in fact result in short-term increases as education leads to more economic growth (Devonald et al., 2021; O'Neill et al., 2020). Modelling demonstrates that reduction in population alone is not an adequate approach to climate mitigation (Budolfson & Spears, 2021). In these discussions that promote investment in girls' education as a climate "solution" it is important to maintain focus on their right to quality education and wellbeing rather than education being a route to reduction of fertility or population control (Devonald et al., 2021).

Conflict and Girls' Education

The effects of climate change and population growth exert pressure on limited resources, leading to an escalation of tensions that result in conflict and significant migration. The effects of conflicts and violence on education are indisputable: poverty is compounded, discrimination is enhanced, curriculums are politicised, and the quality of education delivery is compromised (African Union and UNICEF, 2021). The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016–2025 recognises the presence of conflict on many education systems in Africa through its promotion of peace education and conflict prevention at all levels and age groups.

Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia are all experiencing the effects of current or historic conflict that have had profound effects on their education systems in the short and longer term.

Early in 2021, UNICEF's humanitarian needs overview report registered 28% of the population – 12.7 million people – were in need of humanitarian assistance, 3.4 million people more than in 2020 (UNICEF Sudan, 2021b). Across northern Ethiopia, an estimated 9.4 million people need food assistance due to the ongoing conflict (UNOCHA, 2021b), and 2.7 million children are reckoned to be missing education due to damaged schools or use of education facilities by sheltering IDPs (UNOCHA, 2021a). Unfortunately education is often poorly funded in humanitarian responses, despite evidence of the importance of the role of education in building resilient communities that can withstand shocks now and in the future (INEE, 2019).

Challenges related to migration and climate have led to increasing cross-border issues in the region. Although the Kenyan government is a more stable presence in the region, Kenya is still affected by conflict through migration from neighbouring countries and localised attacks such as school-based attacks in Mandera County in the northeast. This area of Kenya, predominantly inhabited by ethnic Somali nomadic pastoralists, has experienced repeated attacks by Al-

Shabaab on schools and teachers leading to an exodus of teachers during the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 (Haider, 2020). Across north and northeast Kenya, education attendance is significantly lower than the national statistics with primary school attendance at 55% compared to 82% nationally, and secondary school attendance is 19% compared to the national rate of 37% (Haider, 2020).

Recognising the gendered nature of conflict and crisis is critical to being able to design appropriate responses to education losses. Girls living in crisis contexts are two-and-a-half times more likely to be out of primary school and 90% more likely to be out of secondary school than their contemporaries in more stable environments (INEE, 2019). Aspirations for girls' futures can be seriously hampered by displacement and emergencies: in a 2013 survey in refugee and host communities in northern Kenya only 1.7 % of respondents thought that education had the potential to help girls make a better life for themselves (INEE, 2019). Boys' educational aspirations can also be impacted by conflict with expectations for them to join the military or to take paid employment (INEE, 2019).

Overall, the unprecedented overlap of natural and man-made disasters in East Africa creates a uniquely challenging environment for delivering on promises to achieving girls' education. When these factors combine, they impact poverty, migration, and health. Education is often deprioritised and social norms about girls' expectations to support the family rather than achieve an education come to the fore.

11. Conclusion and Regional Entry Points

East Africa is currently facing a unique combination of climate, conflict, and pandemic-related emergencies, underpinned by some of the highest global rates of poverty that are having a profound impact on education systems and girls' education outcomes. The role of poverty and social norms that restrict girls' education create a complex path towards reform. The pre-pandemic learning crisis saw many children in school but not learning, and girls from poor or remote locations falling behind their male, urban, or wealthier counterparts. High levels of children in this region are leaving school without even the most foundational learning skills, with girls' learning levels in Sudan and Somalia being among the lowest in the world. Evidence revealed in this report also illustrates that girls' progression through education severely drops off at secondary level in different ways to boys, indicating the profound effect of gender norms associated with adolescence and expectations around education. Social norms are notoriously "sticky" and have a tendency to revert to traditional pathways in times of crisis (Harper et al., 2020). Yet crises can also present opportunities for social change.

Empowering women and girls through quality education has become even more pressing. More resilient communities that can drive development are built through improving foundational skills for all and challenging restrictive social norms. Education, confidence, and leadership skills create more prosperous and peaceful societies that shift norms around gender equality and are more resilient to the growing number of pandemics, conflicts, and climate-related shocks – all UK ambitions outlined in the recent integrated review. When literate girls become mothers, this also builds intergenerational resilience. Solutions to addressing girls' education outcomes in East Africa cannot be achieved without a holistic understanding of girls' contexts and the inherent social norms and power relations that are infused into all levels of society. Creating education systems that are equitable and inclusive requires leadership and resources alongside gender and inclusion insight. Country-led innovation needs to be mobilised through robust research and evidence to amplify where real progress is being made in girls' education.

All the countries covered in this report feature gender mainstreaming policies and ambitions, with Kenya and Ethiopia starting to implement various initiatives to create more supportive environments for girls to engage with school. However, the implementation of these plans is yet to be realised in all locations and deliver transformative change. Strong leadership and resources are needed at all levels to deliver key policies to make schools safer, ban early marriage, and create social protection networks that children can trust will respond to reports of GBV, as well as deliver on commitments on education for all.

With willing governments, and active girls' education allies who can be champions of change, there is real potential for engaging young people's insight to create more transformative education systems. Responses to the climate emergency have been characterised by an active and informed youth movement. More youth networks are emerging, with an agenda to challenge gender inequalities, fight for climate justice, and create fairer futures. With the substantial youth populations in these countries there is real potential to partner with youth and girl-led movements in the effort to address issues that affect them and accelerate transformative girls' education solutions.

The countries covered in this report have unique strengths and weaknesses that require further research to appreciate the full picture of education systems and social barriers that are involved in girls' education. Common themes that have emerged from this rapid review point to the following potential regional entry points.

System strengthening

- Providing support to education data systems to deliver reliable data on learning that are disaggregated by age, gender, disability, location, and language will enable much clearer analysis to inform policy decisions. This includes establishing reliable systems and continuing to validate systems that have already been established.
- The identification and support of high-level girls' education champions in influential positions in national and regional administrations have real leverage potential. These roles can promote investment in, and raise the profile of, reforms that create more gender-equitable societies and support gender-sensitive education sector planning.
- Investment and capacity building of existing gender units within ministries of education will strengthen gender mainstreaming intentions and can provide the cross-sector coordination that is needed in holistic responses to provision of girls' education.
- Capacity building of school leadership and teachers to recognise gender bias is needed to create safer learning environments that use gender-sensitive and inclusive teaching practices and curriculums. This investment should be integrated alongside the goal of improved teaching quality overall.
- Investment in more flexible education modalities such as accelerated learning curriculums or alternative timetables would reach the large numbers of girls who have already dropped out or are at risk of doing so.

Enabling environments

- Creating more robust links between school and communities is key to creating community buy-in and shifting wider attitudes on violence against children. Investment and capacity building of regional and local-level legal protection systems is crucial to eliminate harmful practices in school and outside.

- Engaging men, boys, and other key stakeholders in social norm change initiatives that challenge assumptions about child marriage and gender roles has been a powerful way to challenge gender stereotypes that often prevent girls from accessing education, and limit boys' future aspirations.
- Strengthening local networks to support re-entry programmes for girls who have had children through practical and emotional support can help shift the stigma associated with teen pregnancies.

Girls' agency

- Ensuring that girls are meaningfully consulted, and are part of project governance structures, means that policies and projects are designed to respond to the needs of the girls it intends to serve. This is particularly key for marginalised girls in complex contexts.
- Investing in life skills programming and leadership opportunities has had a proven impact on girls' self-esteem, education engagement, and learning outcomes. These skills also create more resilient girls and families who can withstand shocks and engage in climate solutions.
- Investing in girl-led groups and youth networks can be part of accountability mechanisms for girls' education and creating role models for girls and a pipeline of future leaders. Local-level peer support networks have been shown to be a powerful resource to support other girls struggling with attendance at school and engagement with education.

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Annexes

1. Data file
2. National government policies