

LET ALL GIRLS LEARN

A CASE STUDY IN SUCCESSFUL
EDUCATIONAL REFORM
AT SCALE IN KENYA

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Between 2013 and 2017, Education Development Trust designed and delivered a large-scale education reform programme in Kenya, intended to improve the life chances of some particularly disadvantaged girls. This was funded by the UK government Department for International Development (DFID) as part of the UK global Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) Step Change programmes.

We called our project Wasichana Wote Wasome; Kiswahili for 'let all girls learn'.

Wasichana Wote Wasome, WWW for short, has been demonstrably successful; here we look at why.

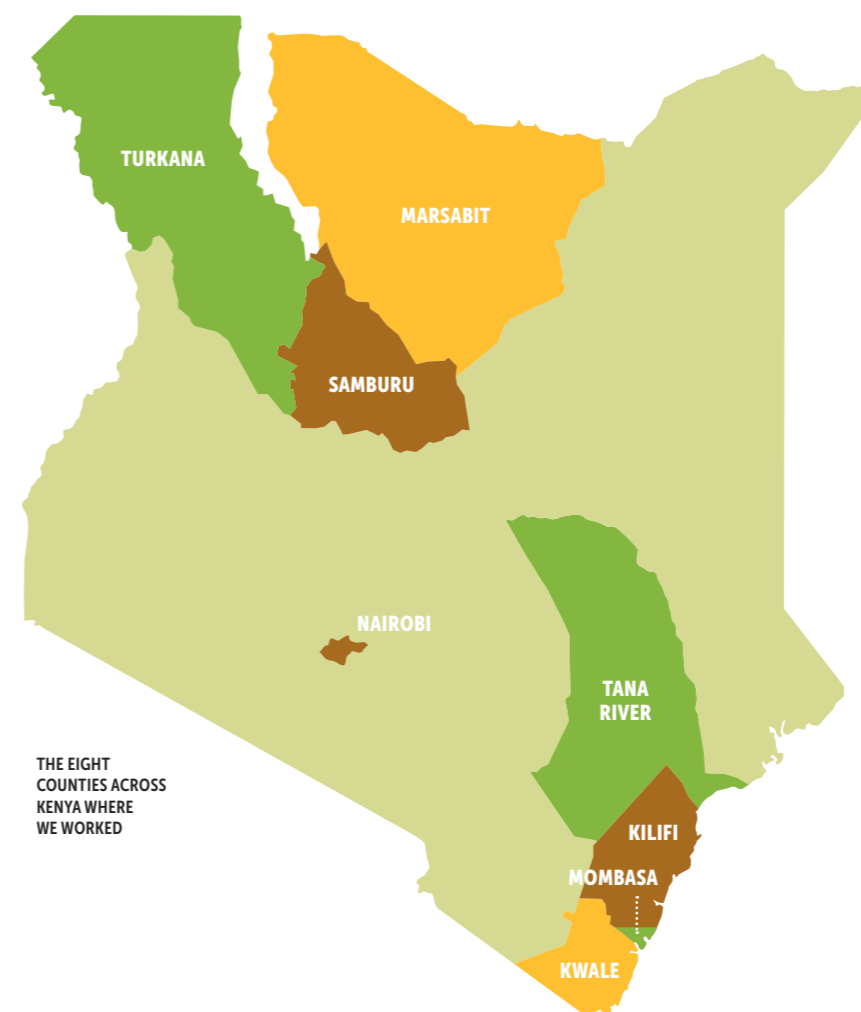
WWW was implemented in two distinct and very different contexts: largely rural arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) and urban slums in the major cities of Nairobi and Mombasa. Although different in many ways, these two settings have in common the prevalence of communities that are extremely deprived economically, where women and girls often lead very difficult lives.

Our focus was on 500 primary schools across the two contexts: 250 schools in the ASAL counties of Turkana, Marsabit, Samburu, Tana River, Kwale and Kilifi and 250 schools in the suburban slums in Mombasa and Nairobi.

We identified out-of-school girls in the local communities served by these schools and encouraged them to enrol or return. We sought to ensure that those girls already in the schools stayed in school and had a positive experience, with good outcomes in terms of academic performance, healthy lifestyles, ambitions and self-confidence.

We worked closely on implementation with staff employed by the government of Kenya. We led a consortium of partner organisations, each bringing specialist expertise: Concern Worldwide, Girl Child Network, AMURT, Women Educational Researchers of Kenya (WERK).

Above all, we engaged with the girls – and the boys – in the counties where we were operating, together with their parents, teachers, school leaders and community representatives.



THE EIGHT COUNTIES ACROSS KENYA WHERE WE WORKED

THE IMPACT HEADLINES

DFID commissioned an independent global review of the GEC programme of which WWW was a part. This used a particularly rigorous evaluation methodology including a randomised controlled trial comparison of the performance of the girls that we supported, with a control group of girls outside the programme. The DFID independent evaluation identified WWW as one of the most effective GEC projects in the world. Not only did many girls re-engage in education but the academic achievements of the girls in school were particularly impressive.

The independent evaluation confirmed that 88,921 specific girls had been direct beneficiaries of the intervention. In terms of literacy gains, girls supported through WWW did better than girls supported through any other GEC Step Change intervention. They performed at a statistically significantly higher level than girls in the control group.

The target group of girls that we supported did particularly well in literacy but also made progress in numeracy outcomes. WWW was the only GEC Step Change project in the world that showed a significant difference for both literacy and numeracy for Lower Primary girls.

Although the primary focus was on the girls, the evaluation considered that a similar number of boys – almost 90,000 – also derived benefit from the improvements to teaching and learning in the target schools.

A wider group of almost 180,000 students in the ASAL and urban slums – both girls and boys – had also benefited from the project.

In addition to the findings of the independent evaluation study, there are further promising signs of impact.

We agreed a project target that 6,000 out-of-school girls should be both identified and enabled to enrol. In fact, we greatly exceeded this target: 9,596 out-of-school girls were enrolled in school, including 320 previously out-of-school teenage mothers.

By the end of the project, a survey of girls' attitudes in the schools we were supporting revealed 93% of girls reporting that they were 'happy at school most or all of the time' compared to a baseline response of 85%.

We administered a survey exploring the attitudes of community leaders – of both

genders – at both the beginning and the end of the project. At the baseline only 57% agreed with the statement that 'vulnerable girls in our community should attend school'. By the end of the project, this figure had risen to 84%.

Besides these impressive quantitative metrics, we also have much powerful qualitative testimony from the girls themselves. Some of the most moving accounts come from the teenage mothers, who had been both excluded from education and stigmatised until new, life-changing opportunities were made available through WWW.

TESTIMONIES FROM
TWO GIRLS WHO WERE
PART OF WWW

'After I became pregnant, I felt the whole world had abandoned me. Upon enrolment, I found the teachers supportive of my resolve. They were ready to listen whenever I was down. In addition, being a member of the school club helped me. The club members were like family to me. They made me feel part of them. I no longer felt like a stranger. I could now concentrate on my studies. On top of that, I got time to discover my talent: football. I love football very much.'

WWW SCHOOLGIRL, AGE 15

'I have gone through a lot. I had given up in life. Thanks to the teachers and Wasichana Wote Wasome, I have new hope. The teachers allow me to come home to breastfeed the baby. My family is also supportive; they stay with my baby as I attend classes and sometimes bring her to me for breastfeeding. In a way, I feel that the baby has been a blessing to me for I now have a new resolve to pursue education. I am more focused and self-driven. I want to transform the economic status of my family through education.'

WWW SCHOOLGIRL, AGE 16

WWW WAS IDENTIFIED BY DFID AS ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE GEC PROJECTS IN THE WORLD

BY THE DFID INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

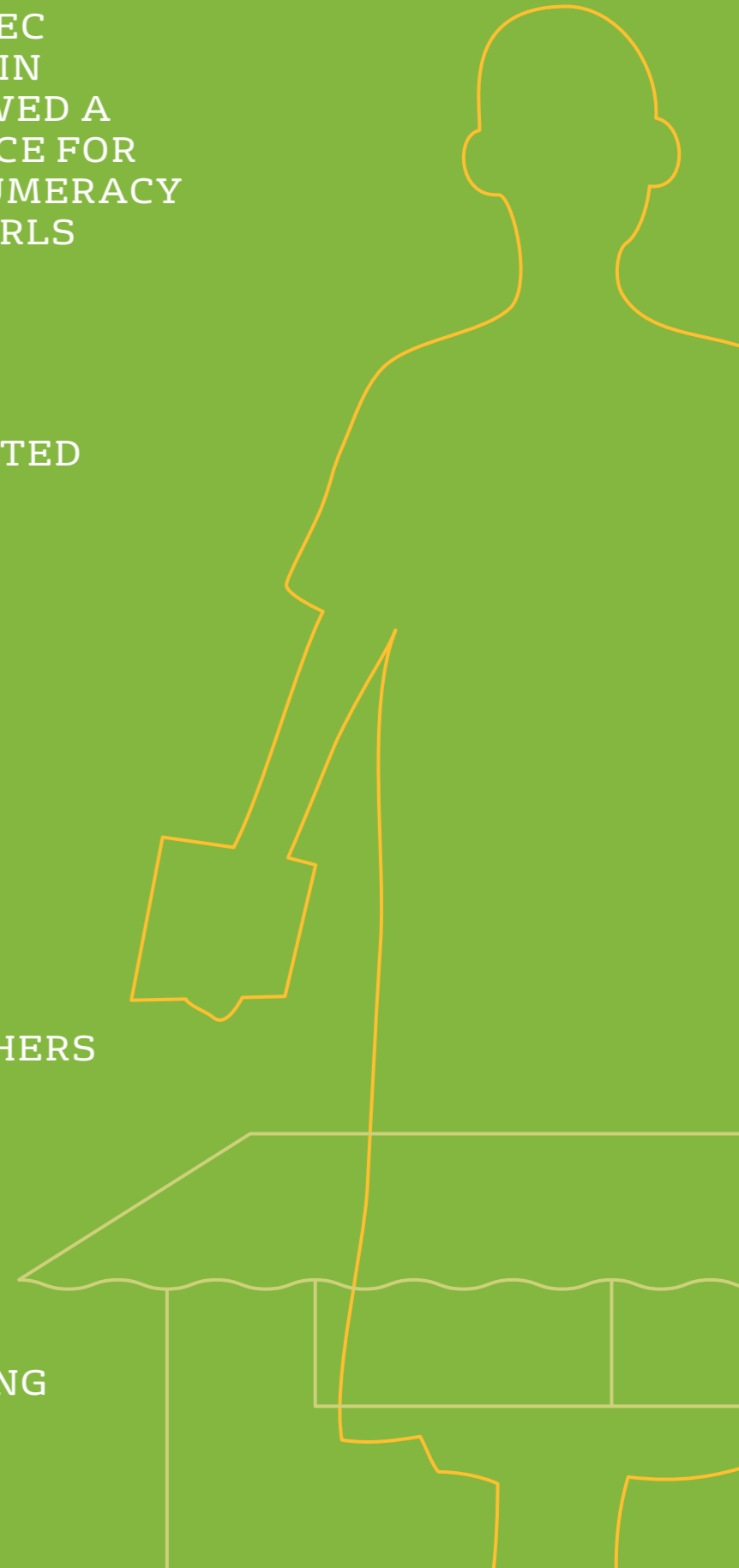
WWW WAS THE ONLY GEC STEP CHANGE PROJECT IN THE WORLD THAT SHOWED A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE FOR BOTH LITERACY AND NUMERACY FOR LOWER PRIMARY GIRLS

88,921
GIRLS DIRECTLY BENEFITED FROM OUR WORK

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OUT-OF-SCHOOL GIRLS WERE ENROLLED IN SCHOOL, INCLUDING...

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90,000
ALMOST 90,000 BOYS BENEFITED FROM IMPROVEMENTS TO TEACHING AND LEARNING



OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

Why was this project so successful? One contributory factor was the quality of the original design. This drew upon both our deep knowledge of the Kenyan context and our analysis of the global research literature relating to both problems and possible solutions when seeking to ensure that girls participate effectively in school education. Using these sources, we constructed an evidence-informed theory of change, that stressed the need for action both within and outside the schools.

Our intervention design highlighted the need to act on several levels:

- **The girl herself:** the physical and mental health of girls and their levels of self-confidence, ambition and agency will have an impact on the girls' attitudes towards school.
- **The girl at school:** achieving enrolment is not enough; girls will be tempted to drop out and may underperform if the school environment is not girl-friendly and if the overall quality of teaching is poor.
- **The girl at home:** girls' participation is circumscribed by parental attitudes and circumstances and parental views of the 'opportunity cost' of girls going to school.
- **The girl in the community:** the views of community members and community leaders can either help or hinder girls' participation in school.

Given the need for a holistic approach we designed interventions that operated at each of the four levels or dimensions highlighted in our theory of change. At the same time, we looked for linkages across the levels so that there was single, coherent programme. Overall, we sought to bring together individually tested interventions in a new powerful combination, which was more than the sum of its already promising parts.



WWW INTERVENTIONS

GIRL HERSELF

- School child-to-child clubs
- Health interventions, supported by community health workers
- Role modelling

GIRL AT SCHOOL

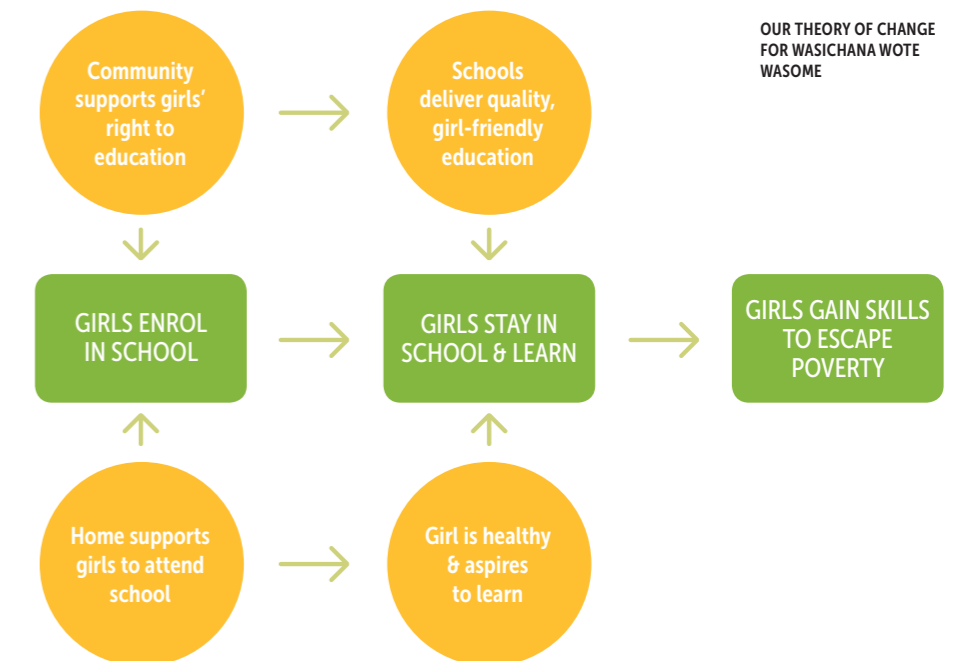
- Teacher coaching in effective literacy and numeracy teaching and gender sensitive pedagogy
- Whole-school behaviour change programme aimed at gender equality and improving adolescent health
- Improvements to school infrastructure to make schools more girl-friendly

GIRL AT HOME

- Cash transfers: for the poorest households in urban slums and ASAL
- Distribution of 'back-to-school kits' (uniforms and stationery)
- Regular visits by community health workers
- Customised support package for marginalised girls (e.g. young mothers) to enrol

GIRL IN THE COMMUNITY

- 'Community conversations'
- Engaging with men and boys on girls' rights to education
- Information sharing around devolved funds for education and government policy
- Mobilisation of community support to education



PROMISING ACTIVITIES

Although we made some important adjustments during the lifetime of the project, our initial choice of component interventions was largely justified by our ongoing evaluation during implementation. Several of the evidence-informed elements proved to be particularly successful:

- IN-SCHOOL COACHING
- SCHOOL CHILD-TO-CHILD CLUBS
- THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS
- 'COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS'

IN-SCHOOL COACHING

Our work in schools has been influenced by the evidence that high quality, gender-sensitive teaching is the most important factor contributing to improved learning outcomes for girls. Evidence globally shows that school-based training is more effective than off-site training as it allows highly contextualised conversations about the best ways to apply theory in practice. Education Development Trust's teacher coaching model, which includes coaching in gender-sensitive pedagogy, used this school-based approach; our model builds teachers' skills and their sense of agency in determining what to do in their own contexts and classrooms. The coaching model seems to be effective because concrete problems faced by teachers can be explored, and teachers can receive feedback on authentic teaching issues.

The testimony from staff in Nairobi slum schools gives some sense of the impact of the WWW coaching model:

'Our teachers have been trained on numeracy and literacy and are being supported by instructional coaches on a regular basis. This has made our teachers gain mastery of the content. Training and coaching has improved the relationship between pupils and teachers, which has made the school one of the most child-friendly schools around. This has led to the increase of the number of girls to the school.'
Headteacher, WWW project school

'The WWW coach comes to the school to observe how I teach, he compliments me where I've done well and guides me on areas

where I did not do so well. He models the lesson then I follow. Using the skills from training and with support from the coach, I now engage pupils more.'

Teacher, WWW project school

The global review of the GEC Step Change projects identified the WWW approach to coaching on literacy and gender-friendly pedagogy as a likely contributory factor to increased motivation and self-esteem, quoting the testimony of a girl student from one of the project schools in Kenya: 'Some teachers are very good in class. They praise us and show us how to behave well. Boys are advised to respect girls.'



SCHOOL CHILD-TO-CHILD CLUBS

Peer learning is a powerful mechanism for both keeping marginalised girls in school and enhancing their learning outcomes. Within WWW, one of the central means of harnessing the power of peer support has been a network of child-to-child clubs. WWW established 480 such clubs across the 500 participant schools and by 2017 17,000 girls and boys were taking part regularly in club meetings. These clubs provide a forum for behaviour change and empowerment. Our internal evaluation revealed that participation in the clubs was associated positively with increased confidence and greater ambition and optimism on the part of the girls.

The clubs provide a safe place for girls to articulate their concerns, acquire new knowledge, share problems and explore solutions through discussion with their peers. They are based on a theoretical communication model built on the assumption that people with similar situations find it easier to talk and learn from each other rather than expert outsiders.

Child-to-child clubs provide opportunities for girls to develop skills as leaders. An in-depth understanding of the benefits they experience in taking on visible positions of responsibility (usually filled by boys) helps shape the way we build and influence the perception of the role of girls in society. Our discussions with girls indicate that the girls themselves are able to identify a range of benefits from leadership activities.

OUR SCHOOL CHILD-TO-CHILD CLUBS OFFERED GIRLS THE CHANCE TO DEVELOP LEADERSHIP SKILLS



THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

The project deployed community health workers, employed by the Ministry of Health, for household visits. This was an important means of both gathering data about the location of particular out-of-school girls, and engaging with the girls and their families about the importance of school enrolment, retention and their wider health needs. For the lifetime of the WWW project, 2013–2017, a target was set of 12,000 visits by community health workers to households with marginalised girls. This target was greatly exceeded. In fact, 15,767 visits took place representing the achievement of 131% of the target number. This led not only to increased enrolment but also access to additional health and social support services that might facilitate their girls' school attendance. Many boys also benefited from these visits in terms of access to health and social support.

'COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS'

WWW sought to bring about lasting cultural change at community level. Our starting point was an assumption that improving consciousness about the importance of girls' education depends upon winning support from influential people at community level. The concept of the 'community conversation' came from our partner, Concern Worldwide. The 'conversation' is a process which engages community gatekeepers – elders, local administration and politicians – on gender discrimination, girls' rights and education.

The DFID global evaluation of the GEC Step Change interventions highlighted the way WWW harnessed the power of community accountability as a means of improving provision for girls. Community members and community leaders have the potential to act as advocates for the rights of local girls. The DFID report cited the testimony of a community member in one of the areas where WWW was operating.

'We also take it upon ourselves to visit the household and talk to the parents asking them why their daughter is not going to school. We then advise the parent to speak to their child on the importance of education. If we notice no change we then inform the village head who also visits the household together with a teacher from the school for appropriate action.' Community member

Our own interviews with project staff have highlighted the potential of community conversations to build long-term local capacity



for the further empowerment of girls. School improvement is important but community commitment to the rights of girls is arguably even more important:

'The community conversations will sustain our work beyond the life of the programme. They identify barriers to enrolment, attendance and learning outcomes and develop action plans and implement them. Before, learning was the domain of the school, we have taken it back where it belongs. The communities monitor attendance and they have passed by-laws so that families can be reported to the local chief.' WWW project staff member

THE RIGHT IMPLEMENTATION

An effective evidence-informed design was an important precondition for success but of course, a good design is not enough. The way that we implemented the design was also extremely important.

STAFFING QUALITY

We placed a big emphasis on the need to recruit the right staff. The quality of the leadership of the project was an essential ingredient of success. At times our insistence on quality caused some resentment locally in the areas where we were working because we could not guarantee jobs for some local candidates. However, this was the right decision. Reform projects such as this will succeed or fail depending on the quality and drive of the staff. In a recent internal review of WWW, one member of staff confirmed this and said, 'We have the right people – the best'.

GETTING BUY-IN FROM GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

There has been a close and effective relationship with government officials at national and county levels. As one member of staff said, 'County officials are very involved. We involve them in monitoring – we don't do anything without them. We have very cordial relationships.' The project also established a good relationship with the Teaching Service Commission (TSC), the government of Kenya agency responsible for the management of the teaching workforce; the TSC approved the use of highly effective government school teachers as WWW coaches and endorsed the coaching methodology.

DATA-BASED DECISION MAKING

The WWW project team used robust and 'almost real time' monitoring and evaluation systems to provide information that shaped decision making. Careful mapping of the location of specific out-of-school girls made

possible highly personalised action. In order to make data about the work of coaches more granular and to improve the accountability of them, the decision was taken to equip the coaches with tablets/computers. The quality of the data also enabled important adjustments to the management of the project.

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Although the fundamental architecture of the WWW intervention remained constant throughout the life of the project, there were

many instances during the project of adaptations that were made based on reflection, new information and careful analysis of the data. There was an iterative quality to the management of the project. We identified, for example, a danger of duplication with another large-scale intervention with a focus on early grade reading and took action to align our intervention accordingly. Concerns about the need to better monitor the work of instructional coaches led to an important decision to issue them with tablets, which was not in the original design.



THE NEXT PHASE: LET OUR GIRLS SUCCEED

Based on the demonstrable success of our work since 2013, DFID has agreed to fund a major follow-up intervention in the same eight counties of Kenya. This next phase will take place from 2017–2023. We have called the new project Wasichana Wetu Wafaulu; Kiswahili for 'let our girls succeed'.

Through the generous funding of the UK government the new project is supporting 72,000 girls currently in primary school to complete their current phase of education, achieve improved learning outcomes and transition successfully to a productive and positive next phase: 521 primary and

45 secondary schools and 25 technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions will participate.

In the past, very few girls from the participant primary schools have had an opportunity to move up to a secondary school. The girls from these communities have historically also been denied opportunities to benefit from technical and vocational education and training.

Wasichana Wetu Wafaulu will use several of the tried-and-tested methods that we have implemented and refined since 2013, such as community conversations, pedagogical coaching and child-to-child clubs.

We will also make use of some promising new interventions, including:

- **Catch-up classes and centres:** we are setting up catch-up classes and centres for girls who drop out of primary school to support them to re-enrol or pursue alternative pathways.
- **Income-generating projects:** the purpose of these projects is to help groups and families generate income to support girls, keep them in school and help them transition to higher education levels.
- **System leadership:** our innovative model is designed to harness the expertise of successful school principals and deploy it to increase leadership and teaching capacity of all project schools in order to raise education standards across the board.
- **TVET centres:** we are working with providers of vocational training to develop work-related skills to offer girls an alternative pathway to worthwhile employment.



LET ALL GIRLS LEARN AND SUCCEED

This case study provides strong grounds for optimism. Education reform is undoubtedly difficult. However, with the right conditions, we can improve the enrolment of out-of-school girls and ensure that girls at risk of drop-out stay at school and do well academically.

The success of Wasichana Wote Wasome confirms our belief in the need for evidence-informed adaptive programming. Some commentators are rightly sceptical about the unthinking adoption of 'best practice' models taken from the wider world. We share this scepticism. At the same time, there is a danger that simply focusing on context-specific, unique problems will blind us to relevant insights from elsewhere.

The design of Wasichana Wote Wasome began with both an analysis of the distinctive political economy of Kenya and insights derived from global research into girls' education. The resulting initial solution was then adapted in action, based on data from the frontline of implementation. The existence and use of 'close to real time' data made possible a rapid, well-informed feedback loop. The use of contextual knowledge, global evidence and implementation data all contributed to the success of the project.

To find out more, contact:
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