

PROJECT COMPLETION BRIEF

SIERRA LEONE

Transforming Girls' Education Project (TGEP)

2018-2023

INTRODUCTION

FOR TOO MANY GIRLS IN SIERRA LEONE, ATTENDING SCHOOL DOES NOT LEAD TO ACQUIRING EVEN BASIC LITERACY AND NUMERACY SKILLS. Girls face huge challenges to their education. Society places a low value on education for girls in their assumed future roles as wives and mothers. Girls experience poor school attendance and performance caused by significant domestic responsibilities, early pregnancy, early marriage, and the threat of sexual harassment and gender-based violence from male teachers and students. A scarcity of female teachers means that girls do not have female role models at an important stage of their life. The situation is compounded by a lack of high quality culturally relevant learning materials and by poor classroom instruction from teachers who may be unqualified, unmotivated and unlikely to understand the differentiated needs of girls in their classrooms.

CODE's *Transforming Girls' Education Project (TGEP)*, sought to improve the quality of education for both girls and boys and to help dismantle barriers to education for vulnerable pre-teen and teenage girls in upper primary classes (grades 4 to 6).

The project was co-funded by Global Affairs Canada and implemented by CODE and CODE's local partner in Sierra Leone, The Association of Language and Literacy Educators (TALLE), with the support of McGill University.



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INTERVENTION

THE TRANSFORMING GIRLS' EDUCATION PROJECT WAS IMPLEMENTED IN SIERRA LEONE FROM OCTOBER 2019 TO DECEMBER 2023.

TGEP's approach was closely aligned with the Government of Sierra Leone's education plans and goals and implemented in four of the most disadvantaged districts: Bonthe, Karene, Port Loko, and Western Rural. The outbreak of COVID-19 closed schools for six months in 2020 interrupting implementation and leading to an eventual extension.

The criteria for selection of participating schools were poor primary school retention and low completion rates for girls. Improving teacher effectiveness and support for girls was foremost in the project design. TGEP supported 1,275 in-service teachers in 260 primary schools with a focus on active learning, improved classroom practice, lesson planning and gender responsive pedagogy. In addition, TGEP sponsored and supported 100 young women to attain their formal teaching qualifications over the course of three years to increase the number of women in the teaching profession. Beyond the participation of in-service teachers, the project aimed to break down barriers to girls' education by involving teaching training institutes, teacher educators, student teachers, school leadership, and school management committees.



“TGEF provided over 330,000 culturally relevant classroom books, which were developed using the skills and talents of local authors, illustrators, and teaching experts.”

All staff, teachers and teacher educators were trained in sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) as well as on preventing and responding to gender-based violence in schools. TGEF championed Gender-Responsive Pedagogy, which promotes gender equality by challenging gender norms and stereotypes, ensuring programs meet the differentiated needs of girls and boys, and empowering girls and women to succeed in their education and teaching.

TGEF provided over 330,000 culturally relevant classroom books, which were developed using the skills and talents of local authors, illustrators, and teaching experts. The project also supported the creation of 260 Boys and Girls Clubs to provide additional tutoring and to create a safe space for primary school students to learn about and develop life skills and for girls to also increase their confidence and agency

To support digital learning, a priority of the Government of Sierra Leone, TGEF provided 24 Remote Area Community Hotspot for Education and Learning (RACHEL) devices in 18 schools and six teacher training institutes. Each RACHEL was packaged with 15 tablets and a solar power system and loaded with a wide range of learning materials to provide teachers and teacher educators with a wealth of resources they would otherwise not have access to.





IMPACT

OVER THE FOUR YEARS, 118,907 CHILDREN BENEFITED FROM IMPROVED CLASSROOM PRACTICE, ACCESS TO QUALITY BOOKS AND LEARNING MATERIALS, DEVELOPMENT OF LIFE SKILLS THROUGH BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS, AND BARRIERS TO EDUCATION BEING IDENTIFIED AND ADDRESSED.

At the start of the project, improved test results was set as a key indicator of success. Throughout the years the aggregate scored for the students in program schools were higher than the district averages, which was a positive indicator. TGEP students realized improvements in the National Primary School Examinations (NPSE), with pass rates increasing overtime from 74% to 85%, however, it should be noted that exam results improved generally for students throughout Sierra Leone, not just for TGEP students.

A second key indicator for the project's success was the number of girls transitioning from primary to secondary school. Out of a sample of 371 girls from 55 TGEP schools who completed their primary education, 343 (92%) passed their NPSE, and of those girls who passed, all but nine transitioned to secondary school, indicating a very low dropout rate.

A sample of participating girls were interviewed to better understand their experiences. 81% of girls reported they were happy in their new school. When asked what had led to their successful transition to secondary school, almost half of the girls named "teacher support" and one third credited themselves, saying that their "personal effort" was the main reason for their success in transitioning to secondary school. These were positive results as teacher support and a sense of personal agency by girls were two of the most important qualitative goals of the project.

TGEP books were widely appreciated and utilized. Teachers said the high quality of the books, the cultural relevance of the content, and the variety and volume of books were the key reasons for the books' success and usefulness. Using local authors to write the books meant that children could relate to and see themselves in the content.

In the final analysis, CODE observed a large majority of TGEP teachers were consistently using the new teaching methods and tools, for instance, 92% of teachers were implementing gender responsive methods in their classroom. Lastly 98% young women supported to attend teachers' college were successful in gaining their teaching qualifications.

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