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Girls' Education Project Phase 3 (GEP3) in Northern Nigeria Final Evaluation Report

EVALUATION BRIEF

November 2022

The Final Evaluation of Girls' Education Project Phase 3 (GEP3) 2012-2022 in Northern Nigeria was developed by the Overseas Advising Group, and commissioned by UNICEF on behalf of the Federal and State Ministries of Education with the generous financial support and partnership with the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.



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Lessons Learned from the Final Evaluation of GEP3 2012-2022

The independent evaluation of the Girls' Education Project 3 (GEP3) in northern Nigeria was a systematic and rigorous assessment of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of GEP3. The evidence collected revealed strong and positive impacts of the GEP3 interventions on girls' enrolment and retention in schools. It also highlighted the tangible effect of unconditional cash transfers on household spending for girls' education. GEP3 raised the profile of educated girls, created new positive social norms in many communities and enabled a transformational shift in mindsets about the importance of girls' education. The most promising practices from GEP3 are related to the consistent and meaningful community engagement, the design and operationalization of innovative strategies such as 'Girls for Girls' mentoring and the engagement of male youth advocates through 'He for She'. Structured teacher training, cash transfers to mothers and caregivers to support girls' education, early literacy and numeracy intervention, and high-level advocacy activities were invaluable components related to the success of GEP3.

¹This Evaluation Brief is based on the Independent Evaluation of the Girls Education Programme Phase 3 (2012-2022) in northern Nigeria, which can be downloaded from the <https://www.unicef.org/>. This Brief aims to facilitate the exchange of knowledge between UNICEF, FCDO, FME and its partners. The contents of the evaluation reports, and consequently this Brief, do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of UNICEF. For more information, please contact [Robert Ndamobissi \(rmdamobissi@unicef.org\)](mailto:Robert.Ndamobissi@unicef.org).

Introduction

Despite efforts by the Nigerian Government to make basic education free and compulsory within the framework of the 2014 National Policy on Education, at least **10.2 million children** at the primary level and 8.1 million children at the junior secondary school (JSS) level are reported to be out-of-school in Nigeria.² Most of these children are girls and primary school-aged children from northern states. Of those children attending school, about 75 per cent were not learning as expected. Approximately 86 per cent of children in rural areas and around 95 per cent of children in the lowest economic quintile do not demonstrate foundational skills.³

The GEP3 programme was developed and implemented by UNICEF, supported by the Government of Nigeria and funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) of the United Kingdom. **With an investment of at least GBP 79 million (approximately US \$109.1 million)**, GEP3 aimed to improve basic education, increase social and economic opportunities for girls and reduce disparities in educational outcomes between girls and boys.

This Evaluation Brief presents critical evidence of the results, lessons learned and priority recommendations for future programming. By design, the evaluation focused on assessing GEP3's contribution to the education sector, its merits and shortfalls and any issues related to access, quality and governance of education in northern Nigeria. The brief focuses on key findings related to three of the 10 evaluation criteria: effectiveness, impact and gender.

²Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), 2018 National Personnel Audit (NPA) Report on Public and Private Basic Education Schools in Nigeria. Abuja: Binani Printing Press, 2019.

³National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2022 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2021-22, Survey Findings Report. Abuja, Nigeria: NBS and UNICEF, 2022.

GEP3 strategy and expected results

GEP3 was a 10-year programme that was implemented from 2012 to 2022. It aimed to increase the number of girls completing basic education and acquiring skills for life and livelihoods in five northern Nigerian states: Katsina, Sokoto, Bauchi, Niger and Zamfara, with Kano state joining in 2018.

The programme aimed to improve access to education for girls, enhance the quality of learning and reduce disparities in educational outcomes between boys and girls by achieving three expected results:

Twelve strategic interventions were chosen for the GEP3:

1. Enrolment drives
2. School grant cash transfer for learning and retention of girls in school (ended in 2017)
3. Girls for Girls groups (G4G)
4. Capacity development of teachers and headteachers
5. Early literacy and numeracy intervention (i.e., Reading and Numeracy Activity (RANA)⁴)
6. Capacity development of School Based Management Committees (SBMCs)
7. Support of effective data-collection (e.g., Annual School Census in the GEP3 states and Local Education Sector Operational Plans)
8. Inclusion of Integrated Qur'anic Schools (IQS) in Education Management Information Systems (EMIS)
9. Promote increased representation and participation of women through the High-level Women Advocates (HiLWA)
10. Girls Education Steering Committee as a forum to advocate for girls' education issues at national, state and local government area levels
11. Advocacy and advice to generate planning and budgeting to sustain interventions at a larger scale
12. Advocacy engagement to support interventions

Expected result 1:

Increased enrolment and retention of girls in basic education (economic household capacity improvement through cash transfers).

Expected result 2:

Improved capacity of teachers to deliver effective quality teaching for girls (pedagogical and methodological capacity-building skills and resources).

Expected result 3:

Improved governance to strengthen girls' education (administrative and education management capacity-building skills and resources).

⁴RANA was designed to improve literacy and numeracy instruction in grades 1-3 in both public schools and IQS, with the ultimate goal of increasing literacy outcomes for learners, especially girls. To achieve these goals, RANA developed Hausa-language teaching and learning materials, built teacher capacity, mobilized communities and engaged local governments to improve early-grade reading policies.

The GEP3 evaluation methodology

Chronologically, the evaluation covered the investment duration from May 2012 to June 2021 and not the entire GEP3 implementation period, which was extended until 2022.⁵

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach by combining qualitative and quantitative methods. This methodology is a quasi-experimental longitudinal panel design that tracked a cohort of targeted schools over the life of the programme. The design was developed to simulate a before and after approach with and without comparison.

The evaluation included: (i) a household survey to measure the effectiveness and impact of cash transfers to girls' caregivers; (ii) a school survey consisting of learning outcome assessments of pupils; (iii) interviews of headteachers; (iv) classroom observations and headcounts; and (v) a desk review, key informant interviews and focus group discussions with a variety of stakeholders. A value for money (VfM) analysis and quantitative analysis of secondary data from national household surveys complemented the evaluation.

Programme effectiveness and impact on learning outcomes and socioeconomic indicators were measured by assessing and comparing the achievements of three school groups. The first school (i.e., "treatment") group received 10 GEP3 interventions (without cash transfers) and RANA. In the second treatment group, girls' families received the same 10 interventions and RANA in addition to unconditional cash transfers. The third group was the comparison group, which did not receive any GEP3 interventions and essentially served as the control group.

Enrolment and retention of girls in schools

The focus on increased enrolment and retention of pupils proved to be an effective strategy that contributed to reducing out-of-school children, early marriages and early childbearing among girls under the age of 15. A remarkable achievement was the transformational shift in these communities' mindsets regarding girls' education. This was the result of intense and consistent community sensitization and high-level advocacy activities.

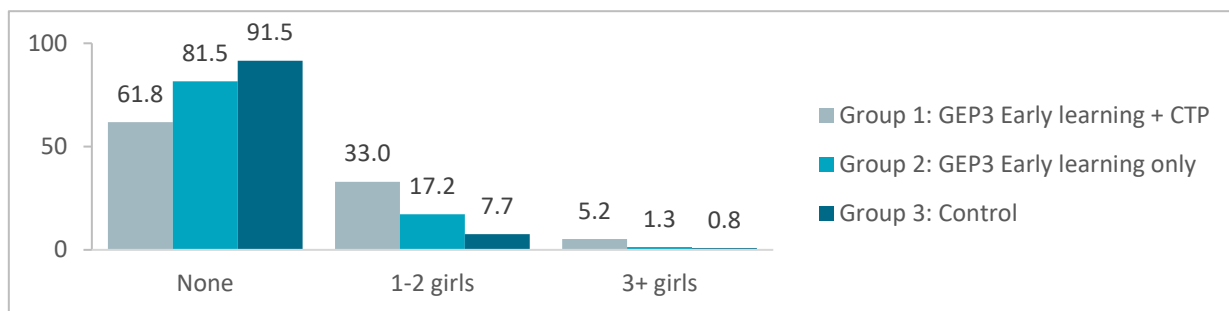
There is evidence of an increase in the gross enrolment of girls in schools and an improved gender parity across the targeted states. The gender parity index (GPI) (i.e., the ratio of girls to boys enrolment) increased from 0.73 (baseline value) to 0.78 (midline) and reached 0.97 by the end of the programme. This means the gender gap was sharply reduced in the targeted communities. The increase in the GPI for public schools was especially profound: from 0.56 (baseline) to 1.00 (end-line) ($p < 0.01$)⁶.

The GEP3 schools supported with cash transfers had the highest proportion of families with one to two girls (33.0 per cent) and three or more girls (5.2 per cent) who had completed nine years of schooling. Compared with the other two groups (GEP3-learning only and control) ($p < 0.01$), this underscored the effectiveness of the GEP3 early learning intervention, especially when combined with the Cash Transfer Programme (CTP). (Figure 1)

⁵GEP3 was implemented until 2022 with a slight pivot in the interventions for the costed extension phase (July 2021 to September 2022) towards adolescent girls in junior secondary schools.

⁶The difference is statistically significant at the 1 per cent level.

Figure 1: Percentage of households with female children aged 15 years old who have completed nine years of education (basic/junior secondary schools)



Source: GEP3 Final Evaluation, 2022

Besides improving school attendance and completion, the CTP improved household consumption and welfare. According to the household survey, more than two-thirds (68.8 per cent) of families that benefited from the CTP had three cooked meals per day compared to 47.3 per cent of households in the control group. In addition, the CTP beneficiaries in Niger and Sokoto states significantly increased their expenditures related to the education of their female children and sent them to school.

Cash Plus initiatives

- The combination of early learning and cash transfer interventions had a multiplier effect⁷ on girls' enrolment, retention and education completion. This critical finding should inform the design of interventions for the next programme cycle.
- Unconditional cash transfers strongly impacted household spending on girls' education even though these transfers were unconditional. This finding highlights several important aspects of Cash Plus initiatives. First, it complements cash transfers with additional inputs, services and linkages to other services; second, it is effective as a sensitization effort and early learning intervention; and third, it can guarantee sustainability and improved outcomes.

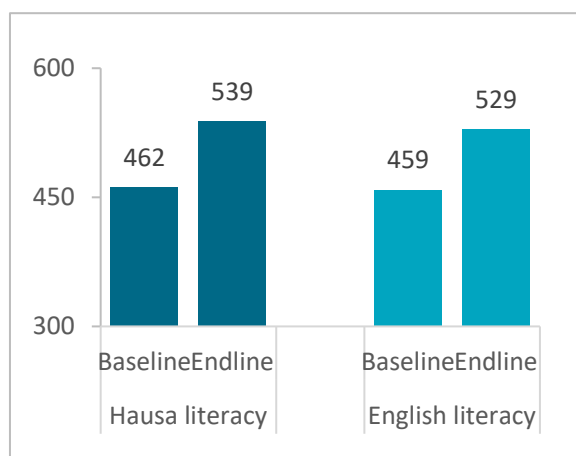
Even though the CTP ended in 2017, there was enough evidence to indicate that it significantly impacted and created sustainable outcomes (e.g., girls' retention in school) in beneficiary households

Learning outcomes

GEP3 presented many promising learning outcomes and showed that pupils who benefited from the GEP3-RANA programme scored higher in literacy (English and Hausa) and numeracy learning assessments than their peers in the control group.

The percentage of pupils in intervention schools achieving basic literacy in English increased from 10 per cent at the baseline assessment to 32 per cent and 40 per cent at midline and end-line assessments, respectively. The share of programme beneficiaries reaching the minimum proficiency in the Hausa language increased marginally from 2 per cent at the baseline to 4 per cent at the midline. During the end-line assessment, girls in public primary schools outperformed their male peers in English and Hausa. For instance, girls had higher English literacy scores than boys in Katsina and Niger states by around 10 test points and by five test points in Sokoto state. (Figure 2)

Figure 2: Evolution of English and Hausa literacy scores of students in GEP3 schools between the baseline and end-line assessment



Source: GEP3 Final Evaluation, 2022

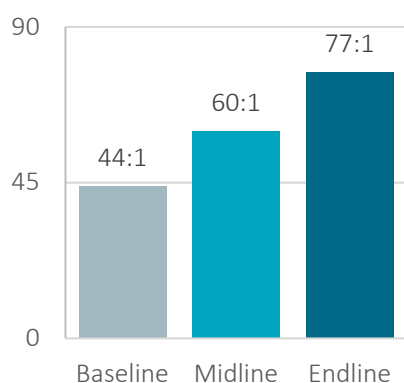
⁷A phenomenon whereby a given change in a particular input, causes a larger change in an output.

In the numeracy assessment, pupils in GEP3-supported IQS centres scored significantly higher than their peers in the control group ($p < 0.01$). Boys and girls had similar test scores in general and when examined separately by school type (i.e., IQS versus formal primary schools). Although the overall performance in numeracy tests is higher in GEP3-supported schools than in the control schools, this difference in scores was not statistically significant.

While the impact of the GEP3 interventions on literacy rate was higher for boys than girls at the midline, girls outperformed boys during the end-line assessment. Between the midline and end-line assessments, the programme impact on boys above the minimum proficiency level in English decreased from 7.9 per cent to 1.2 per cent. In comparison, the programme impact of girls achieving proficiency in English increased from 4.3 per cent to 7.9 per cent during these two assessments. The decline in the impact for boys proficient in English requires further analysis.

The reduced impact estimates recorded from the midline to the end-line could be attributed to the security risks in all the focal states, especially in Katsina and Zamfara, after the midline survey was conducted in 2017. The learning crisis was exacerbated by COVID-19-related school closures for seven months during the final year of the RANA implementation in 2020.

Figure 3: Student-teacher ratio at baseline, midline, and end-line



The programme evaluation revealed an unintended negative consequence related to increased student enrolment. The pupil-teacher ratio rose significantly from 44:1 at the baseline to 77:1 at the end-line ($p < 0.01$), putting the quality of teaching at severe risk.

Source: GEP3 Final Evaluation, 2022

Challenges in quality

Teacher training was instrumental in improving the quality of classroom instruction and pupil learning. Early learning, girls' inclusion and participation in the learning process all improved when teachers, particularly female teachers, received training. Better-trained teachers helped to raise awareness about the problems related to girls' access to education and became advocates of GEP3 by helping to connect schools and communities.

However, the gaps in the quality of teaching remained. This was partly attributed to inadequate teaching aids, entry profiles (basic skills) or teachers' poor comprehension of teaching materials. Overall, many education stakeholders identified the teacher training element as a system weakness in terms of quality practices (e.g., methods, strategies and pedagogical competencies), indicating a need to further tackle gaps in the training of teachers for public schools.

Addressing gender norms

To systematically address drivers of gender inequality, GEP3 engaged women through the Mothers' Associations (MAs), HiLWA and G4G and engaged with multiple stakeholders, including community-level decision makers, to shift social norms and improve local governance of schools.

Fundamentally, the programme aimed to shift social norms among men and women. Implementing advocacy and awareness programming with men (e.g. male religious and community leaders and through SBMCs and 'He for She') occurred alongside support for women's resources, voice and decision-making opportunities. Evidence suggests progress towards female empowerment, especially in giving female students and mentors a voice. The management of resources, evidenced by the mother's/caregiver's use of unconditional cash transfer to support girls' education in Niger and Sokoto, and women's participation in decision-making also supported efforts towards empowerment. Nevertheless, there is limited evidence of the programme addressing the needs of other vulnerable groups, such as disabled and displaced persons.

GEP3 adopted a holistic gender-sensitive approach by:

Improving school environments to enable robust menstrual hygiene management at the school level

Offering a life skills programme in the G4G component

Taking into account different social and economic barriers and concerns that represented potential obstacles to learning for girls reaching puberty

These strategies and initiatives effectively shifted girls' perceptions of their intrinsic potential and value, as well as the community awareness of the burden that uneducated girls represent, whether economical, social or educational. The most compelling element of change in gender equality was related to the shift in the predefined script of daughters in homes and in communities. This was especially true for community representatives participating in focus group discussions. The evaluation found that the older generation still considers a girl's role as that of mother and wife under the care of her husband. In this script, formal education helps girls to better fulfil their roles. Among the younger generation, both boys and girls suggested that education allows girls to pursue professional careers, such as doctors and teachers, and have financial independence. Such roles are key to transforming the household gender dynamics from a submissive/dependent wife-husband relationship into an equal partnership. The evaluation highlights the need for effective intergenerational dialogue aimed at abandoning harmful social norms. It also suggests that mutual understanding between different generations in a community could create an enabling environment for young and adolescent girls to pursue education and delay the age of marriage. As things stand, the acceptance of girls' education continues to coexist with early-marriage practices and with growing support for young married girls to continue their studies.

Good practices

Key strategies of the programme, such as the CTP, RANA, IQS, G4G and HiLWA, were found to be effective in promoting girls' education, including:

Unconditional cash transfers to households empowered mothers and supported girls' enrolment and retention in school.

The 'imitation strategies' of girls' mentoring by programme alumnae used in HiLWA and G4G initiatives were important drivers of transformational shifts in mindsets on the importance of education among girls and community members. These groups hold the potential to drive change towards positive gender norms and rewrite the script for girls in the community.

Community structures such as SBMCs and MAs were integral parts of the GEP3, especially when assuming sensitization and mediatory roles. This added great value in changing the attitudes of male and female caregivers on girls' education.

RANA's evidence-based approach to early-grade literacy and numeracy improved reading and numeracy skills for both girls and boys. The impact of RANA on boys' and girls' literacy and numeracy skills was more pronounced in IQS schools.

The combination of early learning and cash transfer interventions had a multiplier effect on girls' enrolment, retention and completion.

A multi-sectoral approach involving women's affairs and social protection line ministries is instrumental in maintaining and propelling the momentum achieved by GEP3.



Recommendations

Include cash transfer initiatives whenever possible, especially with the Plus element (i.e., complementing cash transfers with additional inputs and services). Integration or scaling-up of this financial household component as part of a more comprehensive inclusive education strategy must be considered in future programmes.

Plan for classroom overcrowding with worsening pupil-teacher ratios due to increases in student enrolment. Comprehensive efforts are needed to prepare and recruit new contingents of trained teachers.

Create a more enabling environment (e.g., with the Ministry of Women's Affairs and gender policy) for gender equality and transforming discriminatory social norms that affect girls. Approaches that change power relations between men and women, as well as girls and boys at the community, local, institutional and national levels, should be supported by government policymaking.

Integrate a Sexual Reproductive Health Rights sensitizing module in the G4G package of the programme to prevent unintended teenage pregnancies that could impact girls' education and sustain child marriage. By elaborating such a training module or toolkit locally, cultural contexts can better address gender norms and lessons learned from this evaluation.

Maintain and scale up the holistic gender-sensitive approach:

- i. Enable robust menstrual hygiene management at schools,
- ii. Offer a life skills programme in the G4G component and consider different barriers and concerns that become an obstacle to learning, and
- iii. Advocate for broader integration of G4G, 'He for She', HiLWA and similar strategies in the education sector by disseminating the positive results achieved within GEP3, including its value for money.



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