



Knowledge hub
-
Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

Girls Education Movement Clubs in Uganda (GEM clubs)

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

Uganda

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

Plan International Uganda

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

School Clubs, Refugees, Youth Engagement, Inclusion and Equity, Gender Transformative Education, Adolescents, Empowerment

6. What makes it a best practice? *

Engaging adolescents directly allows them to participate in ensuring the school environment is gender responsive, inclusive, and safe in accordance with their self-identified needs. The school-based clubs model is simple, relatively cost-effective and easy to replicate in similar contexts where there are significant barriers to education, particularly for adolescent girls.

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

Uganda hosts more than 1.5 million refugees (UNHCR), and recent data show refugees account for over 876,000 school-going age children (Education Cannot Wait, Multi-Year Resilience Programme , Uganda, 2022-2025). Girls and boys in refugee hosting districts in West Nile face significant barriers in accessing education, and in both refugee and host communities girls tend to drop out-of-school earlier than boys, and are particularly disadvantaged in accessing quality education. Reasons include gender inequality, economic challenges, teenage pregnancy, child, early and forced marriage, fear of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), and social norms of prioritizing the education of boys over that of girls. Menstrual Health Management (MHM) is another barrier for girls' education, especially at refugee hosting schools where there are limited sex-segregated and adolescent-friendly latrines with sanitary disposal facilities. Not only are girls often out of school, but those that could attend school still face barriers to their education as the school environment is reported to be not gender responsive, unsafe, and often reinforced harmful gender roles. The baseline study conducted for Plan Uganda's Girls' Education in Crisis project in West Nile found that fewer girls than boys felt their schools provide safe, gender-responsive, equitable, and inclusive education. Moreover, fewer adolescent girls than adolescent boys (51% vs. 54%) felt they participate in decisions related to their education and protection.

To increase girls' access to education, with funding from Dubai Cares and Education Cannot Wait, Plan Uganda is leading the establishment and capacity building of Girls Education Movement (GEM) clubs across 20 primary and secondary schools in Arua, Yumbe, Adjumani, Terego, and Madi Okollo districts. GEM club is a regular program in Uganda developed by the Government of Uganda more than ten years ago, currently supported by many education stakeholders including Plan Uganda. GEM is a movement aimed at mobilizing children and young people in and out of school in the promotion of girls' education and in fighting the multiple gender-based barriers to girls' education. GEM clubs have been designed to respond to barriers to girls' education identified by the National Strategy for Girls' Education (NSGE), and community attitudes towards girls' education. GEM clubs facilitated by Plan Uganda were informed, trained and empowered on issues affecting them, including protection risks, and gender-based barriers to education. GEM clubs meet weekly, and Plan staff meet with them monthly to follow up on questions, provide training and support, and ensure their successful functioning.

8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation? *

Since March 2019, Plan Uganda has established GEM clubs in 20 primary and secondary schools in five districts in Uganda, and Plan continues to establish them across its Education in Emergencies programs. To this end, club members have been trained to raise awareness on comprehensive sexual education in line with the National Sexuality Education Framework (2018), covering sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), protection and gender-based violence and response, pregnancy, and forced marriage.

Each GEM club consists of 30 members (20 girls, 10 boys) and has 1 male and 1 female patron who have been selected by club members. GEM clubs' trainings and meetings are conducted monthly by Plan and school staff, at the schools but outside of school hours to not interfere with their learning. Occasionally, technical experts such as health workers provide trainings on topics requiring their expertise. Moreover, club trainings are sex-segregated to ensure all participants feel comfortable participating and sharing in the groups. At the end of each training and meeting, adolescent girls and adolescent boys club members are brought together to discuss learnings and issues as a group. GEM clubs participants were trained by Plan Uganda staff and the local government's District Gender focal point. They are tasked with developing an action plan for the school year which will outline the various awareness raising initiatives the club will carry out and enhance the gender responsiveness of the schools. The aim is to also have the GEM clubs develop a gender action plan for their school, to hold schools accountable for being gender responsive.

Plan-supported GEM club members have actively reached out to refugee and host communities with messages on the importance of education, discussing barriers to education for children, especially girls. They have also raised awareness in their own communities on the importance of girls' education through community campaigns, participating in radio talk shows and delivering radio messages. They provided peer support and encouraged out of school children to re-enroll through awareness sessions and peer education on information and life skills learned during GEM club trainings, music dance and drama shows held at schools and in community spaces. From the beginning of September 2022, GEM Clubs in Rhino Camp in collaboration with World Vision and other agencies participated in advocacy to "Protect education in Emergencies now". The clubs participated in debates on this theme and came up with key action points to be presented to the state minister for primary education at Rhino camp as part of the build-up activities for the "Transform education in Emergencies" workstream of the Transforming Education Summit in New York on the 19th September 2022, where Uganda's Minister of Education will represent Uganda.

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

GEM clubs contribute to gender transformative girls and young women’s agency by investing in their presence, active participation, leadership and contribution in all GEM club activities, such as back to school campaigns. Through production and dissemination of peer-led messages within the clubs and in the schools, GEM clubs challenge the status quo on gender stereotypes, norms, and societal myths about roles “meant” for boys and girls. GEM clubs create safe spaces to support girls’ and young woman empowerment, allowing them to explore who they are, learn, try new behaviors in a trusting environment, help building their confidence and self-efficacy, and ultimately enabling the inclusion, consideration of needs, and equal access to information of girls in all their diversity.

GEM clubs strengthened school and community-based protection structures in and around schools, promoting adolescent peer-led school-based awareness on existing child protection risks, gender concerns including adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights concerns, and solutions to existing issues. Through GEM clubs, girls and boys learn how to recognize, respond to, and prevent key protection risks, including GBV, and they acquire knowledge and skills to protect themselves and their peers, increasing their positive coping mechanisms and decision making. Ultimately, this is leading to a longer-term impact on girls, boys and their community, empowering them to take actions on issues affecting them, to know how and where to seek support, and to advocate for the right to inclusive and gender transformative education. GEM clubs have redeemed girls’ self-esteem and confidence to engage in cross generational dialogues with community leaders, challenged gender stereotypes, and engaged boys were engaged to support equal access and retention in school. By supporting girls in articulating issues and barriers that affect their access to education within the school and in the wider community, and empowering them in identifying and voicing their needs and concerns, GEM clubs contribute to strengthening the

GEM clubs have also improved knowledge, skills and capacities of children and adolescents, especially girls, facing gender-based barriers to access, attend and complete their education. In terms of concrete results, to date 20 clubs were established in refugee hosting districts. Across the 20 schools, 600 GEM club members (400 girls, 200 boys) were trained as peer educators under one project. The training included learners from 16 primary, four secondary schools, and two AEP centers. It is estimated that each trained GEM club member will reach out to 30 peers, meaning GEM clubs will reach an additional estimated 18,000 learners (50% girls) with peer education sessions on SRHR, gender equality, and child protection risks and solutions.

A final assessment on GEM outcomes will be done in July – August 2023.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

Lessons from projects that have engaged girls' rights clubs and many in and out of school clubs are showing that GEM Clubs are pivotal in confronting negative gender norms and practices that give boys and men more privileges based on gender, deny girls and young women the opportunity to participate in decision-making, and rob them of power to speak up, leaving out more girls compared to boys. Supporting these clubs is a concrete solution that can contribute to gender transformative education outcomes. As the implementation of GEM clubs is ongoing, Plan Uganda is still in the process of assessing the results. One challenge faced during the implementation was prolonged COVID-19 related school closures, which prevented the GEM clubs from meeting, and there were no technological or financial resources to provide alternatives during school closures.

Among the key lessons learnt so far from the program methodology:

- The formation of clubs and the empowerment of participants through training has built girls' and boys' self-confidence and esteem, that are both critical for social protection and ability to advocate for themselves.
- Plan trained teachers to support in mentoring GEM club members, which made it easy for teachers to mobilize girls and enabled them to build collective agency, so they could demand improvement of their school learning environment.
- The inclusion of at least 10 boys per club enabled both girls and boys to use club activities for peer to peer mobilization and awareness about gender equality.
- Using Music drama dance (MDD) has revealed so much talent and innovative communication the learners have, and that is more relevant to their life situations and effective in communicating with them than externally made communication messages.
- GEM clubs engaged boys and helped them appreciate that educating a girl is as good as educating a boy. Many boys are now advocating for gender equality in their families and schools, contributing to changes in attitude. Involving them in campaigns has greatly enhanced their capacity to engage.

11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

School-based clubs for girls and boys are a simple, cost-effective and relevant solution to barriers to girls’ access to gender responsive and transformative education in refugee and host community contexts. This intervention also directly engages youth and gives them opportunities to make decisions relevant to their education and protection. It is a viable option to ensure adolescents, especially girls, enroll in and complete secondary education in a gender transformative and safe environment which could be replicated in other refugee contexts, and situations where girl’s barriers to their education include teenage pregnancy and child, early and forced marriage.

Plan Uganda prioritized sensitizing the school community on the importance of girls’ education including Head Teachers, teachers, school management committees and parent-teacher associations. This created an environment where the GEM clubs were supported. Other agencies looking to adopt school-based clubs to promote gender transformative education should consider this holistic approach that raises awareness among the school community, local leaders and local governments, and includes peer-to-peer interventions. Organizations looking to pilot this intervention must budget adequate staff time, particularly for a Gender Equality Advisor, to oversee the clubs and develop materials for their training

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

- Guidelines on the Formation, Management and Strengthening of school clubs (Uganda MoES, 2020)
- Revised Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancies in School Settings in Uganda (Uganda MoES, 2020)
- National Strategy to end Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy 2022-2027
- Uganda Gender in Education Sector Policy (2016)
- Uganda National Child Policy (2020)