

EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS THROUGH EDUCATION

ABOUT THE BRITISH COUNCIL

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. We do this by making a positive contribution to the UK and the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust.

We work with over 100 countries across the world in the fields of arts and culture, English language, education and civil society. Each year we reach over 20 million people face-to-face and more than 500 million people online, via broadcasts and publications. Founded in 1934, we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body.

ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY

This brief is part of a wider study undertaken by ODI that reflects on the work of the British Council in relation to the empowerment of women and girls between 2010 and 2015, generating recommendations on ways to improve on the existing offer through the identification of strengths, gaps and opportunities in this area. An important dimension of the analysis relates to the British Council's use of its cultural relations approach in its work on gender equality – that is, how much it shows a deep understanding of the context, promotes trust, works in partnership and fosters participation.

The study analyses impact with respect to five outcome areas for women and girls' empowerment to tackle gender inequality:

- (i) increased awareness and agency
- (ii) fairer access to opportunities and resources
- (iii) dialogue, collaboration and collective action
- (iv) supportive policy and institutional reform
- (v) changes in attitudes, beliefs, practices and discriminatory social norms

This brief explores some of the British Council's education sector programmes through which it supports the empowerment of women (particularly young women) and girls. These interventions are only a sub-sample of the British Council's education programmes: education is an area in which it has a long track record of positive experiences.



EDUCATION TO PROMOTE WOMEN AND GIRLS’ EMPOWERMENT

Education programmes supported by the British Council provide opportunities for women and girls to enhance their skills and build their capacities, and can also facilitate the creation of research networks that generate and share knowledge on the discrimination facing them. Through a number of its education programmes, it builds capacity on inclusive education and stimulates reflection on the social norms and attitudes that contribute to gender inequality. Post-graduate scholarships managed by the British Council provide opportunities to young women receiving them who would not have had the opportunity to study in the UK otherwise, providing a life-changing experience that can strengthen some women’s presence in public, business and political spaces. Here we explore some relevant examples.

TULLOW GROUP SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME, KENYA (2011-PRESENT)

The Tullow Group Scholarship Scheme (TGSS) is a regional programme funded by Tullow Oil and Gas managed by the British Council. Scholars are given a scholarship for Masters level degrees in the UK. The programme is in place in Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritania and Uganda.

In Kenya, the team has been proactively targeting women, including in some of the marginalised regions where Tullow is operating, where few women have the necessary qualifications to apply and those who do tend to lack self-confidence or interest to apply for a scholarship to study in what they see as a male-dominated field. Others have family duties they find difficult to forgo in order to live abroad for a year. As such, recruiting women with the right profile is a challenge, but the British Council is making explicit efforts – particularly since the 2015 school cycle – to recruit women as a way to provide an opportunity that can work as a springboard for their development. For example, during the next recruitment round, now that female scholars are back from studying abroad, they will be taken on road shows to serve as role models so that young women in these marginalised localities can identify them as sources of inspiration for them to further their education.

Scholars now back in Kenya interviewed for this study identified many positive changes in their lives resulting from the scholarship: achieving a stronger international education as a platform for better job opportunities; getting a broader world view that will contribute positively

to their role in society; and pushing them to excel in a foreign environment, thus improving their assertiveness and self-confidence. One of the young female scholars said, ‘I now believe in myself more... I can do new things,’ illustrating the transformative role of this scholarship and experience abroad for young women who might not have received such an opportunity otherwise.

While the scale of the scholarship is small it is an example of the British Council influencing a programme to have positive empowerment outcomes for young women by giving them access to new opportunities.

ENGLISH AND DIGITAL FOR GIRLS’ EDUCATION (EDGE), BANGLADESH (2012–PRESENT)

The British Council and BRAC implement EDGE to stimulate the educational possibilities and needs of young girls in Bangladesh. It offers English and digital education for adolescents through non-formal after school clubs. It targets girls and promotes their opportunities to develop and strengthen skills in English and the use of technology, which are typically more limited than those of boys and men, which ultimately restricts their access to the labour market.

Since the project began, over 6573 girls have been reached directly through approximately 264 clubs within the network of BRAC. This project is one example of girls explicitly being targeted as beneficiaries and of an equity approach being followed to provide girls and adolescents with opportunities and resources. The project’s overall aim is that ‘adolescent girls from marginalised communities can make more informed and independent life choices, as is their right, in order to contribute more fully to the family, the economy and society’. To achieve this, the EDGE theory of change highlights four main objectives: development of skills and knowledge, awareness of choices and rights, self-confidence and belief in ability to learn and enhanced status.

There is evidence that EDGE contributes to students completing the formal education cycle, which has positive societal impacts, including strengthening participants’ likelihood of finding formal employment and raising the age of marriage. This point was also mentioned by the BRAC education manager, who explained that EDGE contributes to tackling the rate of girls dropping out of schools:

‘Often girls fail in English and Maths so they drop out and then they get married, so we should help them in their education through linking teaching with the club sessions and linking the project with market opportunities.’

The predominant perception is that EDGE, through improving the participants English and IT skills, positively affects the beneficiaries’ livelihood opportunities. Prevention of early marriage is far more problematic to demonstrate as a direct result of EDGE and could be largely attributed to other components of the Adolescent Development Programme implemented by BRAC. The BRAC manager also highlighted that girls enrolled and retained in secondary education still face risks of early marriage, when from poor families, and of sexual harassment, which lead parents to remove their daughters from school.

CONNECTING CLASSROOMS, UGANDA (2004–PRESENT)

Connecting Classrooms is the British Council’s global flagship schools programme, which is jointly funded with DFID and runs in over 50 countries. By developing and networking with thousands of teachers across the world, the programme aims to help young people develop the knowledge, skills and values to live and work in a globalised economy.

In Uganda, the programme is one of several active projects helping enhance the quality of education by providing international school partnerships, professional development for teachers and school leaders and ICT and policy dialogue and training. By partnering local Ugandan schools with international schools, teachers and students in both institutions are able to use available online resources, while learning more about each other’s cultures and broadening cultural relations.

While the programme is not specifically targeted at girls, and its design does not respond to gender-specific challenges, girls benefit through their involvement. More recently, there has been some thinking about how the programme can be better utilised to promote gender equality dimensions, and as a result the British Council is now carrying out a pilot in 10 countries to focus more on this. An officer from the Ministry of Education and Gender explained:

Connecting Classrooms is now ideally about skills for living in the 21st century and these skills are needed by everyone whether girls or boys but at this time the British Council has been trying to find out what is it that the Gender Unit in the education ministry is doing about girls and women.

Some of the teachers participating in the programme are also considering the need to think specifically about girls and their needs (e.g. competing demands at home or insufficient support to study and perform better) so their performance at school can improve. A female head teacher interviewed responded:

When you look at the design of the programme, you can see the thread that focuses on women and girls.



The programme does not have an in-built mechanism to undertake gender analysis in the localities where it works to inform its implementation or gender equity indicators (beyond parity) in schools to strengthen its programming. These targeted actions could improve results for girls, particularly given the challenging environment for girls in Uganda that leads many of them to dropping out of school after the primary school cycle. Thus, while the Connecting Classrooms programme contributes to develop the opportunities of girls' in the Ugandan schools reached, it has the potential to make more transformative changes on girls, including in terms of their awareness and agency, by undertaking a gender analysis that can underpin some of its actions in the future.

GENDER AND GIRLS' SCHOOLING OUTCOMES: A STUDY IN FIVE NIGERIAN STATES, MACARTHUR FOUNDATION

This project, led by a research team from the University College London Institute of Education, in partnership with the British Council Nigeria, aims to investigate the relationship between what teachers learn about gender and girls' education in pre-service and in-service teacher training or continuing professional development, and secondary school education outcomes.

The research project is particularly concerned with whether teachers are able to put insights regarding gender equality into practice in their work in schools, and what kinds of relationships exist between aspects of teachers' training and girls' education outcomes. The government is hiring 500,000 teachers so the intervention has become particularly important to improve how teachers teach their students about gender equality.

The findings of the survey, focus groups and other in-depth qualitative research tools suggest teachers continue to hold discriminatory views on gender after training. Such views relate to the unacceptability of women's leadership or blaming the victim for sexual violence. These views are generally held by more men than women, although this varies between states.

The research also found a pattern in that teachers who were most actively trying to support inclusion also reported themselves most unhappy with their work conditions, suggesting that trying to put inclusion into practice in an environment with minimal support is extremely stressful. This demonstrates the need to help create more supportive enabling environments both at an institutional level and at a community level, because training alone is not adequate. This work has not yet concluded but is designed to feed into better training for teachers in relation to gender equality in Nigeria.

The British Council's education programmes presented in this brief work in different areas with girls and young women of different ages and circumstances. Some have adapted their design or their implementation to promote gender equity and the support of girls and young women's learning and development have indicated positive results in terms of individual agency and knowledge that can lead to better opportunities. However, some other programmes, are not taking full advantage of their potential to create an enabling environment that is more conducive to ensuring gender equality in education, something that could be inbuilt as part of the programme. Thus, in its work on education, more can be done by the British Council to ensure empowerment outcomes for women and girls – including, for example, changes in attitudes and social norms that discriminate against girls – are better achieved. It is important to note, however, that the British Council's flagship programme supporting school-based learning, Connecting Classrooms, is currently piloting a more gender-responsive approach which looks to incorporate gender and inclusion in the programme more specifically and support those countries where there are opportunities to address gender inequalities in schools/education. Looking at the pilot's results and progress in promoting gender in education over the next couple of years will be important.