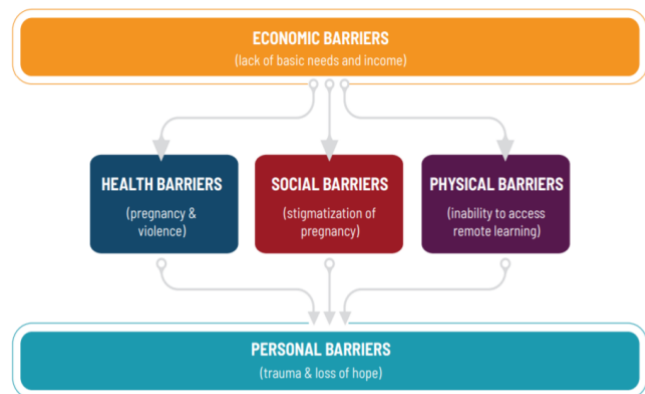


AMPLIFY Girls Education and Innovation Fund

The state of Girls' education following the COVID-19 shutdowns

Girls have been deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent school shut-downs.

As the COVID-19 pandemic caused disruption to education around the world- girls have suffered disproportionate disruptions to their education and are now facing greater barriers to returning to school, as schools reopen. While there have been different responses across the countries that AMPLIFY Girls works in, outcomes for girls across the board have been dire. In Uganda, schools have been shut down for more than 20 months, the government waiting for sufficient vaccination rates before schools can reopen.¹ In Rwanda, more than 16% of students (60,000 students) failed their national exams and will now have to repeat that academic year due to the learning losses.² In Kenya, the rise in sexual assault in girls as young as 12 caused national outcry³ and in Tanzania young people described the pandemic as permeating all areas of their lives and they were grateful for the short school shutdowns so they could avoid domestic violence.⁴ While each of these countries have had a different pandemic response, the outcomes for girls in terms of exposure to additional violence (sexual and domestic) and learning losses have unfortunately followed similar alarming trajectories.



Adolescent girls in poor and rural communities exist at the intersection of a few marginalized identities; the barriers they face to returning to school are complex and interlinked, and like poverty are cyclical. The loss of income of the parent or guardian, illness and sadly death of guardians, meant that more girls were left in precarious economic situations. These economic barriers placed increased pressure on girls to engage in transactional sex to cover their basic needs (e.g. food, clothing and menstrual hygiene products) often resulting in unwanted pregnancy. Pregnancies result in another barrier to returning to school in the form of social stigma and isolation that is often perpetuated by

¹ The Independent "Museveni- Schools will reopen in in January 2022" Sept 2021, Entebbe, Uganda

² Muvunyi, Leonce "Over 60,000 Rwandan students fail national exams- to repeat classes" Oct 2021, The East African, Kigali, Rwanda

³ Odour, Michael "Close to 4,000 school girls impregnated in Kenya during COVID-19 lockdown" June 2021, Africa News, Nairobi, Kenya

⁴ Ngutuku, Elizabeth "The voices of children and youth in Tanzania's COVID-19 response" LSE blog, Oct 2020, Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania



the school and wider community. Girls also face greater health barriers in the form of both sexual and physical violence from the prolonged period out of school.

As schools reopen – having girls return to school is paramount to preserve the gains made towards equitable, quality education and gender equity. The labored gains that have been made in girls education are under threat and achieving equitable and quality education for all before 2030 will be unattainable without a conscious and sustained effort to get girls back in school after the pandemic. The daily experience of violence, acute poverty, stress, anxiety, stigmatization and insecurity have all served to deteriorate girls’ psychological and emotional health, making school return unlikely without sustained and holistic care for multiple facets of their wellbeing.⁵

“Maybe I could go to school but returning home, I could find no food. It could require me to go to look for food. I could then miss the school feeding, and other school materials because it is my mother only who is responsible for me. So, she cannot afford to provide all materials for my little sister and I at once. It can be difficult for her.” (IDI-22-RWANDA)

We listened to recommendations from girls for what it would take to get them back to school and heard removing economic barriers to return to school was critical. Girls were clear in their recommendations for what could be done in the short term to ensure their return to school. The first and most important of these recommendations was the provision of immediate economic relief—specifically school fees and other basic necessities. This economic relief needs to be coupled with trauma counselling and mentorship. Psychosocial support and counselling are necessary to encourage girls (both pregnant and not pregnant) that it is possible to return to school. Mentorship by either peers or adult women can provide girls with a sense of connection, belonging, and hope.⁶ **We believe that community-driven organizations (CDOs) are best suited to address the holistic needs of adolescent girls and their return to school.**

The Education and Innovation Fund

The AMPLIFY Girls Education and Innovation Fund aims to provide a pathway back to school for girls who will otherwise fall through the cracks, as the rest of the world moves on from the devastation of the pandemic. The fund will be set up to aid our partner organizations in getting girls back into schools.

⁵ Oulo, B., Sidle, A.A., Kintzi, K., Mwangi, M., Akello, I. 2021. “Understanding the Barriers to Girls’ School Return: Girls’ Voices from the Frontline of the COVID-19 Pandemic in East Africa.” AMPLIFY COVID-19 Research Brief. Nairobi, Kenya

⁶ Ibid.



CDOs have the relationships, trust, flexibility to get to the girls that are the most affected and vulnerable. The CDOs who are closest to the issue and have the closest relationships with the girls in their communities can offer girls a concrete pathway back into school, holistically with their programming that will ensure that these girls remain on track to complete school. AMPLIFY Girls has been working closely with 25 CDOs across East Africa for the past three years and have built deep and lasting partnerships based on trust and commitment to serving vulnerable girls within their communities. Our collective work has resulted in the creation of shared research frameworks, monthly workshops on organizational development, our collective research on the impact of COVID19 on girls education and promising practices, and the establishment of AMPLIFY Girls.

Funding will be provided to partner organizations to primarily ensure that girls have what they need to return to school. Response to the crisis needs to be contextually relevant and in the hands of the organizations to formulate their own strategies. AMPLIFY Girl's report on promising practices to stem the effects of the pandemic on learning losses detailed diverse categories of promising interventions while recognizing the relevance of holistic approaches.⁷ We recognize that the solutions that organizations present will be diverse and contextually relevant. This could be psychological support, mentoring or monetary support for the girls' family who will likely be providing childcare while she returns to school that can cover food; medical supplies and feminine hygiene products.

Building off of our experience dispersing emergency funding when the pandemic first caused lockdowns- AMPLIFY Girls will prioritize partners based on an equitable system considering- focus, geography and need. Through consultation with our partner organizations, we have decided on an application process that supports the return of girls to both traditional formal secondary education and vocational opportunities for those whom formal schooling is inaccessible. The applications will be reviewed by the secretariat with strategic advice from the board of Directors. Our first round of applications will be capped at \$10,000USD per organization and we will limit individual applications to 25% of their budget. Reporting requirements will be minimal but will include reporting on the number of girls facilitated to return to school and types of wrap-around services provided. Currently our partners provide school fees to roughly 1000 students in Eastern Africa.

⁷ Oulo, B., Sidle, A.A., Butler, M. June 2021. "Stemming Pandemic-Related Losses in Girls' Education: Promising Practices from the AMPLIFY Girls Collective." AMPLIFY COVID-19 Research Brief. Nairobi, Kenya.



We want to be able to support girls, through our partner organizations, for the long term, as we recognize that the economic fall-out of COVID-19 is likely to be felt throughout East Africa until around 2023.⁸ For the poorest and most vulnerable it could take much longer. To ensure the longevity of the fund we are aiming to raise USD500,000+ per year until at least 2023.

AMPLIFY Girls wants to join forces with aligned funders who are responsive to ideas of collective impact know that CDOs are key to deep and sustained impact.⁹ By providing funding for and trusting those closest to the issues to make the best decisions for their community and the girls within them, AMPLIFY Girls alongside funders can use the Education and Innovation Fund to make sure girls within the catchment communities are back in school and are on their way to reaping the benefits of an education for themselves and their communities.

Annex

Aligned funders are those who are coming alongside us to challenge the power dynamics in global development that have locked CDOs out of decision-making spaces. Aligned funders hold agree with and act in accordance with these principles:

1. CDOs play a distinct role in the African civil society ecosystem and their proximity to the communities they serve imbues and empowers them with particular assets that enable them to deliver differential impact
2. To address long term power imbalances that have perpetuated a narrative that CDOs cannot address critical issues at scale that CDOs need long term and unrestricted funding to continue to have deep and long lasting impact
3. To foster the spirit and collective impact, AMPLIFY Girls, funders and CDOs need to continue to move at the speed of trust which includes creating spaces for frank open and honest discussion, participation and sometimes dissent among stakeholders.

⁸ World Bank "East Africa's COVID-19 recovery: Impacting Lives and Livelihoods" Nairobi, Kenya

⁹ See the Annex for more on Aligned Funders.