# National Conference on
"WHAT WORKS IN GIRLS' EDUCATION"

Breaking Barriers, Building Futures:
Evidence & Action for Girls' Education

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October 2025
Kampala, Uganda
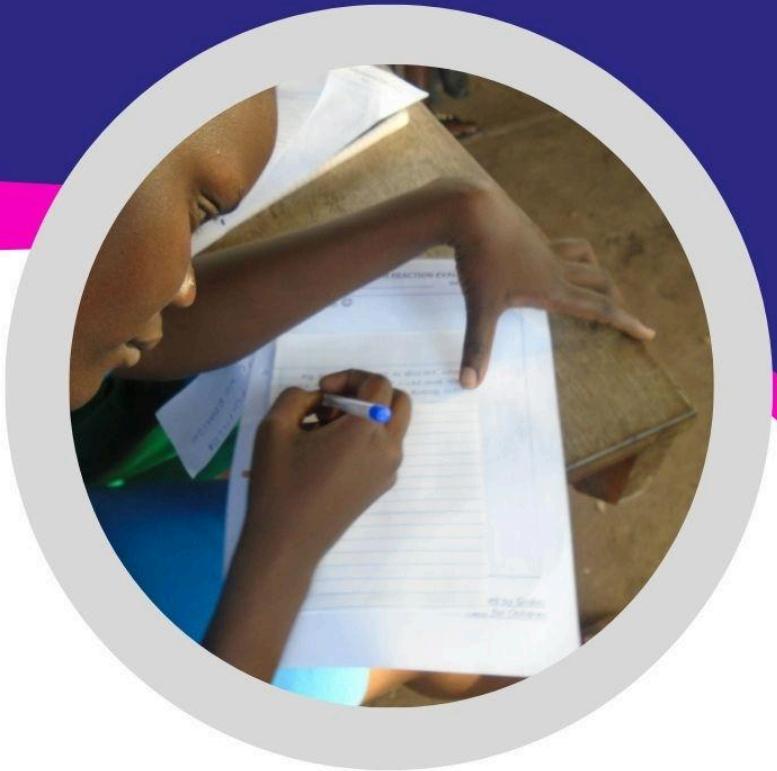
Conference Report

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FCV	Fragility, Conflict, and Violence
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GEMR	Global Education Monitoring Report
GRP	Gender-Responsive Pedagogy
IFA	Iron Folic Acid
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NGES	National Girls' Education Strategy
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RCT	Randomised Control Trial
REAL	Research for Equitable Access and Learning
SEW	Social Emotional Wellbeing
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Foreword:
A Message from Conference Co-Chairs

As co-chairs of the National Conference on 'What Works in Girls' Education,' we are delighted to introduce this comprehensive report that captures the energy, insights, and commitments that emerged from our gathering in Kampala from 1st-3rd October, 2025. This conference brought together over 250 participants from 22 countries and 113 organisations, all united in our mission to advance gender equity in education, to ensure that girls and boys succeed. We extend our deepest gratitude to Honourable Dr Joyce Moriku Kaducu, Minister of State for Primary Education in Uganda, for officially opening the event, and to Dr Kedrace Turyagyenda, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), for closing it with inspiring words. The keynote addresses by Ms Rosette Nanyanzi, Dr Manos Antoninis, and Prof. Pauline Rose set a powerful tone, reminding us of the national, regional and global imperatives driving this work.

In Uganda, where we have largely achieved gender parity in primary enrolment, yet face stark disparities in secondary completion and persistent barriers like teenage pregnancy, child marriage, and socio-economic inequalities, this conference served as a crucial bridge between evidence, policy and practice. Over three days, through 118 presentations across eight themes, we deepened our understanding of the barriers girls face and celebrated proven solutions. We heard compelling stories of hands-on STEM programs boosting girls' confidence, community partnerships shifting gender norms, and holistic interventions supporting teenage mothers' reintegration. These discussions underscored that 'what works' includes practical teacher training, strong family and community engagement, and sustainable financing woven together to create lasting change.

Conference outcomes, including the endorsed Communiqué and tangible recommendations, chart a collaborative path forward. They emphasise the need for coordinated, evidence-based strategies that address interconnected challenges, from menstrual health management to leadership development and career preparation. Educating girls is not just about enrolment; it is about empowering them to thrive, lead and contribute to society, ultimately combating poverty and fostering economic growth.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Conference Organising Committee, participants, presenters, and partners who made this event possible, including Uwezo Uganda Board and Technical Advisory Committee, Ministry of Education and Sports, our funders, especially Echidna Giving, and regional and international collaborators. A special thank you goes to Ms Rebecca Pagel and Mr Patrick Pius Akol who tirelessly supported the drafting of this report to capture the depth of our collective wisdom.

Looking ahead, we invite all stakeholders – governments, NGOs, communities and development partners – to work together to achieve the recommendations contained in this report. We look forward to reconvening in 2027 to reflect on what we have done and learnt.

Mary Goretti Nakabugo, PhD, Executive Director, Uwezo Uganda
George Wilson Kasule, PhD, Associate Professor & Dean, School of Education, Kyambogo University

National Conference on "What Works in Girls' Education"

Executive Summary

Introduction

From October 1-3, 2025, the National Conference on "What Works in Girls' Education" convened over 250 participants from 22 countries at the Hilton Garden Inn in Kampala, Uganda. Participants represented 113 organisations. The conference was opened by Honorable Dr. Joyce Moriku Kaducu, Minister of State for Primary Education, and closed by Dr. Kedrace Turyagyenda, Permanent Secretary—both from the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). Keynote addresses were delivered by Rosette Nanyanzi, Dr. Manos Antoninis, and Prof. Pauline Rose.

Conference Rationale and Context

The conference bridged research, policy, and practice by translating evidence into coordinated action. While Uganda achieved gender parity in primary school enrollment at 91%, girls represent only 46.9% of secondary enrollment. Primary completion for boys and girls stands at 51% and secondary completion has stagnated at 30%, with teenage pregnancy and child marriage driving substantial dropout rates. The Conference was intended to bring such challenges to light and provide a platform to consolidate the latest evidence, share context-specific solutions that have demonstrated impact, and forge a collaborative, multi-stakeholder path forward for Uganda.

Conference Objectives and Approach

Five core objectives guided the conference: deepening understanding of barriers and enablers; fostering dialogue on evidence-based solutions; generating tangible recommendations; amplifying girls' voices; and documenting effective practices. Over the three days, 118 presentations across eight themes moved participants from understanding challenges to showcasing evidence-based interventions and making commitments.

Key Lessons Learned Across Themes

Innovative Pedagogies. While teachers receive gender-responsive pedagogy training, implementation remains moderate due to insufficient practical training. Successful interventions emphasised hands-on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning through robotics and home-based activities, showing documented test score improvements. Community engagement proved critical, with programs increasing support for girls' education from 50 to 100 percent.

Socio-Economic and Cultural Barriers. Entrenched gender norms perpetuate inequality when reinforced by teachers, communities, and parents. School-based violence evolves from physical violence in primary schools to sexual harassment in secondary education. Effective interventions included the Good School Toolkit, safe spaces, and holistic approaches. Successful reintegration of teenage mothers requires community engagement, financial assistance, psychosocial support, and mentorship, but pregnancy management guideline implementation remains inconsistent. Girls facing multiple sources of marginalisation such as poverty, refugee status, or disability, encounter compounded obstacles. Interventions can address these intersecting disadvantages through inclusive clubs and community awareness.

Health and Well-being. Girls' health and well-being interact with socio-economic and cultural constraints to undermine girls' educational outcomes. Menstrual health management education, facilities, and reduced stigma are key to reducing student absenteeism. Trauma-informed education and support systems are also key for girls' positive engagement at school. Various approaches, including play-based psychosocial support, safe spaces, trauma-informed teacher training, and more are useful for supporting girls' and boys' mental health and well-being.

Policy and Financing. Targeted financial support through vouchers and cash transfers removes financial barriers, but sustainable impact requires holistic approaches combining mentorship, health services, and family engagement. Limited policy awareness hampers implementation, necessitating iterative development with stakeholder engagement. For certain groups such as teenage mothers, policy awareness must be accompanied by supportive infrastructure such as mental health services and childcare facilities.

Digital Inclusion, Life Skills, and Career Preparation. Leadership and life skills development among girls must begin early and be sustained throughout education. In addition, career preparation requires diverse role models and practical work experience. Technology presents both opportunities and challenges, with persistent gender gaps in access and digital literacy.

Data and Evidence. Global South and women researchers are under-represented in the global publishing on girls' education. Global South women researchers especially face barriers to publishing. Beyond increasing publication of evidence, strengthening evidence use is necessary to ensure evidence influences policy and program decision-making.

"We cannot talk about girls' education without addressing both the heart and the wallet."

Conference Outcomes and Way Forward

Presentations and discussions at the conference surfaced common elements that define "What Works in Girls' Education." These included practical teacher training, hands-on learning, strong community partnerships, holistic support systems, and sustained commitment to shifting gender norms. Based on these common elements, the conference generated a "Conference Communiqué" that was endorsed by stakeholders, produced recommendations for government and partners, and strengthened a national community of practice. Participants committed to coordinated, evidence-based strategies recognizing the interconnected nature of barriers. As one presenter stated, "We cannot talk about girls' education without addressing both the heart and the wallet." The conference report serves as both documentation of current evidence and as a roadmap for achieving gender equality in education by 2030.

Introduction and Conference Framework

Global Context

Girls' education has made substantial progress globally. Since 2015, approximately 50 million more girls have enrolled in school globally, with completion rates rising from 86% to 89% in primary education, from 74% to 79% in lower secondary, and from 54% to 61% in upper secondary education between 2015 and 2024 (World Bank, 2025a, p. 3). Two-thirds of all countries have achieved gender parity in primary school enrollment, with global enrollment rates at 92% for males and 90% for females (World Bank, 2025b). In sub-Saharan Africa, completion rates for both boys and girls remain particularly low, with primary completion at 67.4%, lower secondary at 47.4%, and upper secondary at 28.5%, further revealing an ultimate gender gap of 7.4 percentage points favouring boys at the upper secondary level (Antoninis, 2025, slide 12)

Despite this progress, significant barriers persist, particularly in low-income countries where girls face multiple obstacles to education. Poverty remains the most critical determinant of whether girls can access and complete their education, with poor families often favouring boys' education when resources are limited (World Bank, 2024; UNICEF, n.d.). Child marriage and adolescent pregnancy are major drivers of school dropout, with girls who marry before age 18 being more likely to experience domestic violence and less likely to remain in school (UNICEF, 2023). Gender-based violence in and around schools, including sexual exploitation and harassment, creates unsafe learning environments that deter girls from attending school (Girls Not Brides, n.d.). Additionally, cultural norms and discriminatory practices perpetuate gender inequality, limiting girls' educational opportunities in many communities (World Bank, 2025b). Fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV) exacerbate these challenges, with girls in FCV-affected countries being 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys (World Bank, 2025a, p. 4).

While girls generally outperform boys in reading proficiency globally, they perform equally in mathematics and lag at the highest proficiency levels (Antoninis, 2025, slides 17, 20). A persistent gender gap exists in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, where women account for only 35% of tertiary STEM graduates despite representing 52% of all graduates (Antoninis, 2025, slide 27). Furthermore, although women constitute 57% of secondary school teachers globally, they face a 20-point gender gap in educational leadership positions (Antoninis, 2025, slide 28).

Girls' Education in Uganda: A Statistical Snapshot

Uganda has achieved gender parity in primary school enrollment, with a net enrollment rate of 91% (World Bank, n.d.). However, the primary completion rate at approximately 51% remains a challenge, though girls show a slight advantage at 54% vs 52% for boys according to 2017 data (UNESCO, 2024). At the secondary level, gender disparities become more pronounced, with girls representing only 46.9% of secondary school enrollment compared to 53.1% for boys (Costa, 2025). The transition rate from primary to secondary school stands at 59%, indicating significant dropout, particularly among girls (World Bank, n.d.).

Multiple barriers impede girls' educational progress in Uganda. Teenage pregnancy and child marriage are among the most significant obstacles, with the Uganda Bureau of Statistics estimating that 35% of girls drop out due to early marriage and 23% due to pregnancy (Nabunya et al., 2021, p. 2). UNESCO analysis suggests that achieving universal secondary education for girls and ending child marriage in Uganda could reduce total fertility by one-third (UNESCO, 2023). Secondary school completion rates have stagnated at around 30%, reflecting the cumulative impact of these barriers (Kazibwe, 2025; UNESCO, 2019a).

In higher education, female enrollment has increased; one study demonstrated that women account for 53% of graduates at Makerere University in recent years (Muvunyi & Jjumba, 2025). However, significant gender disparities persist in STEM fields, where women represent only approximately 26% of professionals and 14% of STEM professors (UNESCO, 2025; Drswahn, 2024). Fewer than one-third of science researchers in Uganda are women, highlighting the continued underrepresentation of women in these critical fields (UNESCO, 2019b). These disparities reflect broader patterns of gender segregation in education, where women are overrepresented in humanities and underrepresented in technical and scientific disciplines.

Conference Rationale, Objectives, and Outcomes

The rationale for this conference was to translate robust evidence into coordinated action. Despite the availability of data highlighting the gaps in learning outcomes, secondary school transition, and the pervasive barriers of poverty and teenage pregnancy, these challenges persist. There is a critical disconnect between research, policy, and on-the-ground practice. **This conference was designed to bridge that gap, creating a pivotal platform to consolidate the latest evidence, share context-specific solutions that have demonstrated impact, and forge a collaborative, multi-stakeholder path forward for Uganda.** Informed by the evidence, the National Conference on "What Works in Girls' Education" set out with the ambition to achieve five objectives (see Figure 1).

The conference was designed to yield concrete outputs to ensure accountability and lasting impact:
1. A call to action directed to different duty bearers on what is needed to enhance engagement of girls and boys.
2. An outcome document or communique that consolidates promising practices, research priorities, funding opportunities, and policy priorities to inform coordinated efforts on education of girls and boys in Uganda (and beyond).
3. Contribution to global knowledge through the publication of a book edition based on some of the outstanding papers presented at the conference.

Figure 1: Conference Objectives

1. To create a platform for government, civil society, funding partners, academia and independent researchers to spotlight issues and deepen understanding of existing barriers and enablers to girls' education.

2. To foster dialogue on effective contextualised practices for implementing evidence-based, innovative, and sustainable solutions to improve girls' education in Uganda and the East African region.

3. To generate tangible recommendations and actionable steps to address gender-based barriers in education in Uganda and the East African region.

4. To amplify the voices of girls and organisations championing girls' education in Uganda.

5. To document what works in girls' education, which could also work to improve all children's learning outcomes, boys and girls, irrespective of gender.

Conference Overview

The conference, hosted at the Hilton Garden Inn in Kampala, Uganda, offered participants the opportunity to engage with session presentations, keynote speaker presentations, and poster presentations over the course of three days. During session presentations, participants had the choice to attend one of five parallel sessions that ranged from an hour to an hour and a half each. Keynote presentations were followed by panelists commenting on the same topic. A poster session offered participants the opportunity to engage with several posters in a single session. Each session room was coordinated by a room manager who oversaw the presentation logistics for physical and virtual presenters and supported the participants.

Participant Demographics

Over 250 participants from 22 countries spanning five continents attended the conference (see Figure 2). Over half of these participants (55%) were female. Participants represented 113 organisations, the majority (94%) of which prioritized girls' education as either part or all of their organisation's mission.

Figure 2: Continents Represented

Africa · Europe · Asia · North America · Middle East

- 61.9%
- 14.3%
- 9.5%
- 9.5%
- 4.8%
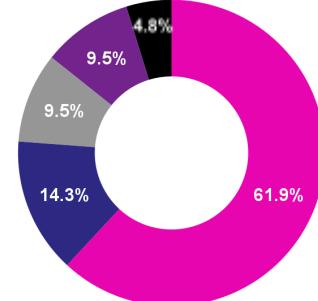
Keynote Speakers

The conference was officially opened by Honorable Dr. Joyce Moriku Kaducu, the Uganda Minister of State for Primary Education. Keynote speakers included Rosette Nanyanzi, Gender Technical Advisor with the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES); Dr. Manos Antoninis, Director, Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) at the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO); and Prof. Pauline Rose, Director of the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre at the University of Cambridge. Keynote speakers addressed the state of girls' education in Uganda and globally, and looked forward towards achieving gender equality in and through education by 2030. Panelists (see the Conference Book of Abstracts) immediately followed

with remarks that spurred further discussions. The conference was officially closed by Dr. Kedrace Turyagyenda, Permanent Secretary, Uganda MoES.

Major Themes

During the three days of the conference, 118 presentations and 9 posters provided opportunities for discussions on girls' education across eight themes (see Figure 3). Day one focused participants on understanding the evidence and outstanding challenges regarding girls' education, while day two showcased proven interventions and scalable models to overcome the challenges to girls' education. Day three called for participants to make commitments and take action to improve educational outcomes for girls and boys.

Synthesis of Presentations By Theme

Presentations were made across all eight themes, with "Innovative Pedagogies, Assessments and Learning Approaches" and "Overcoming Socio-economic and Cultural Barriers" being the most popular themes (see Figure 3). The following sections synthesize learnings from presentations by theme.

Figure 3: Percentage of Presentations by Theme
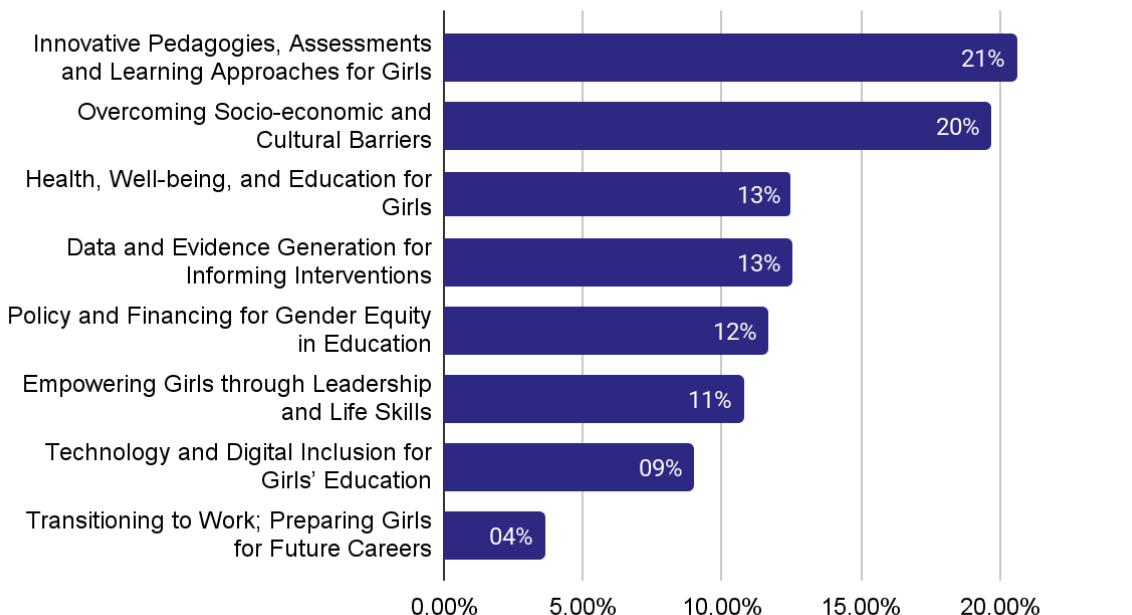
Innovative Pedagogies, Assessments and Learning Approaches for Girls

This sub-theme brought together inspiring stories and solid evidence showcasing how to make education more equal for girls. The presentations moved beyond listing problems but also focused on what is working in real classrooms and communities. A common strand was the importance of

training teachers in new ways, making learning hands-on, and building strong support beyond the school walls to encourage more girls to enroll, participate, and succeed in education.

Supporting Teachers to Use Fair Teaching Methods

Presenters agreed that, while teachers are often introduced to gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP)--which includes using fair language, creating inclusive lesson plans, and ensuring both girls and boys participate equally–they find it hard to use these methods in class. In West Nile in Uganda, teachers tried to use gender-sensitive language; however, with limited training, their overall use of GRP was only moderate (Polycarp & Aparo, Abstract T112[1]). A separate study in teacher colleges found there was no deliberate gender integration in examined teacher lesson plans and teaching materials (Bakaira, Abstract T114). This underscored the need for more practical, hands-on training on GRP for teachers. Other solutions to low GRP implementation included organisations like the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) Uganda working to incorporate GRP in the national curriculum for all student teachers (Okhako, Ogara, & Auma, Abstract T124), and the Fundi Girls Program focusing deeply on a smaller number of schools (Obote, Abstract T105). This presented a key policy question on how to scale GRP mastery from focused projects into the broader teacher workforce. These presentations argued for teacher training to focus less on lectures about GRP and more on practice, where teachers can experiment with methods that include-using gender-neutral language and create balanced group activities in mock lessons, followed by supportive feedback (Bakaira, Abstract T114). One presenter proposed empowering female educators through mentorship, positioning educators as catalysts for change and visible role models who challenge restrictive norms from within (Audo, Abstract T408).

Getting Girls Excited about Science by Doing

The presentations showed that girls learn science and math best by doing, not just by listening. The Fundi Girls program, for example, used hands-on robotics activities, reporting that "girls thrive with hands-on learning" and become more confident (Obote, Abstract T105). Another researcher showed that when girls learn STEM through practical projects at home, like role-playing pollination or managing a small garden, their view of these subjects changes; they start to see STEM as "enjoyable and achievable," which leads to a documented "improvement in monthly test results" (Andema, Abstract T129). While such hands-on approaches make difficult ideas easier to understand, presenters noted that these activities need to grow with the student. The ALOT-Change program found a "need to further adapt interventions for older adolescents," as the same activities that work for younger children may not be challenging or interesting enough for teenagers (Abuya, Abstract T615).

Presenters share visual aids that help learners get excited about science "by doing."

Working Together with Families and Communities

Presenters concurred that for lasting changes to happen, schools' efforts must be connected to the communities around them. Presenters shared varied approaches; for instance, one program trained parents to become active helpers in their child's learning by leading practical household demonstrations, effectively making parents "active change agents" (Andema, Abstract T129). Other

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[1] Conference abstracts may be found in the Conference Programme and Book of Abstracts, also linked in Annex A.

work in West Nile and Karamoja in Uganda focused on changing deep-rooted community beliefs that hold girls back, such as the idea that boys' education is more important or that girls should be married early (Polycarp & Aparo, Abstract T112; Kaboyo, Abstract T111). The Simameni Project demonstrated that community conversations can dramatically increase–from 50% to 100%--the number of people who see the value in educating a girl (Gowan et al, Abstract W112). The presenters made a clarion call for a formalized linkage between schools and local health, child protection, and cultural leaders to tackle barriers like early marriages and poor menstrual health together (Gowan et al, Abstract W112; Kaboyo, Abstract T111).

Overcoming Socio-Economic and Cultural Barriers

Presentations in this sub-theme highlighted obstacles that limit girls' access to education such as cultural norms and negative mindsets, lack of resources, early marriage, gender-based violence (GBV) including female genital mutilation (FGM), and poor menstrual health and hygiene. Nearly all presentations under this theme, regardless of the specific barrier addressed, discussed how cultural gender norms and mindsets can influence a girls' educational outcomes. Presenters demonstrated that cultural norms perpetuate gender inequality and are often reinforced by teachers, communities, and parents (Namatende-Sakwa, Abstract T611), with poverty further intensifying traditional preferences for boys' education (Ketty, Abstract T220). Indeed, Chikopela's research in Zambia articulated the "free education paradox," revealing how, despite tuition fee abolition, many girls still drop out of school due to indirect poverty-related costs, household labour expectations, and cultural norms devaluing girls' education (Chikopela et al., Abstract T413).

Many presenters highlighted the need for positive counter-narratives to challenge gender norms that limit girls' educational outcomes. One presenter noted that while girls' and boys' mindsets are constructed from surrounding voices, mindsets are not static, and youth can either internalize or challenge these cultural frameworks (Nakalawa, Abstract T225). While discussing specific barriers such as GBV, teenage pregnancy, and specific marginalised groups, presenters emphasized the importance of shifting cultural gender norms and proposed targeted interventions to remove barriers to girls' education.

Gender-based Violence

Presentations on gender-based violence examined school-based violence, sexual harrassment, and FGM. Presenters highlighted that school-based violence evolves from physical abuse by staff in primary schools to sexual harassment at secondary and tertiary levels in the context of East Africa and specifically in Uganda. Effective interventions included the Good School Toolkit for reducing staff violence and promoting student agency (Nakiboneka, Lauri et al., Abstract P(W)103), safe spaces, and school-based gender-advocacy clubs (Ssesanga, Abstract T204). Presenters also emphasised holistic approaches targeting learners, policies, communities, parents, teachers, and health systems (Mbuthi, Abstract T211). In Ethiopia, multi-stakeholder strategies engaging community and religious leaders, teachers, parents, and learners through sensitisation, women's groups, and gender clubs increased awareness and reporting of FGM and early marriage (Workneh et al., Abstract T229)."

Teenage Pregnancy

Presentations on teenage mothers' re-entry into school in Uganda highlighted challenges including childcare constraints, financial barriers, and stigma from teachers and peers. Presenters noted the importance of the revised *Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in*

School Settings (MoES, 2020) that permit and govern continuation of education for pregnant girls and adolescent/under-age mothers in primary and secondary schools. While presenters lamented that these guidelines are inconsistently implemented, prey as they are to individual teacher or peer attitudes, presenters also noted the presence of teacher and peer advocates supporting young mothers in school (Kitamirike et al, Abstract T508), and called for more flexible pregnancy management guidelines (Onen, Abstract T206). Presenters noted that, to successfully reintegrate child mothers into school, community engagement, parent-teacher dialogue, financial assistance, psychosocial support, and mentorship are key (Hope et al, Abstract T202; Tumusiime et al, Abstract T123).

Intersectionality and Multiple Marginalisation in Girls' Education

Several presentations discussed intersectionality, whereby a girl with additional sources of marginalisation–such as poverty, refugee status, ethnic group, or disability–must overcome more obstacles than other girls in order to receive the advantages of an education. Presenters shared research suggesting that poorer girls in East Africa face more violence in their homes, lower parental involvement in education, and poorer psychosocial well-being (Mugoya, Abstract T102). These presenters suggested multi-level and community-led solutions, where children, teachers, caregivers, communities, and even members of parliament all play a role in reducing barriers and supporting girls to develop and exercise agency (Kinyanjui et al, Abstract T237). One presenter focused on the impoverished Batwa people of Uganda, whose marginalisation has led to barriers to education including early marriage, early pregnancy, domestic violence, alcohol abuse, and more. This presenter further proposed that integration of Batwa culture into learning activities, parental engagement, and life skills training were key to these children benefitting from education (Wilson et al, Abstract T221).

Studies on girls with disabilities demonstrated higher rates of violence against girls with disabilities compared to non-disabled girl peers throughout their education (Rehema et al, Abstract T235), with schools functioning as sites of both inclusion and exclusion (Mugisha, Abstract T207). One randomised control trial (RCT) showed that peer-to-peer support significantly increased educational inclusion for children with disabilities (Nansamba, Abstract T813). Another study found that refugee girls in Uganda fall behind non-refugee learners in English literacy (Simpson et al, Abstract T208), with refugee girls with disabilities experiencing additional sources of marginalisation, including stigma, unaffordable assistive devices, and inaccessible infrastructure (Mugisha, Abstract T207). Presenters recommended interventions including inclusive gender clubs for refugee and non-refugee children (including learners with disabilities), community awareness campaigns, and non-government organisation (NGO)- provided assistive devices.

Conference participants work together on a workshop activity.

Technology and Digital Inclusion for Girls' Education

Presentations explored the journey to digitally include every girl in different settings. Presenters from Uganda and Türkiye shared highlights on their work (including challenges and solutions) that ranged from establishing basic technology hubs in Ugandan villages to reshaping classroom dynamics and tackling complex social barriers in Türkiye. In the quest for digital inclusion for girl's education, the presentations echoed a common refrain at the conference, that we must first build a strong foundation of health and safety for everyone and, second, design specialized, focused interventions to reach the most marginalised girls, ensuring that efforts to help the many do not leave the few behind.

Technology as a Foundational Tool and a Creative Platform

When it comes to giving girls technology, a crucial question arises: what is it truly for? In Uganda, presentations revealed two different answers. One presenter showcased technology as a building block for core skills. His work focused on the very basics of reading, using simple tools to help girls decode words and sounds (Onyang, Abstract W107). Meanwhile, other presenters positioned technology as a platform for innovation by arguing that interventions such as digital learning corners are less about learning to read and more about learning to build–encouraging girls to code, design, and create digital solutions from scratch (Ogwal, Abstract T302; Okongo & Okaka, Abstract T311). The presentations pushed participants to think beyond "digital access," but called for the education sector to understand two strategic uses of technology: helping girls succeed in their current classes, and giving them the skills and support to become creators and problem-solvers for the future.

Fostering Academic Success and Self-Belief

Inside the classroom, technology can be wielded to achieve two distinctly different outcomes in academic excellence and nurturing self-belief. One Ugandan research presentation demonstrated how digital tools can directly boost academic performance in a specific subject like Kiswahili, by turning a disliked class into an engaging one (Arishaba, Abstract T305). On a different track, work from Türkiye and Uganda showed technology being used to build something less tangible but just as vital: providing girls with belief in themselves (Polat et al, Abstract T307; Nalubowa, Abstract T310). The two presentations focused on breaking down the idea that STEM is "for boys," and working to build girls' confidence and sense of belonging in technical fields.

These presentations agreed that using technology to help girls learn foundational skills and to inspire them into future scientists and engineers are both important, but they require different teaching strategies. Furthermore, recognizing these two purposes is crucial for training teachers and measuring success.

Health, Well-being, and Education for Girls

The theme dubbed "Health, Well-being, and Education for Girls" brought together research from across East and Southern Africa, examining how health challenges–particularly menstrual hygiene, nutrition, and sexual and reproductive health–intersect with socio-economic constraints, cultural norms, and systemic gaps to undermine girls' educational outcomes. Through diverse methodologies, the presentations revealed that sustainable progress requires holistic, community-driven interventions addressing not only physical access but also the psychological, emotional, and social dimensions of girls' well-being.

Menstrual Health Management and Girls' School Attendance

Menstruation emerged as a critical yet often invisible barrier to girls' education across multiple presentations. Over six in ten Ugandan girls miss school during menstruation (Omongo, Abstract T412), with 77% missing two to three days monthly (Odong & Byamukama, Abstract T404). Nabaasa's research in Uganda revealed absenteeism as stemming from a cascade of challenges including embarrassment, anxiety, cultural taboos, debilitating pain, teasing, and bullying (Nabaasa, Abstract T403). The problem is compounded by inadequate menstrual hygiene facilities, pervasive social stigma, and a fundamental lack of menstrual hygiene management education (Adong, Abstract T409).

"We need to create a culture where it is okay for fathers to buy sanitary wear for their daughters without making it a taboo."

Presenters demonstrated strong consensus that addressing menstruation as a barrier to education requires moving beyond one-time product donations toward comprehensive, multi-pronged interventions. Likongwe's work in Malawi highlighted dangerous myths surrounding health interventions, such as beliefs that iron and folic acid supplements are contraceptives or associated with satanism, underscoring the necessity of community-wide education. Successful models integrated product provision with deep community engagement (Likongwe, Abstract T406). Omongo's community-led initiative in Bugiri, Uganda, combined reusable pad-making workshops with stigma-free conversations involving girls, boys, parents, and teachers, achieving a 45% drop in absenteeism (Omongo, Abstract T412). Tumwesigye's work in Nebbi, Uganda, demonstrated how economic self-reliance through small-scale entrepreneurship enables girls to afford hygiene products and continue education despite hardships (Tumwesigye, Abstract T411). The Jane Goodall Institute's program in Uganda empowered women's groups to generate income through tailoring and making reusable pads, creating sustainable, community-owned solutions (Odong & Byamukama, Abstract T404).

While most presenters focused on hygiene products and education, Likongwe offered a complementary emphasis on nutrition and iron folic acid (IFA) supplementation, demonstrating that dietary diversification improved from 47% to 86% and IFA uptake rose from 38% to 88%, enhancing girls' physical capacity to manage menstruation and attend school (Likongwe, Abstract T406). Overall, key recommendations from presentations included normalizing menstruation conversations, engaging boys and men as allies, ensuring community ownership, and integrating infrastructure, products, and education (Adong, Abstract T409; Omongo, Abstract T412).

Psychosocial Support as a Foundation for Learning

Several presentations demonstrated that physical presence in school is insufficient; learning capacity is profoundly shaped by holistic wellbeing. Onsarigo's research in Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands revealed that unaddressed trauma is the primary obstacle to learning (Onsarigo et al., Abstract T415). Critically, social emotional wellbeing (SEW) is dangerously misunderstood by stakeholders who equate it with basic needs provision while overlooking deep-seated trauma from FGM, child marriage, and GBV (Onsarigo et al., Abstract T415). This finding resonated with Omare & Bashaija's analysis from Uganda, which documented how GBV inflicts severe psychological damage including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression that directly impairs learning (Omare & Bashaija, Abstract T213).

Presenters converged on the necessity for integrated, trauma-informed support systems. Muhawenimana's SHARE project demonstrated how School-Based Mentorship using play-based psychosocial support creates safe spaces for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) discussions, improving adolescents' confidence and help-seeking behavior (Muhawenimana, Abstract T416). Guvhu's work in Zimbabwe reinforced this holistic approach: successful interventions like STEM clubs and girls in science champions increased enrollment by 25% while re-entry policies achieved 60% return rates for young mothers (Guvhu & Matope, Abstract T414). Presenters highlighted common challenges, including inadequate teacher training in handling complex well-being issues. Central recommendations emphasized investing in trauma-informed teacher training, formally integrating SEW and SRHR into national education policies and school evaluations, and prioritizing quality psychosocial support alongside access (Onsarigo et al., Abstract T415; Omare & Bashaija, Abstract T213).

Policy and Financing for Gender Equity in Education

This sub-theme focused on policies and funding mechanisms that promote equitable access to education for girls. Presentations here shared studies that used qualitative and mixed method approaches to examine policy and financing that promotes girls' education, and, in particular, teenage mothers' education.

Promoting Girls' and Teenage Mothers' Education through Policy

Presentations from Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda focused on policies to promote girls' or teenage mothers' education. The reviewed policies and or strategies included the *Malawi National Girls' Education Strategy* (NGES); the *Uganda Revised Guidelines on Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Settings* (MoES, 2020); the *Kenya School Re-entry Guidelines* (Ministry of Education, 2020); the *Kenya Gender Policy in Education* (Ministry of Education, 2015), and the *Kenya National Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy* (Ministry of Health, 2015). Collectively, these presentations agreed that limited awareness of policies by girls, their families, local government officials, and educators hampered policy implementation. Further challenges to policy implementation included stigma and discrimination against teenage mothers, low policy ownership by local-level actors, and issues such as insufficient school facilities or forced marriage. To overcome these challenges to policy awareness and implementation, presenters called for iterative approaches to policy development. These iterative approaches included early stakeholder engagement, policy implementation monitoring, teacher training on supporting teenage mothers, and supportive infrastructure and systems including mental health services, breast feeding rooms, and childcare-integrated initiatives in schools.

Financing for Girls' Education

Presentations on financing girls' primary, secondary, and higher education agreed that, while targeted financial support could remove financial barriers to education, it must be accompanied by other strategies to increase and sustain girls' participation in education. A presentation on vouchers in Pakistan found that vouchers do expand enrollment, but risk overlooking gender equity (Baquee et al, Abstract T503). Presentations on cash transfers for education in Uganda and South Sudan and fee-free education in Ghana found that while these financial interventions can enhance

"We cannot talk about girls' education without addressing both the heart and the wallet."

retention and completion rates for girls, holistic approaches that included mentorship, health referral services, life skills training, and family and community engagement further helped girls stay in primary school and transition to secondary school (Amanya & Okaka, Abstract T520; Stenzel et al, Abstract T501; de Garang, Abstract T511; Nakimuli & Kizza, Abstract T519). A presentation on women in higher education suggested that to increase the percentage of women studying in public universities, a combination of financial, infrastructural, technological, and policy strategies is essential (Nantongo, Abstract T515). One presenter summed up the importance of a holistic approach to girls' education by stating, "we cannot talk about girls' education without addressing both the heart and the wallet; invest in systems that care and support, not just instruct."

Empowering Girls through Leadership and Life Skills

This sub-theme highlighted programs that equip girls with leadership, decision-making, and life skills to navigate both educational and professional pathways. These presentations discussed the benefits of leadership and/or life skills training, emphasising the importance of giving girls opportunities to lead, the role of mentors and peer support, and the value of community engagement.

Leadership

The presentations examining women's leadership across Uganda, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and other contexts revealed both structural barriers and emerging opportunities for women and girls in leadership roles. While many presenters documented the challenges women face leading within patriarchal, post-colonial systems where female leaders may hold visible positions without legitimate authority (Okoro, Abstract T604), others highlighted the substantial yet often unacknowledged influence women exercise as they strategically create spaces for civic engagement and organisational leadership (Binda, Abstract T613). Across these diverse contexts, presenters consistently emphasized the critical importance of adult mentors and role models for increasing women's leadership opportunities for the next generation.

Many presenters shared successful approaches to building leadership skills in girls, including involving girls in school governance structures (Kapinga, Abstract T620), integrating them as leaders within organisational activities, and engaging them as peer mentors (Mgonda et al, Abstract T609; Syndrella, Abstract T606). Indeed, keynote panelist Jackline Nampijja, Guild President at Muteesa 1 Royal University, challenged conference participants to move beyond rhetoric by creating authentic opportunities for girls to exercise leadership.

Jackline Nampijja implores conference participants to "create opportunities for girls to lead."

Life Skills

Many presenters shared successful strategies for strengthening learners' life skills, including integration of life skills into primary and secondary school curricula (Olak, Abstract T610), clubs and camps (Tiruneh, Abstract T214; Matemu, Abstract W115), and experiential learning. Evidence on these life skills interventions suggested cascading benefits from immediate gains in self-confidence,

agency, and communication to sustained improvements in literacy and numeracy, school retention, and sexual and reproductive health outcomes (Matemu, Abstract W115; Katho et al, Abstract T601; Tiruneh, Abstract T214; Ecwou & Mekonnen, Abstract T130).

Community Engagement

Presenters recommended that government, civil society, schools, and communities invest in culturally-sensitive and gender-responsive leadership and life skill development programs. Presenters noted the importance of engaging communities at various phases of implementation in order to foster transparency, promote community buy-in, and enhance relevance and effectiveness by ensuring interventions are responsive to local needs, culture, and feedback (Abbasi, Abstract T815). Presenters also highlighted the role of local champions, including teachers, parents, and community leaders, in supporting girls' participation in leadership and life skills programming. Finally, presenters emphasized that these programs must include boys to promote broader gender equity and social cohesion, while engaging policy makers to ensure program sustainability and scalability.

Transitioning to Work; Preparing Girls for Future Careers

Presentations under this theme examined how education systems prepare girls for economic opportunities and career success. While submissions to this theme were few (see Figure 3), they provided a clear picture of the ingredients necessary for girls to choose and enter appropriate employment.

Presenters acknowledged the existence of accepted gender norms related to career choice, with certain fields (such as STEM-related careers, carpentry, etc.) being male-dominated (Namuggala & Nankindu, Abstract T701). Presenters also agreed that to be successful in male-dominated fields, girls benefit from female role models, career counseling, and parental encouragement (Atuheire, Abstract T706; Ngenda, Abstract T705). However, girls' increased individual agency as a result of such interventions was insufficient to sustainably increase representation of girls in these careers; systemic changes that address institutional environments–like workplace cultures, school and training center power hierarchies, and teacher attitudes–are necessary to advance the inclusion of girls in male-dominated fields.

Some presenters recommended shifting these institutional environments by embedding employment training in school systems, including by integrating career counseling and skills training into school curricula (Atuheire, Abstract T706). One intervention providing school-based skills training, mentorship, and practical experience to secondary school girls increased their business ownership, income, and employment in the short term, with a four-year follow-up showing gains in agency, educational attainment, family planning, and reduced rates of intimate partner violence (Mukyala et al, Abstract T116). Presenters agreed that integrating career support, skills training, and mentorship into the Ugandan education system is key for strengthening girls' livelihood outcomes.

Data and Evidence Generation for Informing Interventions or Scaling Impact

This sub-theme emphasised the role of research, data generation and evaluation in designing effective interventions for girls' education. Presentations reviewed the state of research publishing and evidence use for girls' education.

The State of Publishing on Girls' Education

Presentations that examined published education research revealed severe under-representation of African and women researchers. A review of published research databases showed that African authors account for only 8.9% of global research published on gender in education, with Ugandans as first authors in fewer than 1% of published papers (Gichuru, Abstract T504). A separate review of research in early childhood development and education found African women researchers face more publishing barriers than men, particularly in international journals, and they are less likely to receive research funding (Asare et al, Abstract T808). Presenters recommended fostering cross-gender and international research partnerships and providing publication support to African and women researchers.

Evidence Use

Several presentations examined how evidence moves from research to national policy (Mwongeli et al, Abstract T806) and from national policy to district and classroom integration (Olak, Abstract T805/W103). Presenters agreed that stakeholder inclusion and participatory methods were crucial for evidence use. One presenter highlighted a process that included understanding user data needs, integrating key stakeholders, determining optimal information use, and considering options for evidence-based action (see Figure 4, from Mwongeli et al, Abstract T806). Applications of this evidence use process included creating national dashboards on girls' education and developing scale-up readiness checklists.

Some presentations specifically highlighted the use of foundational learning assessment data for strengthening program implementation and influencing policy change. The Second Chance program in India used formative and summative assessment to track learner attendance and data, allowing the program to ensure the delivery of quality content even as the program went to scale (Nair et al, Abstract T817). Uwezo's independent, citizen-led foundational skills assessments across East Africa encouraged participatory education monitoring and pressured schools to improve accountability for learning, shifting government's focus from access to quality (Mugimu & Nassereka, Abstract T802).
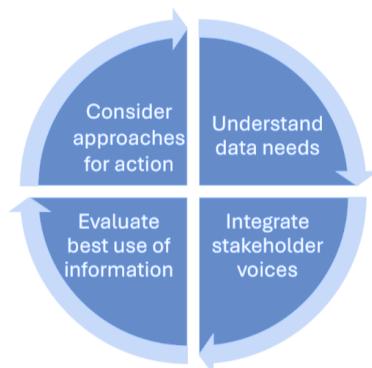
Figure 4: Evidence Use Process

Nuanced Findings on the State of Girls' Education

Presentations on girls' education globally highlighted nuances in access and learning. A Ghana study showed gender parity in primary school access, but lower secondary enrollment for girls, with gender parity at the tertiary level benefiting only a select group of men and women (Agyapong, Abstract T224). A 68-country evidence review identified specific, predictable, and preventable challenges to transitioning to secondary school (Ayesiga et al, Abstract W109).

While Uwezo Uganda demonstrated that girls in Ugandan primary schools perform as well as, or better than, boys in learning outcomes, few children acquired age-appropriate competencies (Nakabugo & Segura, Abstract T810). A study of an accelerated education program found that low performing girls were less likely to improve than low performing boys (Aysa, Abstract T801). A qualitative study identified drivers of such differential performance–including social emotional stressers, safety concerns, and low resource or conflict-affected contexts–that undermine girls'

learning (Kemunto et al, Abstract T811). A quantitative study confirmed low-resource settings' influence on girls' education (Kuzirimpa, Abstract T607).

Commitments

Based on the thoughtful insights, new evidence, and actionable recommendations gleaned from conference presentations, keynote addresses, panelists, and posters, conference organisers developed a [Conference Communique](#) (see Annex B) capturing key learning, recommendations, and commitments. Conference participants are encouraged to work to advance these commitments alongside conference organisers. The second biennial National Conference on "What Works in Girls' Education", to be held in 2027, will provide an opportunity to reflect on progress along these seven commitments:

a. We commit to working together across government, academia, and civil society to holistically address the challenges that prevent girls from achieving their potential through education. These include early marriage, poor menstrual hygiene, mental health challenges, low access to reproductive health services, cultural gender norms, gender-insensitive teaching and learning approaches, and more.

b. We commit to increasing our attention to fostering girls' agency, enhancing their capacity to learn, and strengthening supportive environments so that they may transition to higher levels of education, an area in which girls face significant challenges. This is particularly the case for girls facing intersecting disadvantages, whether related to poverty, disability, where they live, or other factors.

c. We commit to supporting Global South and African-led research, and, in particular, Global South women-led research, on girls' education. Global South and African-led research on girls' education remains a small percentage of the global knowledge production. Yet it is imperative that this research, regardless of the methodological approach, be grounded in the lived experiences, realities, and needs of girls in all their diversity.

d. We commit to ensuring girls and boys have positive female and male role models to uplift them and encourage them to productively approach girls' issues. This is particularly important for girls navigating social interactions and excelling in areas in which they are underrepresented.

e. We commit to working to shift mindsets so that girls and boys can equally access and engage with education and opportunity. Mindsets critically affect the ways in which societies understand the role of girls and women, as well as boys and men. Changes in mindsets, and ultimately in behaviour, are necessary at all levels of society, but particularly within households, schools, and communities.

f. We commit to strengthening girls' meaningful participation in STEM. We must invest in strengthening teacher training in STEM, support schools in their delivery of STEM, and challenge gender norms about girls in STEM.

g. We commit to supporting girls to develop agency, leadership, life skills and values throughout their education. These skills matter for girls and boys to be successful at school and beyond.

Critical Reflections

To determine if the conference met its key objectives and what could be improved for future events, conference organisers collected data through a registration form, daily feedback surveys, a final feedback survey, and notes taken during each presentation or keynote session. Surveys were implemented using a GoogleForm and advertised each day via posters, presentation slides, and direct calls to complete the survey; on average, 24% of participants participated in the daily or final surveys. A combination of conference organising committee members and volunteers took notes in each session.

Overall, conference participants expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the conference (see Figure 6). The majority of participants indicated that presentations sessions and networking opportunities were the most beneficial to them, with poster sessions being the least beneficial.

Figure 5: Participant Satisfaction

Very Unsatisfied • Satisfied • Very Satisfied

3.6%
39.3%
57.1%

The following sections use collected data to critically examine if the conference achieved its five objectives as well as what can be improved for future events.

Objective One: Deepen Understanding of Barriers and Enablers

Feedback survey data and session notes suggest that **participants deepened their understanding of the barriers and enablers to girls' education**. Session notes revealed that 90% of sessions discussed issues related to barriers and enablers to girls' education. Further, when asked how they benefitted from the conference, 96% of participants indicated they deepened their understanding of the barriers and enablers to girls' education (see Figure 7).

Figure 6: Conference Participant Benefits

Strongly Agree • Agree • Neutral • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

	Strengthened Network	Deepened Understanding of Girls' Education	Learned Evidence	Developed a Skill
Strongly Agree	54%	71%	59%	59%
Agree	41%	25%	36%	32%
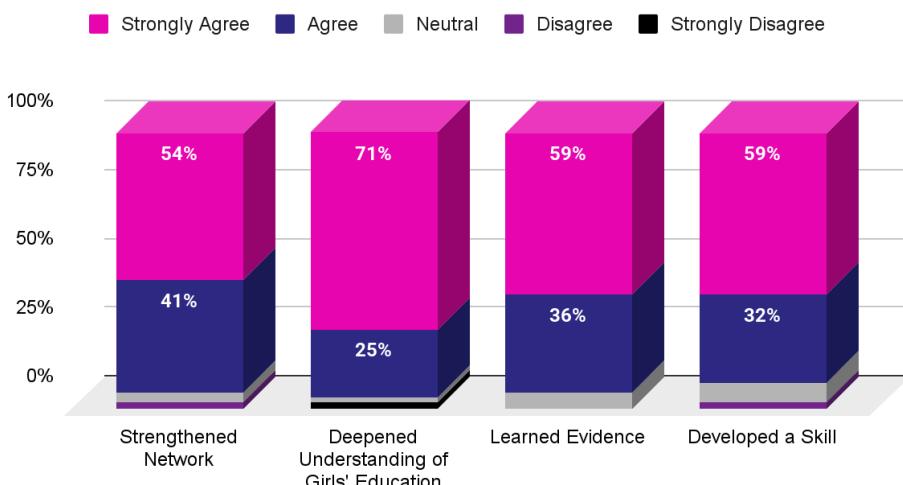
Objective Two: Foster Dialogue

Session notes and feedback surveys revealed that participants engaged in dialogue with each other around evidence-based, innovative, and sustainable solutions to improve girls' education. The vast majority (92%) of sessions discussed new evidence, a new practice, or new insights on girls' education. Indeed, 95% of participants indicated that they benefitted from the conference by learning evidence-based ways to strengthen education. Further, most participants (95%) indicated they had strengthened their professional network as a result of the conference (see Figure 7).

Objective Three: Generate Tangible Recommendations

The conference **generated tangible recommendations to address gender-based barriers to education**, according to session notes. All of the 90% of sessions that addressed barriers to girls' education presented recommendations on how to do so. Recommendations were further consolidated into commitments in the Conference Communique (see Annex B).

Objective Four: Amplify Voices of Girls and Girl-Championing Organisations

While the **conference succeeded in amplifying the voices of girl-championing organisations, it only partially amplified the voices of girls**. While 90% of attending organisations included girls' education as either a part or all of their organisational mission, few of the over 100 presentations at the conference were given by girls.[2] Among these, the young women of the Agnes Zabali Boys and Girls Club presented the factors that enabled them to challenge cultural norms that expected them to

marry early (Nasamula, Nassuna, & Cane, Abstract T612); and keynote panelist Jackline Nampijja, Guild President in Muteesa and student at Royal University, advocated for the provision of leadership opportunities for girls. However, conference participants made the importance of amplifying girls' voices known by voting the Agnes Zabali Boys and Girls Club, which brought several youth to the conference, as first runner up for the "Top Girls' Education Champion." First place was awarded to the FAWE, and third place to Building Tomorrow.

Objective Five: Document What Works in Girls' and Boys' Education

Session notes and submitted presentation slides adequately **captured participants' contributions about what works in girls' and boys' education**, enabling conference evaluators to consolidate these contributions into a Conference Communique (see Annex B) and this Conference Report.

Conference Organisation and Logistics

Regarding logistics, organisation, and planning, participants were satisfied, with most participants expressing they had a positive experience with the paper submission process, communication, promotion of the conference, accessibility of the venue, catering, technology, and conference support staff (see Figure 8).

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[2] For the purpose of this analysis, "girls" were defined as any female who had not yet entered a career, master's degree study, or doctoral degree study in education.

When asked for more detail, several participants commented on the need to improve technology, better engage with online participants, and use a venue that better fits the large number of participants.

Some participants shared ideas for consideration for the 2027 Conference:
- Dedicate a day to Master's and Ph.D students' research as a form of mentorship
- Ensure continued knowledge sharing beyond the conference, perhaps through WhatsApp

Figure 7: Feedback on Logistics and Organization

Legend: ■ Very Good ■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor

Category	Very Good	Good
Submission Process	59%	32%
Communication	64%	32%
Conf. Promotion	52%	41%
Accessibility	61%	29%
Catering	57%	32%
Technology	39%	54%
Support Staff	71%	23%
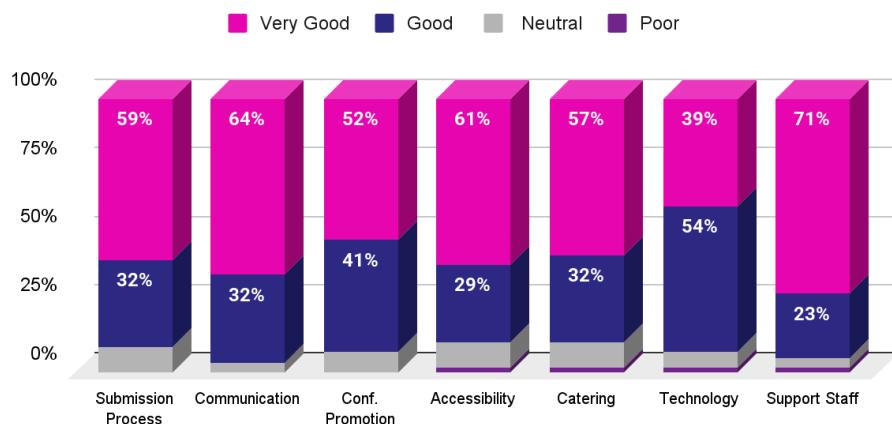
Conclusion

The National Conference on "What Works in Girls' Education" provided an opportunity for rich discussions of key programs, policies, and evidence for girls' education in Uganda and beyond. High levels of participant satisfaction and the call for future conferences evidenced the value participants placed on these opportunities. Presentations organised under eight conference themes highlighted key barriers, promising practices, and notable evidence to influence practice. Participants collectively aligned around the importance of holistically addressing the challenges that prevent girls from fully benefitting from an education, noting that doing so requires a focus on both girls and boys and will mean shifting mindsets and cultural norms. Participants agreed that, while increasing gender parity in primary education is promising, more effort is needed to support girls to advance to higher levels of education. Finally, participants aligned around the imperative to work together to address gender barriers to education so that all girls and boys may access education, learn, and thrive.

Such conclusions have several implications for future practice and research. Donors and higher education institutions must invest in research led by Global South researchers, especially Global South women researchers, in order to ground research on girls' education in the lived experience of girls and women. Practitioners must strengthen the enablers of girls' education, including training teachers in gender-responsive pedagogy, shifting norms related to STEM education and careers, and strengthening girls' and boys' leadership and life skills. Researchers must engage in nuanced evidence generation that not only uncovers barriers to girls' education, but explores the specific levers that remove those barriers and create opportunities for girls and boys. By working together, education donors, practitioners, academics, researchers, and more can amplify the voices and improve the opportunities for girls and boys in Uganda and beyond.

Annexes

Annex A: Full Conference Programme and Abstracts

The [Conference Programme and Book of Abstracts](#) may be downloaded at
https://uwezouganda.org/download/Conference%20Program%20and%20Abstracts.pdf

Annex B: References

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Annex C: Conference Communique

The [Conference Communique](https://uwezouganda.org/download/Girls%27%20Education%20Conference%202025_Communique.pdf) is included below, and it may also be downloaded at https://uwezouganda.org/download/Girls%27%20Education%20Conference%202025_Communique.pdf

The National Conference on "What Works in Girls Education" 2025
Breaking Barriers, Building Futures: Evidence & Action for Girls' Education

Preliminary Communiqué

Kampala, Uganda
October 3, 2025

1. Introduction

From October 1-3, 2025, 237 participants, 55% of whom were female, from 22 countries and 113 organisations met to discuss *What Works in Girls' Education* in Uganda and beyond. The Conference aimed to share evidence and strategies for improving education outcomes for all children, with a special focus on girls. With only five years left until the expiry of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2030, this conference served as a timely call to accelerate progress on quality education and gender equality (SDGs 4 and 5) through stronger local leadership, strategic collaboration, and increased investment.

Uwezo Uganda, in partnership with Kyambogo University's School of Education, the University of Cambridge's Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre, and the Uganda chapter of the Regional Education Learning Initiative Africa (RELI-Africa) organised the conference. The event was further supported by over 25 volunteers from 20 organisations.

2. Shared Understanding

As a result of over 100 presentations and three keynote speeches with panel discussions, participants recognised the barriers that uniquely affect girls' educational outcomes, as well as actions needed to address these barriers. They reaffirmed their commitment to collaborating to strengthen educational opportunities and outcomes for girls and boys in Uganda and beyond.

3. Main Outcomes and Commitments

The Conference produced several key takeaways and recommendations. We invite stakeholders to commit to advancing these recommendations together:

a. We commit to working together across government, academia, and civil society to **holistically address the challenges** that prevent girls from achieving their potential through education. These include early marriage, poor menstrual hygiene, mental health challenges, low access to reproductive health services, cultural gender norms, gender-insensitive teaching and learning approaches, and more.

b. We commit to increasing our attention to fostering girls' agency, enhancing their capacity to learn, and strengthening supportive environments so that they may **transition to higher levels of education,** an area in which girls face significant

challenges. This is particularly the case for girls facing intersecting disadvantages, whether related to poverty, disability, where they live, or other factors.

c. We commit to supporting **Global South and African-led research, and, in particular, Global South women-led research,** on girls' education. Global South and African-led research on girls' education remains a small percentage of the global knowledge production. Yet it is imperative that this research, regardless of the methodological approach, be grounded in the lived experiences, realities, and needs of girls in all their diversity.

d. We commit to ensuring girls and boys have **positive female and male role models** to uplift them and encourage them to productively approach girls' issues. This is particularly important for girls navigating social interactions and excelling in areas in which they are underrepresented.

e. We commit to working to **shift mindsets** so that girls and boys can equally access and engage with education and opportunity. **Mindsets** critically affect the ways in which societies understand the role of girls and women, as well as boys and men. Changes in mindsets, and ultimately in behaviour, are necessary at all levels of society, but particularly within households, schools, and communities.

f. We commit to strengthening girls' meaningful participation in **science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)**. We must invest in strengthening teacher training in STEM, support schools in their delivery of STEM, and challenge gender norms about girls in STEM.

g. We commit to supporting girls to develop **agency, leadership, life skills and values** throughout their education. These skills matter for girls and boys to be successful at school and beyond.

4. Moving Forward

The Conference's success is evidenced by the knowledge shared on girls' education from participants from over 22 countries. The Uganda Minister of State for Primary Education and Sports and several participants recommended holding the conference annually as an international conference. Thus, the conference organisers propose to hold the conference biennially to allow time for organizations to act on and learn from Conference recommendations before reconvening again in 2027. In the intervening years, we will continue to engage and meet to advance girls' education in Uganda and beyond.

Conference organisers will release a full report of conference proceedings and learning, and include links to the book of abstracts and the conference programme in early November 2025. Furthermore, the conference organisers are committed to publishing a book of selected papers from the Conference after an additional selection and peer-review process.

Several participants expressed appreciation to the Conference organisers for convening the conference and emphasised their commitment to girls' education in Uganda and beyond.

Annex D: Conference Organising Committee Members

Committee Members

S/N	Name	Organisation	Role
	CONFERENCE ORGANISING COMMITTEE		
1	Dr Mary Goretti Nakabugo	Uwezo Uganda	Co-Chair
2	Assoc Prof Kasule George Wilson	Kyambogo University	Co-Chair
3	Emmy Zoomlamai Okello	FICH / RELI	Member
4	Dr John Mary Vianney Mitana	JMERC / RELI	Member
5	Prof Pauline Rose	University of Cambridge/REAL Centre	Member
6	Prof Ricardo Sabates	University of Cambridge/REAL Centre	Member
7	Prof Christopher Mugimu	Makerere University	Member & Technical Lead
8	Fatuma Wamala	Kukuza Education / RELI	Member
9	Grace Musiimire	Building Tomorrow / RELI	Member
10	Joseph Kasasa	Uwezo Uganda	Member
11	Jane Sebuyungo	STiR Education/RELI	Member
12	Sarah Kyobe	Uganda Media Centre	Member
13	Sandra Baxter	University of Cambridge/REAL Centre	Member
14	Rebecca Pagel	Uwezo Uganda	Member
15	Pius Patrick Akol	Uwezo Uganda / Independent	Member
16	Dr Elizabeth Opit	Kyambogo University / Uwezo Uganda TAC	Member
17	Faridah Nassereka	Uwezo Uganda	Member
18	Judith Nyakaisiki	Uwezo Uganda	Member
19	Dr Jimmy Luyima	Kyambogo University	Member
20	Dr Namulondo Veronica	Kyambogo University	Member
21	Vincent Kalibbala	Uwezo Uganda	Member
22	Solomon Sebule	RELI Africa	Member
23	Jennifer Sibbo	Kyambogo University	Member
24	Dr Binda Niati	University of Cambridge/REAL Centre	Member
25	Dr Bea Simpson	University of Cambridge / Oxford Policy Management (OPM)	Member

Sub-Committees

Abstracts, Programme and Book of Abstracts Sub-Committee

S/N	Name	Organisation	Committee Role
1	Prof Christopher Mugimu	Makerere University	Chairperson
2	Faridah Nassereka	Uwezo Uganda	Organiser/Secretary
3	Prof Kasule George Wilson	Kyambogo University	Member
4	Dr John Mary Vianney Mitana	JMERC / RELI	Member
5	Prof Ricardo Sabates	University of Cambridge/REAL Centre	Member
6	Prof Pauline Rose	University of Cambridge/REAL Centre	Member
7	Dr Binda Niati	University of Cambridge/REAL Centre	Member
8	Dr Mary Goretti Nakabugo	Uwezo Uganda	Member

Budget and Logistics Sub-Committee

S/N	Name	Organisation	Committee Role
1	Dr Elizabeth Opit	Uwezo Uganda Technical Advisory / Kyambogo University	Chairperson
2	Joseph Kasasa	Uwezo Uganda	Organiser/ Secretary
3	Fatuma Wamala	Kukuza Education / RELI	Member
4	Dr Jimmy Luyima	Kyambogo University	Member
5	Judith Nyakaisiki	Uwezo Uganda	Member
6	Jane Sebuyungo	STiR Education/RELI	Member

Communication, Engagement and Branding Sub-Committee

S/N	Name	Organisation	Committee Role
1	Emmy Zoomlamai Okello	FICH / RELI	Chairperson
2	Judith Nyakaisiki	Uwezo Uganda	Organiser / Secretary
3	Grace Musiimire	Building Tomorrow / RELI	Member
4	Sarah Kyobe	Uganda Media Centre	Member
5	Sandra Baxter	University of Cambridge/REAL Centre	Member
6	Solomon Sebule	RELI Africa	Member
7	Jennifer Sibo	Kyambogo University	Member

Conference Evaluation/Feedback and Publications Sub-Committee

S/N	Name	Organisation	Conference Role
1	Rebecca Pagel	Uwezo Uganda	Chairperson
2	Vincent Kalibbala	Uwezo Uganda	Organiser/Secretary
3	Pius Patrick Akol	Uwezo Uganda / Independent	Member
4	Dr Namulondo Veronica	Kyambogo University	Member
5	Dr Christopher Mugimu	Makerere University	Member
6	Dr Binda Niati	University of Cambridge/REAL Centre	Member
7	Dr Bea Simpson	University of Cambridge / Oxford Policy Management (OPM)	Member