After years of progress in increasing gender parity for education, recent data from the World Bank show declines in primary enrollment and progression to secondary school for girls in low and middle-income countries.

Tackling this disparity is a high priority for the international community, as evidenced by the Global Goals that explicitly call for gender equality in education and beyond. In addition, committed education practitioners are stepping in to address gender imbalances in education access and quality.

The Center for Education Innovations (CEI) has identified more than 110 programs working to expand provision and improve the quality of girls’ education.
COMMON THEMES ACROSS PROGRAMS

This database at a glance highlights seven common approaches and characteristics across documented girls’ education models.

1. Addressing cultural attitudes through community engagement:

For many young girls, family and community preconceptions often constrain education opportunities. Addressing societal barriers and highlighting the value of education for both sexes can transform a community long after a project ends.

Projects also seek to empower communities to champion their rights in education by training school based management committees to address the needs and barriers for girls’ attendance, retention, and success. Working with the Government of Rajasthan in India, Educate Girls mobilizes villagers to take ownership of school reform by helping develop Village Based Youth Leaders and trains school management committee members (SMC) on girl-friendly infrastructure, enrollment, and attendance practices. Improving Girls’ Access through Transforming Education (IGATE) in Zimbabwe also empowers communities to demand improved education service delivery by tapping into grassroots advocacy efforts to sustain a dialogue between communities and local providers.

The media is also a popular vehicle for engaging communities and encouraging investment in girls’ education. For example, Promoting Advancement of Girls’ Education in Mozambique (PAGE-M) uses radio programming as part of their community mobilization campaign. The Back to School Film Campaign for Children in Africa brings together more than 1500 volunteers across six African countries using video and photography in ways that increase visibility to achieve progress in universal primary education and the particular challenges facing girls on the continent.

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2. Strong emphasis on life skills:

Programs in the CEI database are also increasingly focusing on life skills. However, the term “life skills” is used loosely and incorporates a range of lessons from health and reproductive education, soft skills such as teamwork, leadership and civic engagement, to livelihoods and vocational training. Programs that increase access to education for girls, whether formal, informal or extra-curricular, seek to impart skills that will be critical as the role girls and women play in the workplace evolves and grows.
One program combines life skills with sport in order to prepare girls for their future. This program, **Yuwa: Kicking It New School** in India, focuses on empowering girls by helping them form their own soccer teams and using this experience to guide development in critical thinking, teamwork, time and financial management.

Other programs focus more explicitly on students’ leadership and civic engagement. The **School of Leadership Afghanistan (SOLA)** – the first girls’ boarding school in the country – provides a comprehensive academic curriculum while stressing civic leadership skills, English literacy, and cultural self-awareness. “SOLA Returns” encourages and supports these women to return to Afghanistan to pursue leadership roles across public, private and civil sectors after attending secondary or university abroad. Two other boarding schools in Kenya also hold leadership skills development central to their mission.

In India, the **Pardada Pardadi Girls Vocational School (PPGVS)** integrates life skills development with livelihood and vocational training. The school focuses on technical skills such as call center work, business process outsourcing, and textile production in addition to core academics. Income from student-developed work is reinvested in the school and these partnerships help PPGVS assist students with job placement. **Young Africa** provides vocational and life skills trainings through hands-on training with local entrepreneurs across three countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. While their programs are open to boys and girls age 15-25, they facilitate girls’ entry by providing hostel facilities.

### 3. Accelerating curricula to boost access and attendance:

Regular access and attendance is a challenge for many girls, especially in rural or economically deprived areas. As a result, many girls are over-age for their level of education, further limiting the incentive to continue.

In India, for example, **Udaan** targets girls in rural areas who have never been to school or have dropped out, ages 11 to 14. The program covers Classes 1 to 5 in a residential camp setting over
11 months. While following the government’s curriculum, Udaan teachers adopt a holistic and activity-centered approach to learning and 90% of girls completing the course are mainstreamed into formal education.

**Children in Crisis - Community Based Education Centres (CBECs)** in Afghanistan targets children 8-14, predominantly girls, in the poorest districts of Kabul, many of whom are too old to be assimilated into the primary schools or have never attended school to begin with. While formal primary school takes 6 years to complete, the CBECs only require 3 years and through a partnership with Afghanistan’s Ministry of Education, these students can be integrated into secondary public schools following completion of the program. In neighboring Pakistan, the **Community-Based Accelerated Learning Schools (CBALS)**, provide a condensed, 18-month, non-formal curriculum covering grades 1-3. Operated by the READ Foundation, the CBALS train females in the local area as teachers and partner with the local community, ensuring their support and engagement. They have also developed a relationship with the local government schools to facilitate their graduates’ enrollment into the formal education system.

**4. Community-based learning centers or informal learning opportunities:**

Another relevant theme emerging in girls’ education programming is the development of community-based learning centers or informal places for girls and women to access resources, education, and training.

Since 2010, the **GetSetGo Women’s Library and Learning Center** in Cambodia offers under-educated women access to a learning hub complete with computer lab, reading room, teaching kitchen, and education technology and training 24-hours-a-day. This format is especially useful for those with low-skill and odd-hours employment.

The **Off-campus Community Cluster Schools for Girls in Balochistan**, Pakistan, coordinates evening classes held at a community member’s house to help girls from close-by villages continue their secondary education and pass their matriculation exams. The Azat Foundation is currently piloting this project with 7 cluster schools and 175 girls with plans to scale similar interventions in other remote areas.

Also targeting girls in rural areas, the **Pastoralist Afar Girls’ Education Support Project (PAGES)** in Ethiopia plans to construct 40 new Alternative Basic Education Centers in addition to upgrading 40 existing schools. PAGES is actively supporting the Afar Regional Education Bureau’s drive for flexible schooling for the pastoralist and often
itinerant populations with these Centers, some of which will be mobile, as well as libraries transported by camels.

5. Emphasizing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM):

More and more girls’ education programs are focusing on subjects in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, commonly referred to as STEM. Currently, most of the STEM programs focusing on girls in the CEI database operate in Africa. Technogirls in South Africa identifies high achieving girls ages 15-18 from disadvantaged and rural communities and provides them with corporate mentorships, skills development programs and academic scholarships to help to expose and encourage them to enter historically male-dominated technical professions.

In Nigeria, the W.TEC Girls Technology Camp is a two week program for girls (ages 11-15 years) which offers exposure to information and communication technology (ICT) topics like graphic design, computer programming, website design and application development. The Camp’s objective is to provide a platform for young girls to nurture their interest in technology, connect with others, learn in a real world environment, and expose them to careers in ICT or how ICT might be integrated into their career of choice.

Implemented by STEM Africa, Africa Women in Science and Technology (AWiST) seeks to provide STEM opportunities for female students and professionals in Kenya, enabling them to
build connections through discussions, fieldwork, and mentoring. In addition to raising the profile of women in STEM fields, AWIST scientists and engineers work with women’s groups in low-income areas providing guidance on self-sustaining projects such as briquette making, solar energy and recycling.

6. Ensuring safety inside and outside the classroom:

Girls often bear the cruelest consequences of areas with conflict and/or weak governance. Programs in the CEI database are also addressing girls’ unique safety needs and moving to support those who have come from fragile or conflict-affected contexts.

Promoting Advancement of Girls’ Education in Mozambique (PAGE-M) addresses school safety and establishes local Safe Schools Committees (SSCs) based off Save the Children’s Safe Schools Approach. These SSCs work to evaluate and improve the safety and quality of the school’s environment, sanitation facilities, girls’ clubs, and monitor students’ satisfaction with school responses to reports of harassment.

Establishing girls’ clubs in schools has been another model to address safety and abuse in Nigeria. The Sexual Offences Awareness Victims Rehabilitation (SOAR) Initiative’s Peer Education Program trained 20 girls as peer educators in each of three public secondary schools; these students pass on knowledge of sexual and child abuses including how to report them and encourages girls to remain in schools in the face of these challenges. In addition to a venue for girls to discuss issues affecting their lives, Girls’ Clubs such as those in Ethiopia implemented through the Securing Access and Retention into Good Quality Transformative Education program also serve as a means of tracking and intervening for girls at risk for early marriage.

7. Girl-friendly or gender sensitive teacher training:

Within the school and the classroom, a focus is also growing on training teachers to be gender-sensitive and responsive.

At the two FAWE Centres of Excellence in Kenya (part of the network of 19 FAWE schools across Africa), teachers are trained on gender responsive pedagogy. The teacher training is part of the school’s approach to learning, design, and management that aims to provide a conducive learning environment for girls to successfully complete their education.

Creating a safe and inclusive learning environment is also the focus of the Supporting Marginalised Girls in Sierra Leone to Complete Basic Education with Improved Learning Outcomes program. Teachers and volunteers are sensitized to the needs and challenges of girls transitioning into lower secondary schools, raising awareness and facilitating access to supportive educational services, along with an emphasis on inclusive education for girls with special needs.