

Tackling barriers to girls' education in Nyarongi, Kenya

Project summary

Despite the Kenyan government's efforts towards providing education for all, girls in Kenya continue to experience many challenges which prevent them from going to school or completing their education. We will empower 600 girls to challenge violence and pursue their education by forming Girls' Clubs in 20 schools. The project will promote the importance of girls' education to over 3,000 people in the local communities and will work with them to reduce harmful traditional practices and violence against girls. We will also support 300 out-of-school girls and young mothers with vocational skills training and business start-up grants, to continue their education and help them out of poverty.

Context and background



For girls in Kenya there are a number of barriers which make it difficult for them to access education, these include cultural norms, risk of violence and harmful traditional practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early marriage. Girls are not generally encouraged to go to school and are instead considered to be caregivers in the family home and assigned to domestic and childcare responsibilities. For those who do go to school, dropout rates are high due to issues such as sexual harassment, early marriage and early pregnancy. 2 out of 3 girls who join form one (around age 14) do not make it to form four, the end of secondary education.

Girls in Nyarongi, Homa Bay County, are among the most vulnerable in the whole country and are at a very high risk of failing to complete even primary education. Located in the West of Kenya, close to the shores of Lake Victoria, Nyarongi is a predominantly rural area with a poverty rate of 73%, a figure

much higher than the national average of 46%. The majority of the county's inhabitants are poor farmers practising subsistence agriculture and livestock rearing. The area suffers harsh weather conditions and poor road infrastructure, which make accessibility and service delivery difficult.

Girls in Nyarongi face a number of obstacles. Large numbers of girls are sold off by impoverished family members for a dowry from their husband's family, many while they are still in primary school. Early pregnancy is common as a result of pressure, and in many cases sexual violence, from men and boys. Often parents keep their daughters out of school to undertake housework, or to go and work selling charcoal or water. A recent report showed that fewer than 50% of children in Homa Bay attend school regularly; within the impoverished and marginalised community of Nyarongi this percentage is likely to be lower. For girls the number will be even lower, as priority is given to educating boys.

ActionAid in Kenya

Kenya was one of ActionAid's first country programmes and we have been working on the ground with local communities since 1972. Since then, our work in Kenya has gone from strength to strength and we now work in 21 counties, tackling work around women's rights, education, democratic governance, livelihoods and human security in conflict and emergencies. Over the last 40 years, ActionAid has built a reputation as a leading voice on education; we have a proven track record in successfully implementing the type of activities outlined in this project and have taken learning from past projects to inform this one.

ActionAid has been working to support women and girls in Nyarongi for five years. In this time we have run successful programmes to empower women economically through training and supporting groups of women to build small businesses. We have also worked to improve response and resilience to drought, which frequently affects the area. In addition, ActionAid Kenya has set up governance and accountability programmes to build the capacity of communities to demand provision of public services from the county government.

ActionAid set up and has supported the Nyarongi Women's Network since 2012. Through membership of the network, women in Nyarongi have been empowered to work together in a number of ways, from coordinating the response to emergencies affecting their communities, to leading community engagement sessions, through to raising awareness of and tackling gender-based violence. The women's network also links women and girls who have been affected by violence with healthcare and legal services in their area.

What we can achieve together

With your support, we can improve the lives of over 900 girls and young mothers in Nyarongi, as well as their families and communities, particularly 300 boys, empowering girls to stay in education and reach their full potential. We will:

Objective one: Empower 660 girls in school to challenge violence and continue their education by:

- 1.1 Formation, strengthening and facilitation of Girls' Forums in 22 primary schools** – Working with teachers we will strengthen 12 existing and create 10 new safe spaces for girls to learn about their rights and support one another to challenge violence and further their education. Through the Forums we will raise awareness of the issues faced by girls, including reproductive health, so that they are better informed and able to protect themselves. We will also highlight positive role models to demonstrate that accessing education is possible and leads to important benefits. The Girls' Forums will meet on a weekly basis during term time and aim to reach at least 30 girls per school.
- 1.2 Establish Boys' Forums in 10 schools** – we will also trial Boys' Forums in 10 of the schools, reaching 300 boys in total with activities and messages about their rights, reproductive health and the importance of girls' education. These aim to change patriarchal views of girls and reduce the challenges they face.
- 1.3 Training 64 teachers to run the forums and support girls** – We will work with 44 female and 20 male teachers – two per forum – to build their understanding of child protection, the issues facing both girls and boys and how to combat these issues. Using ActionAid's Girls' Forum Facilitation Manual, which includes a facilitator's guide to ensuring sessions are accessible, participatory and effective, as well as a five-module syllabus covering male and female anatomy; human rights with a focus on the rights of women and children; preventing and responding to violence against girls; harmful traditional practices; and life skills, we will equip teachers with the skills necessary to run the forums.
- 1.4 Conducting a door-to-door return to school campaign** – ActionAid staff will train and support members of the Nyarongi Women's Network to go door-to-door visiting families to identify where girls have been taken out of school and make family members aware of how their daughters can be supported to return to school. This will be done in close partnership with the Ministry of Education and other education stakeholders.

Objective two: Raise awareness of the importance of education for girls and tackle violence against them, reaching at least 3,000 community members by:

- 2.1 Working with the Nyarongi Women’s Network to support survivors of violence** – Members of the women’s network will be supported to meet regularly and coordinate support for girls who have experienced violence. This will include provision of psychosocial support and linking survivors with police, health care and legal support. Where necessary, girls will be supported to return to school.
- 2.2 Conducting quarterly community forum sessions** – Male and female community members will be brought together at quarterly forums where members of the women’s network, community leaders and local authority representatives will discuss the importance of education for girls, the barriers that need to be overcome to ensure equal opportunities for women and girls and what communities can do to improve the situation.
- 2.3 Raising awareness through the media and public barazas** – Media work will focus on FM radio talk shows where child rights experts will be invited on a regular basis to discuss children’s rights and the legislation protecting children, such as the Sexual Offences Act (SOA) 2006 and the Anti-FGM Act 2014 among others. Additionally, 3,000 community members will be reached through regular public barazas (meetings) and sensitised on the issues facing girls that hinder them from accessing education.
- 2.4 Designing, printing and disseminating information materials** – These will outline girls’ rights, the challenges they face and the importance of their education. These materials will be distributed to community members as well as girls at the target schools.
- 2.5 Engaging with local government representatives** – Local and county level representatives will be engaged in biannual meetings throughout the project and encouraged to support activities to further girls’ education. We aim to influence increased budget allocation on education towards support for girls in school through education bursaries and scholarships.
- 2.6 Engagement with duty bearers and stakeholders to celebrate International Day of the Girl Child** – we will bring together 15 people including the county government for at least 3 preparatory meetings over the year to organise an annual celebration of the International Day of the Girl Child, which takes place on 11 October.

Objective three: Support the economic empowerment of 300 out-of-school girls and young mothers by building alternative livelihood options, by:

- 3.1 Conducting a rapid assessment** – initially we will carry out a rapid assessment to evaluate the number of out-of-school girls and young mothers, their existing skills and different avenues for employment which they could access after the skills training.
- 3.2 Constructing and furnishing a Resource Centre offering skills training** – we will construct a Resource Centre within the community where out-of-school girls and young mothers will receive training to build life skills and access economic empowerment initiatives, such as sewing and farming classes. The centre will include a Child Day-Care Facility so that young mothers can gain life skills while their children are safely cared for. Local stakeholders will be trained to continue



Lencer, in red, is a teacher and runs a Girls’ Forum that ActionAid supported her to set up at her school in Kongelai, West Pokot

running the centre after the project ends and income generating schemes will be put in place to cover running costs and maintenance.

3.3 Developing a tailored training programme – A comprehensive and flexible training programme tailored for out-of-school girls and young mothers will be developed in partnership with the county education office on vocational training. This will encompass income-generating activities, life skills and leadership, financial management, book keeping, successful business start-up and business management and marketing. The girls and young mothers will be involved in the curriculum design to ensure it meets their needs, and then helped to identify a trade of their choice such as braiding, tailoring or agribusiness. Specific vocational training will be provided by the county education office, which will ensure sustainability and continuity once the project ends.

3.4 Providing livelihood and business start-up grants – we will assess employment opportunities for the girls and young mothers and will help them to improve their household income through support with starting up a small business in the trade of their choice. They will be helped to access credit from government affirmative action funds (Youth Fund and Uwezo Fund), regulated financial institutions or table banking spaces and helped to start these economic empowerment activities. The girls and young mothers will also be trained on saving so that they can grow and expand their businesses in the future.

3.5 Establishing 10 support groups – we will bring together the out-of-school girls and young mothers in 10 support groups to learn about their rights and support one another with the issues they face. As the girls access training and set up their own businesses the groups will enable them to share learning and work together.

Expected results

- 660 girls in 22 schools are empowered with knowledge on their reproductive health and their rights – including the right to education. They are able to challenge violence by protecting themselves from risky situations and reporting any incidents that occur, enabling them to access support services and continue with their education.
- 300 boys in 10 schools are empowered with knowledge about their own rights, and important health issues such as HIV/AIDS as well as the challenges facing girls, including violence and pregnancy, and the negative effects this can have on their lives.
- 64 teachers in 22 schools have increased understanding and knowledge of children's rights, to protect all children from any form of violence and equipped with mechanisms for reporting incidents of violence.
- 300 out-of-school girls and young mothers gain a certified and recognised qualification. They are empowered with knowledge and skills on their rights and entrepreneurship enabling them to initiate income generating activities and improve their livelihoods.
- Their families in 300 households benefit from their economic empowerment and improved livelihoods.
- 10 self-help groups formed for out-of-school girls and young mothers, enabling them to share their experiences, offer learnings and identify their own development needs. These then can be presented to the duty bearers, such as the local government, for continued action and support.
- At least 3,000 community members (which will include; women, men and boys) empowered with knowledge on child rights and how to facilitate positive change within the community by protecting and promoting child rights and girls' education.
- At least 20 duty bearers, including the county government, actively engaged through various forums to provide workable solutions for tackling the barriers experienced by girls, in order to support long-term community transformation and development.

Thank you for your interest in supporting girls and young mothers in Nyarongi to access education and challenge violence – together we can change lives, for good.