

Executive Summary: Outcome Harvesting Study of Global Fund for Children's Echidna Giving Portfolio¹

Global Fund for Children (GFC) invests in community-based organizations to help children and youth reach their full potential and advance their rights. Since 2013, GFC has received funding from Echidna Giving to support girl-focused community-based organizations globally. In December 2017, Echidna Giving awarded a final grant of \$875,000 to GFC to support 15 local partners striving to improve the quality of girls' education in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the Caribbean. The current tranche of Echidna Giving funding covers programs from December 2017 through June 30, 2020.

This funding from Echidna Giving has helped GFC support community-based organizations to achieve **three primary project objectives**:

1. "Removing obstacles that make it difficult for girls to stay in school and receive a quality education";
2. "Increasing the quality of education available to girls in school"; and
3. "Strengthening grassroots organizations' programmatic, organizational, and networking capacity to promote replication of best practices at the local, regional, and global level through networking and advocacy."

With the funding from Echidna Giving, GFC provides primary grants for local partners to support their programmatic and operating costs. GFC staff and consultants also deliver tailored, value-added services to strengthen the local partners' capacity; their monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) skills; and their networking and fundraising skills. Echidna Giving funding also supports supplemental grants for organizational development and convening local partners. In addition, GFC provides advisory support not funded through a grant to the local partner; this is referred to as non-financial support.

Cultural Practice, LLC (CP) led a study to understand how GFC's support enables local partners to advance their work in girls' education and beyond under the Echidna Giving portfolio, between December 2017 and June 2020.² The Echidna Giving portfolio was not designed with an overarching or common set of desired results or outcomes for the local partners. Therefore, there were no common indicators that could be investigated to understand the extent to which local partners had or had not achieved a common set of goals.

In collaboration with GFC, CP used a complexity-aware evaluation method called **Outcome Harvesting**. This methodology was selected because it allows local partners without a common set of indicators from diverse contexts and different packages of support to identify observable changes in behavior³ (outcomes) that their activities contributed to. These changes could have been intended or unintended, positive or negative, programmatic or organizational. Using this approach, the CP team worked with three local partners using a variety of qualitative data collection methods to identify and analyze outcomes. After the changes in behavior were identified, CP guided the three local partners to "work backwards" and identify the actors, contributing factors, and key moments in time that led to each outcome, and how GFC support contributed to those outcomes. The local partners selected to participate in the Outcome Harvest were Centre for Development Initiatives (CDI) based in Accra, Ghana; Nyanza Initiative for Girls' Education and Empowerment (NIGEE) based in Kisumu, Kenya; and Samburu Girls Foundation (SGF) based in Maralal in Samburu County, Kenya. Many of the activities these organizations implemented targeted at-risk girls to increase their access to quality education by addressing context-specific obstacles girls experience going to and staying in school, such as harmful practices or the low value placed on girls' education by parents and other decision-makers. **A synthesis of the key findings and conclusions from the study follows.**

¹ Prepared by Wesley Laytham and Caitlin Nordehn, Cultural Practice, LLC for Global Fund for Children in October 2019. *The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of Global Fund for Children.*

² At the inception of this study, it was understood that the Echidna Giving grant would end on December 31, 2019. While GFC was revising internal processes, it was discovered that funding actually went through June 30, 2020. This did not affect the analysis of findings.

³ In the context of Outcome Harvesting, "changes in behavior" is a generalized term that refers observable changes in actors' behavior, actions, activities, policies, and practices.

The benefits of trust-based relationships with local partners

The strong trust between GFC and local partners is shaped by GFC's overall approach, which puts the power in local partners' hands to determine how best to use funding. This approach can minimize the gap between GFC and the local partners, making local partners more willing to share their ideas or call on GFC for support when challenges arise, to navigate course corrections. The local partners appreciated GFC's flexible funding, because it could be used to complement more restrictive funding from other donors. It also enabled them to pilot new concepts in search of new ways to meet organizational goals to strengthen girls' education and protect girls from harm.

Local partners have appreciated the benefits of GFC's approach; however, they still face challenges designing and implementing sustainable activities to empower girls. The complex environments within which local partners work – complicated by shifts in government, climate, or even other organizations' interventions – make it difficult to design, implement, and monitor programming. Furthermore, the local partner teams are often small and do not have sufficient time, staff, or other resources to design and implement programming that will lead to longer-term changes in social norms or institutions. Local partners need additional technical guidance to design projects and develop their own organizational capacity to maximize the benefits of GFC funding.

Developing sustainable pathways toward girls' empowerment

Local partners are on a pathway to meet their organizational goals to remove obstacles for girls to access quality education and improve girls' physical and psychological wellbeing. Their activities contributed to strengthening girls' access to resources to increase livelihood opportunities; increasing girls' access to quality education; and developing girls' life skills, confidence, and aspirations. The trust local partner staff built with the girls and communities through their activities was a common theme reported in their stories of change. With additional targeted technical support, local partners could go further to reach, benefit, and empower girls.

To maximize GFC's financial and advisory support, **additional technical guidance on project design is needed, particularly around best practices, risk management planning, and monitoring and documenting challenges and achievements.** Local partners' project design is largely shaped by their experiences and understanding of the local context, but only to a limited extent by best practices to reach, benefit, and increase girls' ability to make strategic decisions about their lives and act upon them. They also face challenges finding ways to effectively use limited funding, plan for risks, and course correct. Furthermore, minimal monitoring data, evaluation, and opportunities for reflection and learning limits the extent to which local partners can learn from their challenges and achievements to improve their project design and implementation.

Local partners have demonstrated they have the capacity to contribute to positive changes in their communities, but **they require more organizational support to sustainably contribute to broader processes of social change.** The local partners provide critical services to at-risk girls at sites like SGF's "rescue centers," at NIGEE's Academic Camps, and through CDI's home visits. These activities are benefiting girls today, but do not carve a path toward longer-term sustainable change in the communities they serve. This is in part because these organizations do not have the networks to identify and connect with new donors to scale up their pilot activities. Additionally, small organizations have limited networks and capacity to influence widespread behavior change in communities. Furthermore, few have the mechanisms to document achievements and use them to write winning proposals. GFC has encouraged and developed the skills of some local partners to create strategic sustainability plans. However, that will only be useful if it is complemented by strengthening organizational capacity to secure new funding.

Opportunities of the cohort-based portfolio model

A portfolio based on a cohort model has benefits for both the local partners and GFC. Local partners were eager to learn from one another's approaches and challenges, offering advice to one another. A cohort, with a common purpose and indicators, provides a solid foundation for peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and learning. GFC regional directors and staff could support each other to address shared challenges and document local partner and management achievements. A synthesis of local partner and GFC program officers' reflections can also be used by business development to describe GFC's approach and grantees' successes to donors.

The recommendations focus on strengthening GFC’s technical guidance throughout the project cycle to design, implement, and manage MEL activities to achieve sustainable pathways to girls’ empowerment. To ensure the legacy of GFC’s trust-based relationship with local partners continues, GFC should continue to encourage local partners to share their ideas and also increase exchanges between local partners to learn from one another. Some recommendations highlight how collaboration between the GFC teams, particularly around MEL, can benefit all and strengthen the overall quality of the work and its relevance to GFC goals.

Recommendation	Actions
1. Strengthen technical capacity of GFC and local partners for portfolio and program design	
<p><i>1.1 Leverage and strengthen in-house capacity for GFC portfolio design.</i> During this study, program staff demonstrated a wealth of knowledge and experience managing grants that can be drawn upon to design future portfolios. This report offers evidence of the common themes and programmatic and monitoring challenges that these staff manage. GFC should encourage internal collaboration across teams in the design phase to maximize the existing expertise.</p>	<p>Action 1: Map out existing in-house expertise and interest in technical sectors, project management, and MEL. It is anticipated that gaps will be identified in in-house expertise during this process. See Recommendation 1.3 for how to engage consultants and firms to support GFC’s portfolio design.</p> <p>Action 2: Clearly define responsibilities, across teams, to support the design of new portfolios, including the draft MEL framework. For example, program staff who participated in the management of the Echidna Giving Portfolio will be well suited to contribute to the design of a new adolescent girls’ education portfolio.</p> <p>Action 3: Establish common outcomes, outputs, and indicators for all local partners within the portfolio. This could be done prior to making awards, as evaluation criteria, or developed collaboratively with selected local partners during portfolio kickoff. This gives local partners a foundation for peer-to-peer learning. See Recommendations 2 and 3.</p>
<p><i>1.2 Provide more technical assistance to support local partner program design.</i> Community-based organizations face challenges staying up to date on best practices and approaches because of limitations on staff time and training, funding and travel constraints, and small networks. This limits the extent to which the local partners can influence positive change in communities through their activities. After awarding an initial grant, GFC could strengthen local partners’ programmatic capacity by connecting local partners with in-house and external technical experts (local or international) for the final project design.</p>	<p>Action 1: Develop a roster of technical experts to collaborate with local partners on their activity designs, including budgeting, based on best practices and the local contexts. The technical expertise may cover topics like education, child protection, gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment, social and behavior change, and other areas in which local partners are working. These experts should be familiar with other organizations implementing similar projects in these contexts. This collaboration could be done remotely, through stakeholder workshops, or through short-term visits.</p>
<p><i>1.3 Engage external technical assistance to support GFC portfolio design, as needed.</i> Based on the mapping of in-house technical capacities, GFC can draw on additional external support in technical areas to shape these portfolios and be more judicious about which organizations to fund. This should be based on an understanding of the specific landscape and relevant</p>	<p>Action 1: Staff with interest in specific areas should be matched with external technical experts to respond to donor solicitation and/or develop unsolicited proposals that reflect these priorities. This increases in-house technical capacity and learning as well as the quality of the portfolio design. Technical experts should be familiar with the landscape of interventions in the sector and targeted geographic area to maximize investment by complementing existing activities. This process will help GFC proposals include sufficient rigor and builds technical capacity in new areas for staff.</p>

<p>best practices for targeted technical areas and geographies.</p>	<p>Action 2: Develop a roster of technical experts (local or international) to support local partner application review. Technical experts can guide GFC through local partner selection based on an understanding of the extent to which partners' interventions align with best practices and the on-the-ground landscape. Following the selection of local partners, technical experts can work with GFC staff to develop overall next steps for working with each local partner. Based upon previous portfolios, the targeted technical expertise may include education, child protection, gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, social and behavior change, and other areas in which local partners are working.</p>
<p>2. Strengthen capacity of local partners to implement and adapt programs</p>	
<p><i>2.1 Provide more technical assistance to support implementation.</i> Local partner organizations are mostly employing strategies to reach and benefit girls. If GFC wishes to support more community-based organizations to employ strategies that empower girls and follow best practices, it may be necessary to provide additional technical expertise during the funding relationship with GFC, in addition to organizational capacity development. There are two reasons to provide additional expertise after the final design of programs. The first is to support local partners' adaptive management. For example, local partners may need to adjust their approach based on new information or a change in context (e.g., political change). The second is to help local partners that are piloting new activities scale and improve their approach.</p>	<p>Action 1: Develop a roster of technical experts and subcontractors to provide support throughout program implementation. The targeted expertise may cover education, child protection, social and behavior change, and other areas in which local partners are working. Technical experts can support local partners to adjust their programs during implementation kickoff and in developing new activities, learning, and adaptive management throughout the project cycle. This can be done remotely, through site visits at different points throughout the intervention, or a convening of multiple local partners for a workshop or training.</p> <p>Action 2: Facilitate more opportunities for local partners to participate in learning activities with a sectoral focus, in addition to organizational capacity focused opportunities. For example, local partners could attend convenings, attend conferences, or receive visits from experts focused on building their awareness of and ability to implement best practices around child protection and education. These opportunities can be external or internal to GFC.</p>
<p><i>2.2 Establish a cohort of local partners to support peer-to-peer learning.</i> GFC may want to strengthen the linkages between local partners funded by the same portfolio. Establishing regular interactions between local partners could instill a common sense of purpose. It would also create more opportunities for networking and exchanging ideas about promising practices among peers who develop trust through repeated interaction. Local partners can apply these lessons to adjust their implementation approach throughout the project cycle.</p>	<p>Action 1: Provide local partners with opportunities to interact and reflect on their individual and collective experiences. This would allow for sharing of ideas about effective solutions to common challenges and provide a platform for thinking about the value of their work. The authors recommend increasing the number of opportunities for peer-to-peer learning engagements. GFC can conduct an assessment of local partner preferences and communications infrastructure to determine the most effective and appropriate mechanisms for continuous peer-to-peer learning. An initial meeting of the local partners can take place at regional meetings. Other mechanisms like WhatsApp and webinars can be used to facilitate continuous learning across regions, where language is not a barrier.</p>
<p><i>2.3 Increase the value of the grants to local partners based on changes in their organizational capacity and demonstrated results.</i> Community-based organizations that demonstrate positive results or improvements in organizational development could be given additional funding to scale up their approaches and/or ensure sustainability when there is a demonstrated need. Providing additional money at key moments in time to expand local partner programs could help make their work more attractive to other donors.</p>	<p>Action 1: Set aside a pool of money to make results-based increases to local partner grants. The determination for additional money should be based on performance against MEL plans and results achieved to date in pilot activities. This will help rationalize more rigorous MEL requirements.</p> <p>Action 2: Consider scheduling annual grants to increase over the life cycle of the partnership. This should be tailored for the specific interventions (e.g., proof of concept activities vs. better established activities). Partnerships that begin with relatively smaller grants that increase over time can also help reduce risks to GFC of supporting untested or unknown local partners.</p>

3. Support local partners to improve Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning systems	
<p><i>3.1 Ensure that future GFC programs have sufficiently planned and budgeted for Monitoring, Evaluating, and Learning.</i> To learn from interventions and describe results across a cohort of local partners, GFC should conduct more extensive monitoring. Throughout the lifecycle of the grants, this should include the selection and reporting of clearly defined common indicators, and validation or triangulation of results. Local partners that participated in the Outcome Harvesting workshop indicated that they already collect more monitoring data than the one indicator required by GFC.</p>	<p>Action 1: Program officers conduct an assessment of local partners' MEL capabilities to shape the appropriate level of capacity building support. The Organizational Capacity Index (OCI) self-assessment tool can be used as a starting point for the initial assessment but should be validated by the GFC MEL and programs teams.</p> <p>Action 2: GFC staff should coach future local partners based on the results of the assessment to develop a MEL plan and to report on more extensive, quality monitoring data to better inform GFC decision-making about the work it supports.</p> <p>Action 3: GFC could plan for external performance evaluations to improve in-house learning and the organization's capacity to manage and design programs more effectively. GFC should budget for evaluations during the program design phase. The programs and MEL teams should begin planning the evaluation questions and scope of work well in advance, according to guidance from the MEL team. Because of the flexible nature of GFC's grants to local partners, additional complexity-aware and mixed methods may be most appropriate for future evaluations.</p>
<p><i>3.2 Establish reflection mechanisms for improved programming and business development.</i> During the Outcome Harvesting workshop, the local partners valued using their time to learn from each other and reflect on their own work in a structured way. This is something that they normally do not have the time or opportunity to do within their organizations. The process achieves multiple goals. It supports local partners to make course corrections during implementation, to tell their story in new ways to pursue new funding, and to think strategically about their organizational needs and programmatic objectives.</p>	<p>Action 1: Establish a framework for local partner reflection meetings/processes within GFC grantmaking activities. Reflection session could be done internally within each local partner organization, and/or collectively within a broader cohort on a regular basis (e.g., quarterly or semi-annual meetings). This would allow for local partners, and GFC, to think critically about what has been achieved to date, what unforeseen issues emerged, and how to solve them. This is captured in two outputs: 1) documentation of achievements, and 2) an adaptive management plan detailing changes to the anticipated approach. Reflection questions may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the progress to date (since the last check-in) in relation to indicators? • Are there any new and unforeseen challenges that explain why we are not meeting targets? • What can we do differently to achieve the results that we want to see? • What are some of the obstacles/risks to achieving our objectives that we need to plan for? • What is going well and why? <p>Action 2: Use reflection meetings to further refine local partners' theories of change and identify opportunities to support transformative and sustainable changes in the communities where they work. Reflection meetings should result in clear next steps for program management. It is critical to communicate the multiple purposes of these reflection mechanisms to encourage local partners' participation.</p>
<p><i>3.3 Use outputs of reflection mechanisms to improve local partners' access to funding and GFC's business development.</i> The success stories and lessons learned identified during reflections can be used by local partners and GFC to support future proposals or attract donor attention.</p>	<p>Action 1: Reflection mechanism outputs can help local partners to tell their story in a more convincing way to donors. They can use the outputs to refine their proposed approaches. GFC can guide local partners through this process.</p> <p>Action 2: GFC business development and program teams can use the outputs of reflection and learning activities to develop proposals for funding new community-based organizations. Use the reflection outputs to strengthen links between GFC's business development, programs, and MEL teams to better capture the unique value added of their work for proposal writing and project design.</p>