

LITERATURE REVIEW

# Supporting girls' transitions from school to higher education and work

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To achieve all this, we draw on our programme of public domain research that highlights 'what works' in education reform and invest in research and development to create globally leading and innovative methodologies, helping to make government ambitions for better education systems a reality.

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# Executive Summary

Children experience a series of important transitions: from home to school, between phases of schooling and on to employment. Transition from school to higher education or work, in particular, is a defining process that determines individuals' future trajectories and has been a subject of intense research. Recent systematic reviews on girls' education in low- and middle-income countries have focused on quantitative evidence on gender-related barriers to school participation and learning<sup>1</sup>. This transitions review more broadly explores the wider evidence base on girls' education that could help us to understand the challenges of transition, skills and competencies needed for effective transition, and interventions needed to make the transitions happen. The literature review used search engines and databases to find paper publications and grey literature as well as reviewing targeted websites for reports on girls' transitions.

Results from large-scale surveys with employers in lower- and middle-income countries suggest that effective transition is enabled by development of core foundational, transferable, digital, and technical and vocational skills. Despite global efforts on universal access to education, development of foundational and transferable skills is not the same for all children. For girls in low-resource contexts, development of the core skills for transition is hindered by a number of barriers such as low access and participation rates in school, higher risk of dropout, and gender gaps in technology access and usage, as well as minimal opportunities for technical and vocational training.

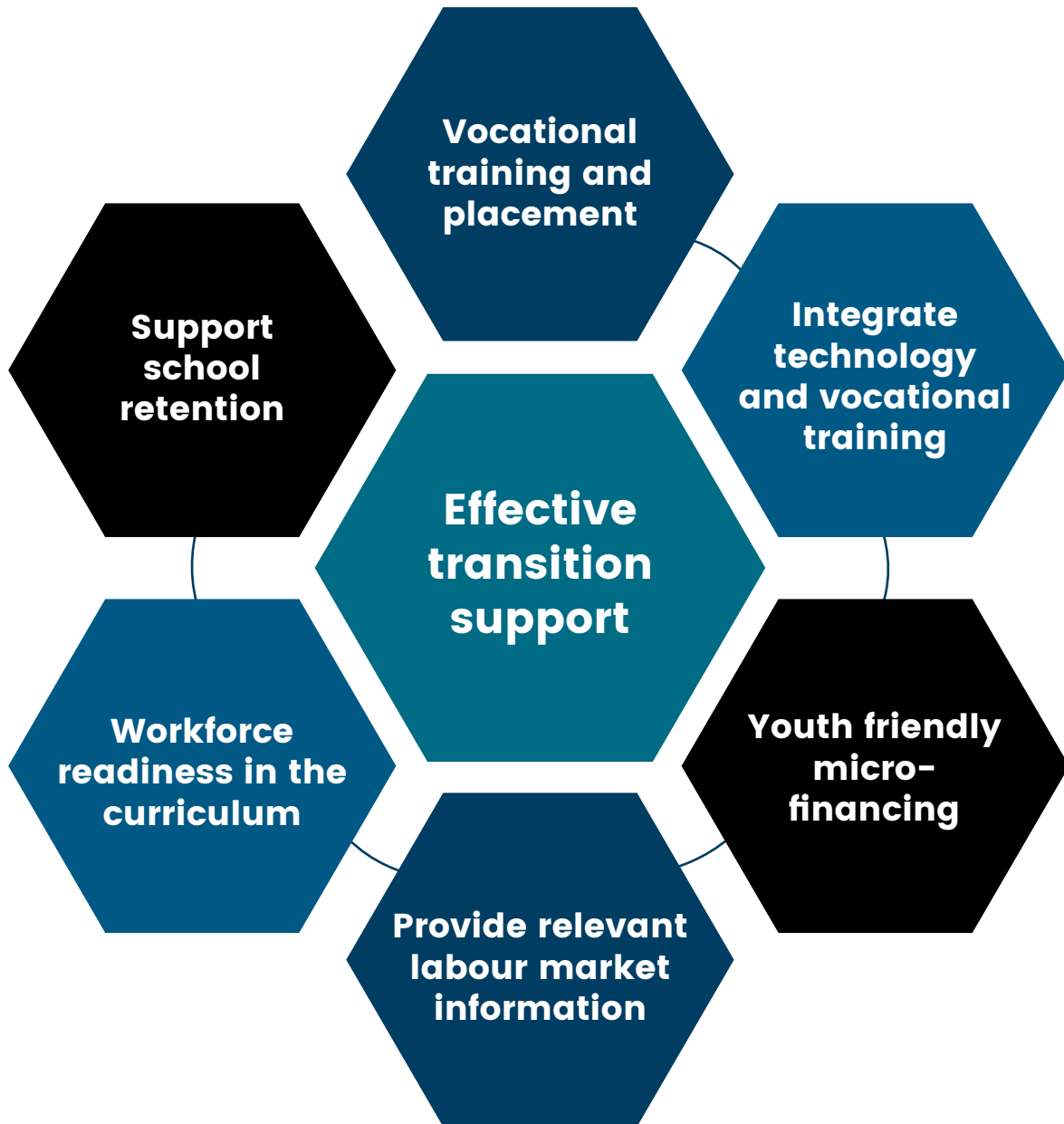
Drawing on the wider evidence base, disadvantaged girls' transition to higher education or work can be supported through packages of integrated interventions that enable them to develop the core skills and competencies relevant to the labour market needs. Some of the promising solutions include:

- » **supporting school retention** for disadvantaged girls and provision of remedial/catch-up programmes on literacy and numeracy to help girls develop core foundational skills
- » **providing youth-friendly micro-financing** interventions to enable girls to access credit at affordable rates and terms
- » **complementing vocational training** with life skills and on-the-job internship/placement opportunities to enable girls to develop employability skills
- » **providing girls with relevant labour market information** and supporting them in taking up courses in non-saturated fields with high demand for labour
- » **integrating appropriate technologies** with vocational training to support girls in navigating the digital world of work
- » **integrating workforce readiness** and entrepreneurship training into the school curriculum.

A key lesson for policymakers is to provide integrated interventions that address multiple barriers that can block girls' transitions. In recognition of the dynamic nature of the labour market, there is also a need to involve the private sector in the development and review of training curricula to ensure relevancy and alignment with market needs.

<sup>1</sup> Psaki et al. (2022)

Figure 1: The components of effective transition for girls



# Section 1

## Background and context

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The growing population of youth in low- and middle-income countries presents enormous opportunities as well as development challenges. For countries to reap the demographic dividends of the youthful population, young people require opportunities to transition from school into higher education and stable livelihoods. However, future employment forecasts project a continued decrease in labour force participation rates among young people, lower quality jobs and difficult transitions into decent work<sup>2</sup>. These challenges are even greater for girls and young women in low- and middle-income countries.

There is considerable evidence on what works to get girls into school and help them learn. Recent syntheses suggest that addressing financial barriers to schooling such as inability to afford school levies, changing retrogressive social norms to promote inclusion, targeted academic support and provision of additional schools in underserved areas are effective at addressing gender-related barriers to girls' education and improving education outcomes for girls specifically on enrolment and attainment<sup>3</sup>.

Previous reviews have explored only the barriers to girls' transition. In contrast this review seeks to identify: 1) the key skills necessary for transition and 2) the interventions needed to make effective transition happen. It looks at the full schooling life cycle from early years onwards. At the end of the publication, lessons for policy-makers are discussed, particularly the need for effective transition to be supported across education systems in an integrated way rather than through isolated individual programmes.

The review is part of Education Development Trust's wider research agenda in education, careers and employability aimed at generating publicly available evidence to inform policy and practice. The initial phase of the study (this report) is a desk review focusing on promising interventions that have been impactful in facilitating girls' transitions from school to higher education/work in challenging contexts where girls are still marginalised from education (access, learning and transitions). Phase two of the study will involve primary data collection that will inform the development of a model of change for investment in empowerment interventions to support girls' transition to the labour market and further education. The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What key skills and competencies are needed for successful transition to work?
2. What supports girls' transitions from school to higher education or work?
3. What are the implications of the promising interventions for policy-making and practice?

To answer the research questions, this literature review used search engines and databases to find paper publications and grey literature, as well as customised search on targeted websites for reports on girls' transition. 'Transitions' in this paper refers to finding and keeping adequate work/a livelihood, or pursuing the next level of education.

The paper is organised into three sections. Section one provides the background and context of the study, including research questions. Section two presents solutions for challenges in girls' transitions from school to higher education or work. Lessons for policy-makers are presented in section three.

<sup>2</sup> International Labour Organization (2020)

<sup>3</sup> Carvalho and Evans (2022); Psaki et al. (2022); Unterhalter et al. (2014)

## Girls' educational attainment and transition in low- and middle-income countries

Transition from school is a demographically pivotal period, setting young people onto particular adult trajectories of advantage or disadvantage. Structural differences in the life paths for boys and girls have meant that girls experience greater interdependence between family and work. These differences often have implications for subsequent inequality in socioeconomic attainment, and therefore possibly greater life-course inequality<sup>4</sup>. In resource-constrained settings where poverty and gender inequality intersect, marginalised girls face a triple handicap: being female, being poor and living in disadvantaged rural areas. These challenges are amplified by economic insecurity, social isolation, early marriage, exposure to violence, and weak voice and agency, which have detrimental and long-lasting effects on their wellbeing besides hindering their transition into a healthy, safe, and productive adulthood<sup>5</sup>.

Low educational attainment is still a major block with regard to girls' transition from school into stable livelihoods. While parity in education at the primary level has increased significantly in most parts of the world, the progress is not consistent across all groups. In low-income countries, 94 girls for every 100 boys are enrolled in primary school, 87 girls for every 100 boys are enrolled in secondary school, and just 80 girls for every 100 boys are enrolled in upper secondary<sup>6</sup>. This illustrates the importance of focusing on transition points between school phases to reverse educational wastage particularly among girls.

Even when girls and boys are in school, only a small proportion are able to develop basic foundational skills crucial for later learning and transition to work<sup>7</sup>. Globally, 6 out of 10 young people are unable to meet minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics<sup>8</sup>, with rates in sub-Saharan Africa (88%) and Central and South Asia (81%) alarmingly high. Overall, girls in sub-Saharan Africa perform poorly, with 90% not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading (versus 86% of boys) and 86% (versus 82% of boys) not achieving minimum levels for mathematics<sup>9</sup>.

Advances in technology provide opportunities for jobs, with the youth particularly primed to benefit from these developments, given their familiarity with digital technologies. However, large gender gaps in technology access and use remain, and this reinforces the economic exclusion faced by disadvantaged girls living in extreme poverty<sup>10</sup>. For example, in Tanzania, only 30% of young women in the 18–35 age group report using the internet and/or owning a smartphone<sup>11</sup>. On average, women are 26% less likely than men to have a smartphone.

Trends in labour force participation among girls paint a grim picture. Although the population of young women and girls completing education has been steadily increasing, there are wide disparities in their labour force participation. For example, at the age of 15, the proportion of young women not in employment, education or training (NEET) exceeds that of young men by a ratio of approximately 1.5:1; by the age of 20, the ratio increases to 2:1; and by the age of 24, it is nearly 3:1<sup>12</sup>. Young people who are un(der)employed for significant periods are more likely to face un(der)employment, economic exclusion and labour market withdrawal in adulthood<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Xue et al. (2020)

<sup>5</sup> Kober (2016); Stavropoulou (2018)

<sup>6</sup> Psaki et al. (2021)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations (2018)

<sup>11</sup> International Labour Organization (2020)

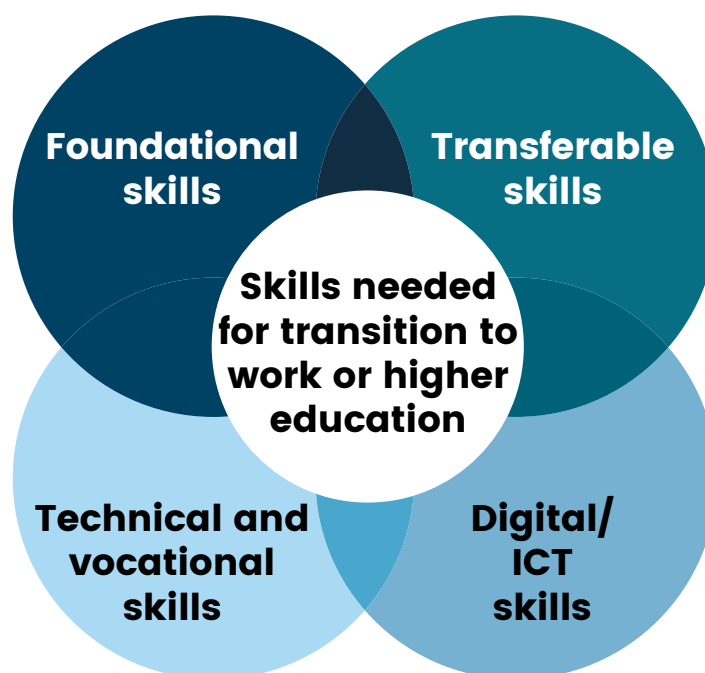
<sup>12</sup> International Labour Organization (2020)

<sup>13</sup> International Labour Organization (2011)

## Factors that enable transition to higher education or work

Results from surveys with employers about the competencies needed to effectively function in a job provide crucial insights on important skills needed to secure, retain, and thrive in work. While there is no standard agreement across sectors on what skills are needed for successful transition, there is a strong evidence base suggesting that employers in low- and middle-income countries value educational qualifications as well as a broad range of foundational, transferable, digital and technical, and vocational skills<sup>14</sup>. Figure 2 presents a summary of skills needed for effective transition.

Figure 2: Skills needed for transition to work or higher education



- » **Foundational skills** consist of basic literacy and numeracy needed for effective communication and to work with numbers and mathematical approaches. Foundational skills are also a prerequisite for further education and training, and for developing transferable as well as technical and vocational skills that boost one's prospect of employment.
- » **Transferable skills** include cognitive, metacognitive (having a clear goal and learning strategies, and monitoring oneself in pursuing the goal) and socio-emotional skills. Examples of transferable skills include analytical and critical thinking; problem-solving and decision-making; self-reflection and learning to learn; planning and organising; career management; collecting, organising, and analysing information; emotional intelligence; collaboration and teamwork; and conflict resolution and negotiation, among others.
- » **Technical and vocational skills** include specialised practical competencies needed to perform specific duties or tasks in the labour market.
- » **Digital skills** include the ability to operate a digital device, use basic software and work safely in an online environment.

<sup>14</sup> UNICEF (2019a)

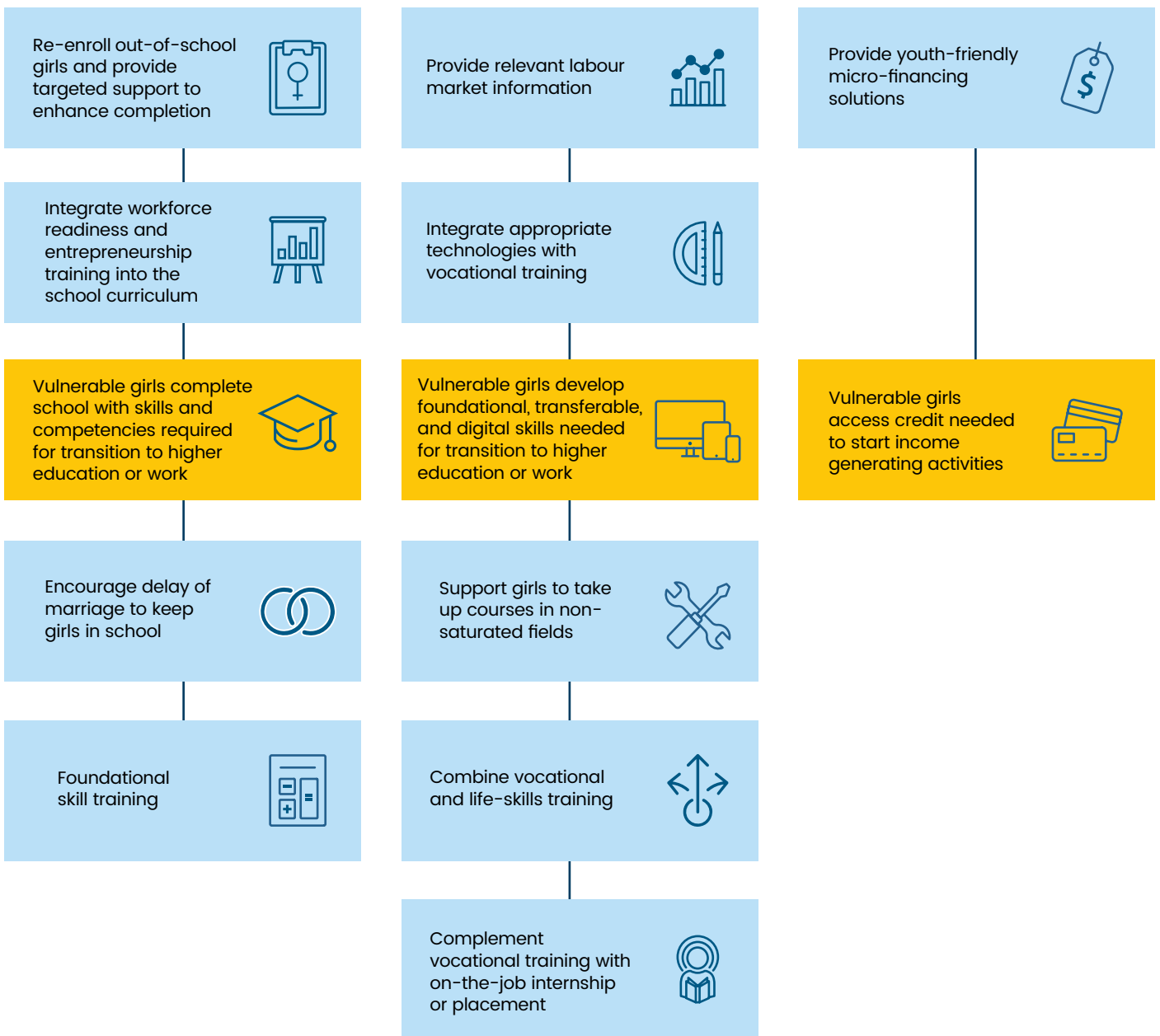


# Section 2

## Interventions for facilitating girls' transitions

This section presents an overview of promising solutions for facilitating girls' transitions from school to higher education and work. It draws on the wider evidence base and from programmes with available impact data on girls' transitions. Figure 3 provides a summary of the various interventions covered and how they need to be linked with each other to be effective. The first column relates to school-level transition support, the second the transition to work and third the system-level financial support.

Figure 3: Supporting girls' transitions to higher education or work



Evidence for the effectiveness of the 10 solutions summarised in Figure 3 is discussed below. The discussion draws on existing evidence on the impact of the solutions which have been implemented in low- and middle-income country contexts.

### **Solution 1: Encourage delay of marriage to keep girls in school**

Education remains a strong predictor of employment probability, career progression and lifetime earnings. In low- and middle-income countries, early childbearing remains one of the key barriers to girls' education. Emerging evidence shows that delaying marriage is one of the factors that shows promise in enabling girls to stay in schools longer, which increases their likelihood of developing core foundational and transferable skills required for transition to higher education or work. Results from the evaluation of programmes that have supported delaying marriage and school retention for disadvantaged girls in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia and Tanzania show a strong positive impact on long-term education and economic outcomes<sup>15</sup>.

In Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Development Society (BDS) implemented a girls' empowerment programme (Kishoree Kontha) in partnership with Save the Children (USA) between 2007 and 2010. Targeted communities were randomised into four groups, namely:

1. a basic empowerment programme
2. a conditional incentive to delay marriage
3. empowerment plus conditional incentive
4. the status quo.

In communities that received the Kishoree Kontha programme, safe spaces were created which provided forums for girls to meet, socialise and receive the training. The empowerment curriculum included education support and social competency training which was aimed at enhancing the basic literacy, numeracy and oral communication of both school-attending and out-of-school girls. Communities under the incentive programme received an in-kind transfer of cooking oil to encourage parents to postpone their daughters' marriage until the legal age of consent, 18 years<sup>16</sup>.

Results from a follow-up study, four-and-a-half years after the initial programme, showed that the programme had positive impacts on delaying underage marriage, teenage childbearing, and girls' retention in school – all outcomes associated with increased likelihood of gaining skills crucial for transition to work and higher education. Specifically:

- » **The financial incentive** reduced the likelihood of child marriage by 21% overall and 24% for girls aged 15 at distribution start
- » **The likelihood of being married** under age 16 fell by 28% among girls eligible for the incentive and aged 15 at distribution start
- » **The likelihood of teenage childbearing** reduced by 11%. Girls aged 15–17 at distribution start and eligible for the incentive were 13% more likely to be in school at age 22–25
- » **Overall, the empowerment** intervention increased the likelihood of girls working by 52%<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Population Council (2018)

<sup>16</sup> Buchmann et al. (2018)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

**Solution 2: Re-enrol out-of-school girls and provide targeted support to enhance completion and transition**

In low-resource settings where vulnerable girls are likely to be out of school, re-enrolment provides a second chance for the development of skills and competencies required for further education and transition to work. Implementing simultaneous interventions aimed at building disadvantaged girls' financial, physical, personal and social assets have been found effective in facilitating school completion and transition to higher education or work. The asset-based model works by not just delaying pregnancy, but also helping girls re-enrol in school and engage in income-generating activities. An example of an asset-based model is the Firelight Foundation's girls' empowerment programme that was implemented in Rwanda from 2016 to 2018 through a local community grantee<sup>18</sup>. The intervention involved simultaneously building girls' assets across four interconnected domains (financial, physical, personal and social assets) aimed at supporting school completion and transition to work<sup>19</sup>.

Figure 4: Firelight Foundation's asset-building model

Domain	Intervention areas
Financial assets	Start-up capital, livestock provision, establishment of savings groups and provision of school fees
Physical assets	Provision of food, housing and clothing to the most vulnerable girls
Personal assets	Educational support, mentorship to improve self-confidence, life-skill training on sexual and reproductive health, financial literacy, and vocational training.
Social assets	Peer networks and relationships, community mentorship and support

Evaluation results by the second year of implementation showed the following findings:

- » **Employment:** Statistically significant differences were found among the number of girls employed in different sectors. For agricultural, waged or in-kind employment, and non-farm-business employment-related activities there was an increase of 5% from year 1 to year 2
- » **Business ownership:** The number of girls who did not own a business declined from 77 in year 1 to 65 in year 2
- » **Membership in business cooperatives:** There was a statistically significant difference in the proportion of girls who indicated that they were members of a cooperative association (69% in year 1 versus 91% in year 2)
- » **Formal education:** More than 115 girls were supported to re-enrol in formal education
- » **Vocational skills:** The proportion of girls who reported having skills enabling them to earn income increased by 21.7 percentage points.

<sup>18</sup> Firelight (2019)  
<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

### Solution 3: Provide foundational skills training for both in-school and out-of-school girls

Foundational skills are fundamental to further education and transition to work. Remedial training in fundamental skills is particularly crucial for out-of-school girls who may have missed the opportunity to develop such skills through basic education or in-school girls unable to develop the skills due to poor-quality education. In Bangladesh, the Population Council, in collaboration with three other international organisations<sup>20</sup>, implemented an adolescent girls' programme that included foundational skills training over an 18-month period beginning in 2014. The Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income and Knowledge for Adolescents (BALIKA) project was a randomised controlled trial involving about 9,000 girls aged 12–18 years in 72 communities. Girls in targeted communities were assigned to receive one of three interventions<sup>21</sup>:

- » **Education:** Girls received tutoring in mathematics and English (in-school girls) and computing or financial training (out-of-school girls)
- » **Gender:** Girls received life skills training on gender rights and negotiation, critical thinking, and decision-making
- » **Livelihood skill training:** Girls received training in ICT, entrepreneurship, mobile phone servicing, photography and basic first aid.

Evaluation results show that girls participating in the programme were:

- » **31% less likely** to be married as children at endline
- » **20% more likely** to have improved mathematical skills
- » **one-third more likely** to be earning an income if they received gender-rights awareness or livelihood training<sup>22</sup>.

### Solution 4: Combine vocational skills and transferable skills training – the importance of an integrated approach

Multi-sectoral interventions that target overlapping vulnerabilities have been shown to have a positive impact on girls' empowerment<sup>23</sup>, and are more effective compared with standalone vocational skills training for which meta-analyses have pointed to low or short-lived returns in low-income settings<sup>24</sup>. Such programmes include more than one type of intervention for participants. For example, a programme that includes both life skills education and livelihood training, or a programme where participants receive both academic tutoring and participate in empowerment interventions<sup>25</sup>. Figure 4 presents a summary of a multifaceted intervention.



<sup>20</sup> Amin, et al. (2016) Delaying child marriage through community-based skills-development programs for girls: Results from a randomized controlled study in rural Bangladesh. New York and Dhaka, Bangladesh: Population Council

<sup>21</sup> Amin et al. (2016).

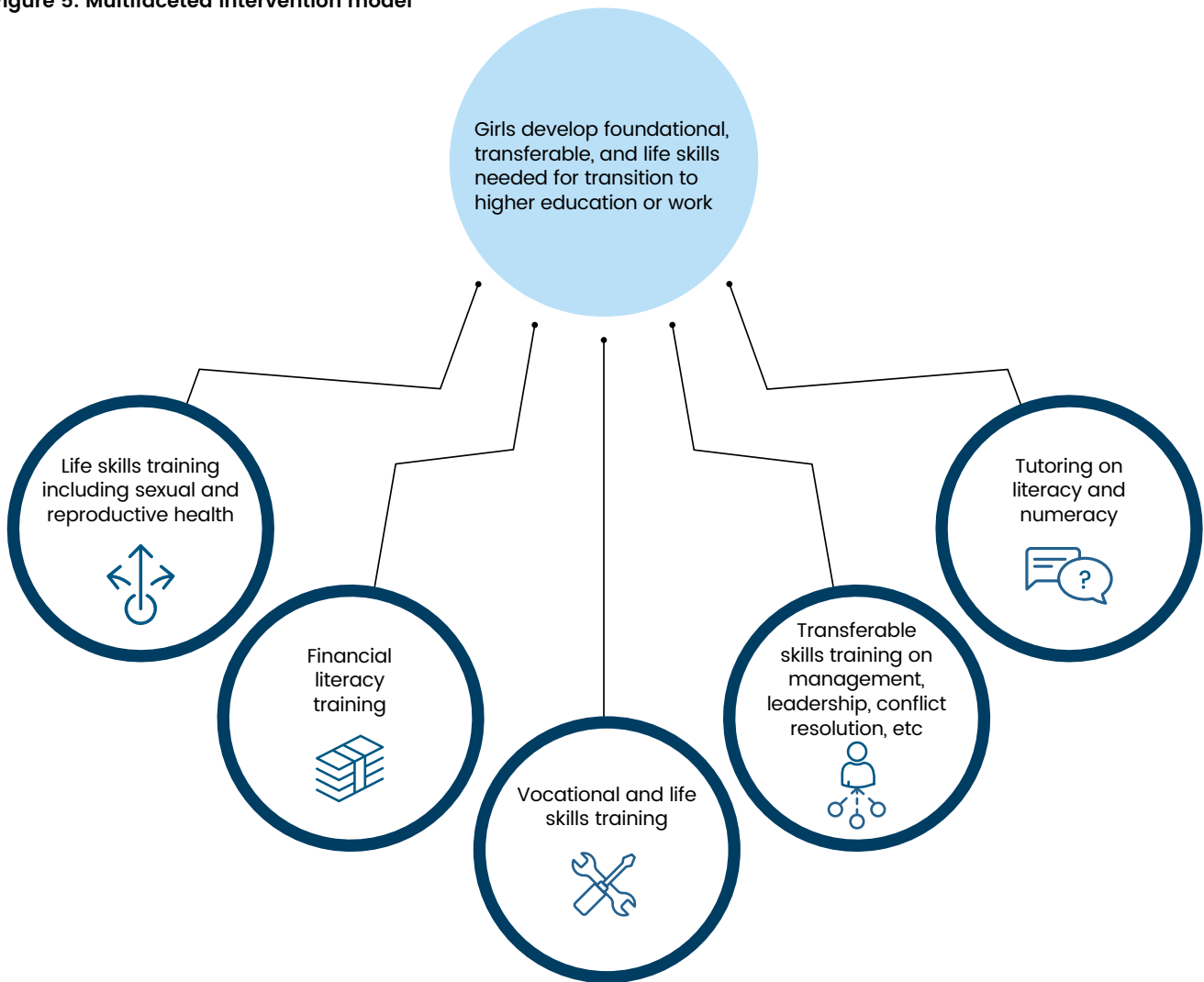
<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Kangwana et al. (2022)

<sup>24</sup> Lybbert and Wydick (2017)

<sup>25</sup> Haberland et al. (2018)

Figure 5: Multifaceted intervention model



Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) is an example of a multifaceted programme aimed at empowering disadvantaged girls through simultaneous interventions on life skills development and vocational skills training. The vocational and life skills training which was provided in the first two years of the intervention comprised a series of courses on income-generating activities such as hairdressing, tailoring, computing, agriculture, poultry-rearing and small trades operation. The vocational skills training was supplemented by financial literacy courses (budgeting, financial services and accounting skills) as well as life skills training that focused on sexual and reproductive health, and a set of transferable skills such as management, leadership and conflict resolution<sup>26</sup>.

Results from the evaluation of the ELA programme show that:

- » the likelihood of girls being engaged in income-generating activities increased by 35%
- » the proportions of girls in the intervention communities that engaged in income-generating activities increased by 6.8 percentage points
- » average monthly income among beneficiaries increased by US \$26.7
- » girls in communities receiving the programme perceived themselves as having better entrepreneurial skills than girls in control communities in various dimensions such as running a business, identifying business opportunities, and accessing and managing capital<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> Bandiera et al. (2018)  
<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

The evaluation concluded that multifaceted interventions that bundle multiple types of hard and soft skills hold promise for increasing the economic and social autonomy of disadvantaged girls. Combining business and life skills training provides girls with an important foundation for success as it has been found to lead to significant improvements in business skills and the likelihood of self-employment<sup>28</sup>.

### **Solution 5: Complement vocational training with on-the-job internship or placement opportunities**

Programmes that combine vocational training and on-the-job training or internship or other kinds of work experience have showed positive effects in facilitating disadvantaged girls' transitions to work. Emerging literature attributes the success to practical opportunities that job placements offer: learning transferable skills at the same time as applying skills learnt while undergoing training in work contexts<sup>29</sup>.

The Kenya Youth Empowerment Project (KYEP) launched in 2010 by the Government of Kenya with funding support from the World Bank combined skill development and job placement with a view to enhancing employability and the earning potential of vulnerable youth. To create opportunities for training or internship, private employers were mobilised and incentivised to accept interns and teach them job-relevant skills, and where possible create jobs through retention of interns who successfully completed the programme. On the supply side, youths were provided with job-relevant training opportunities – both technical and life skills training<sup>30</sup>. Results from evaluation of the programme show that:

- » The probability of being employed increased by 4.5 percentage points for all young women originally assigned to the programme. It increased by 6.7 percentage points for young women placed in training and internships, and by 8.7 percentage points for those women who completed the programme.
- » Wage earnings for women increased by KES 7,500 (approximately USD 68.18) which corresponds to 132% relative to the earnings of the control group cohort.

In the Dominican Republic, Acevedo et al. (2017) explored the marginal impact of a vocational training programme<sup>31</sup> when supplemented with soft skills training and internship placement. The programme applicants were randomly assigned to one of three modalities: (1) received vocational training combined with soft skills training and an internship; (2) received soft skills training with an internship only; and (3) control group. Results from evaluation of the programme showed that<sup>32</sup>:

- » the probability of employment for women (16 to 29 years) was 7 percentage points higher with the combined vocational and soft skills treatment and 5.2 percentage points higher in the soft-skills-only group, which represents relative increases of 32% and 23.6%, respectively
- » earnings by women on both schemes increased by 17% relative to the control group
- » on average, women in the combined treatment group were 16.3 percentage points more likely to be satisfied with their job<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Fox and Kaul (2018)

<sup>30</sup> Honorati (2015)

<sup>31</sup> *Programa Juventud y Empleo (PjyE)*, which was designed to improve the employment opportunities of at-risk youth

<sup>32</sup> Acevedo et al. (2017)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

## Solution 6: Integrate appropriate technologies with vocational training

The digital transformation offers immense opportunities for job creation, which is crucial in overcoming pervasive poverty and deprivation. However, in low-income contexts, the huge digital gender divide often blocks girls from transition to work as most jobs have a digital component<sup>34</sup>. Empowerment interventions that integrate ICT have shown promise in building girls' skills and confidence in navigating an increasingly digital world<sup>35</sup>.

The International Youth Foundation (IYF) in partnership with the African Center for Women, Information and Communication Technology (ACWICT) implemented a 24-month youth employability programme funded by the World Bank, entitled Ninaweza. The programme targeted young women living in the informal settlements around Nairobi from January 2011. The purpose of the intervention was to improve the employability and earning capacity of disadvantaged young women. The Ninaweza programme provided young women with technical training in Information Communication Technology (ICT) as well as life skills training and work experience through internships, and job placement support<sup>36</sup>. Results from the evaluation<sup>37</sup> of the programme show that:

- » beneficiaries who received ICT and life skills training were 14% more likely to obtain jobs than those in the control group
- » programme participants were also more likely to apply for and secure a job<sup>38</sup>

## Solution 7: Provide youth-friendly micro-financing interventions

In low- and middle-income countries, access to credit among the youth is daunting, as banking institutions consider them high risk. As a result, disadvantaged girls who would like to venture into business often lack the financing to grow their businesses over time<sup>39</sup>. Findings from evaluation of micro-financing interventions show that improving access to youth-friendly loans can be a catalyst for growth and employment for marginalised and unemployed youth<sup>40</sup>. For example, the YES – JUMP<sup>41</sup> pilot programme implemented in Kenya and Zimbabwe from 2009 to 2012 supported financing for youth by building the capacity of micro-finance institutions such as youth-led saving and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) to offer financial services to young entrepreneurs. The programme facilitated SACCOs to provide an enabling financing environment that allowed youth members to make decisions on major issues such as loan interest rates, repayment periods and collateral to make loans more accessible to young entrepreneurs. Evaluation findings show that the YES – JUMP programme created a total of 2,956 job opportunities (53.6% of the new employees being women) against the project target of 2,000 jobs in both countries<sup>42</sup>.

## Solution 8: Support girls in taking up courses in non-saturated fields with high demand for labour

Trends in selection of training courses show that when given a choice, boys and men overwhelmingly prefer traditionally male-dominated courses such as motor-vehicle mechanics and engineering, whereas girls and women almost exclusively choose traditionally female-dominated courses such as hairdressing and hospitality. Such pervasive and gendered occupational segmentation often disadvantages girls as they end up in oversaturated sectors with fewer opportunities for employment<sup>43</sup>, given that the private sector often demands skills for IT, engineering and other technical fields<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> Fox and Kaul (2018) The evidence is in: How should youth employment programs in low-income countries be designed? Washington DC: USAID.

<sup>35</sup> Population Council (2018)

<sup>36</sup> Azevedo et al. (2013)

<sup>37</sup> Using an RCT design with participants randomly assigned to one of three groups: Treatment 1: received training in ICT and life skills, along with on-the-job experience through internships and job placement; Treatment 2: received ICT training and on-the-job experience through internships and job placement; Treatment 3: control group, received none of the interventions.

<sup>38</sup> Azevedo et al. (2013)

<sup>39</sup> UNICEF et al. (2020)

<sup>40</sup> International Labour Organization (2012)

<sup>41</sup> Youth employment support: jobs for unemployed marginalized young people

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Hicks et al. 2011

<sup>44</sup> UNICEF (2019b)

Emerging evidence shows that proactive efforts to attract disadvantaged girls to livelihoods in which they are underrepresented – such as the technology, fire service, security and construction sectors – can enhance their chances of securing employment. In Kenya, for example, the Samsung Real Dreams programme supported empowerment of young, disadvantaged women in the informal settlements of Nairobi through training on the use of ICT tools for social, economic and political advancement. The pilot phase evaluation findings show that six months after completion of the programme, 77% of the beneficiaries had secured jobs, while 10% were pursuing further studies. Among those that were working, 95% had started their job less than six months prior to the evaluation, hence most likely as a result of the newly acquired skills<sup>45</sup>.

### **Solution 9: Provide relevant labour market information**

Disadvantaged girls typically have limited access to knowledge, labour market information and professional networks. This is compounded by lower education levels, higher illiteracy rates and confinement in rural areas which often limits their access to information about employment and job opportunities. More limited social networks also limit girls' ability to succeed in the labour market<sup>46</sup>.

Providing relevant labour market information has been found effective in challenging misconceptions about income prospects in specific occupations as well as existing alternative pathways. In Kenya, provision of labour market information under a programme that provided vocational training vouchers to disadvantaged youth registered positive outcomes on the training choices of participants. This applied specifically to young women who were more likely to choose training in traditionally male occupational areas after they had been informed that these were generally better paying in the labour market<sup>47</sup>. Existing literature also suggests that investing in enterprises that link young women to employment opportunities in their local area holds promise in helping young, disadvantaged women secure work that they would otherwise struggle to find directly<sup>48</sup>.

### **Solution 10: Integrate workforce readiness and entrepreneurship training into the school curriculum**

Targeted interventions that provide learners with opportunities to learn and practise entrepreneurship and transferable skills necessary to compete in the formal labour market have shown promise in reducing youth unemployment<sup>49</sup>. The Educate! programme, for example, builds on the ILO's well-tested Know About Business (KAB)<sup>50</sup> programme and is aimed at fostering entrepreneurship and transferable skills needed for work. The programme is structured on three key pillars:

- » entrepreneurship and leadership course: a 35-lesson course aimed at developing socially responsible leadership skills and entrepreneurship skills
- » mentorship: one-to-one student mentorship focusing on personal development
- » student business development clubs which aim to help learners design income-generating projects<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> Franz (2014)

<sup>46</sup> UNICEF et al. (2020)

<sup>47</sup> Franz (2014)

<sup>48</sup> UNICEF et al. (2020)

<sup>49</sup> UNICEF (2019b)

<sup>50</sup> [https://www.itcilo.org/courses/know-about-business#:~:text=Know%20About%20Business%20\(KAB\)%20is,secondary%20and%20higher%20education%20institutions](https://www.itcilo.org/courses/know-about-business#:~:text=Know%20About%20Business%20(KAB)%20is,secondary%20and%20higher%20education%20institutions)

<sup>51</sup> Carney et al. (2019)



A quasi-experimental evaluation of the Educate! Programme was conducted from 2015 to 2017 to better understand its impact. Results from the evaluation show that:

- » income levels among girls in the intervention group increased by 244% from a base of USD 32.43
- » the likelihood of girls in the intervention group finding employment increased by 113% from a base of 9%
- » 91% of girls in the intervention group were likely to own a business, compared with 15% in the control group<sup>52</sup>.

### **The provision of childcare once in employment – a further consideration**

Alongside the integration of the 10 solutions discussed above, girls may be less likely to believe in their ability to transition to work, if childcare is not available once they are employed. This is particularly more pronounced in low-resource contexts where young women workers often shoulder more childcare responsibilities than men due to persistent gender norms<sup>53</sup>. Without access to high-quality childcare services, female workers who are largely concentrated in the informal economy risk losing out on much-needed income by reducing their hours of work, or they may shift into more vulnerable and low-paid forms of self-employment<sup>54</sup>.

There is evidence showing that provision of affordable centre-based early child care (ECC) can be an effective strategy in reducing gender inequalities in labour force participation. In Kenya, Clark et al. (2017) conducted a randomised control evaluation to assess the impact of provision of vouchers for subsidised centre-based care on maternal employment, number of hours worked and maternal income. The day care centres covered by the programme were randomly assigned into three arms: control (C), voucher-only (V), or voucher-plus-quality (VQ). Both the V and VQ centres agreed to accept monthly vouchers from women assigned to their centres, for which they would be compensated directly by the project. Caregivers at the day care centres assigned to the VQ arm were given additional training on early childhood development and the centres were provided with materials such as mattresses, potties, toys and hand-washing stations<sup>55</sup>. Results from the evaluation of the programme show that young mothers who received vouchers for either V or VQ day care centres<sup>56</sup>:

- » were, on average, 8.5 percentage points more likely to be employed compared with mothers who did not receive a voucher (57.4% vs. 48.9%, respectively).
- » were four percentage points more likely to become employed if they were unemployed, and were also five percentage points less likely to become unemployed if they were already employed, compared with mothers in the control group<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> Salam et al. (2016)

<sup>53</sup> International Labour Organization (2018)

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Clark et al. (2017)

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

# Section 3

## Lessons for policy-makers

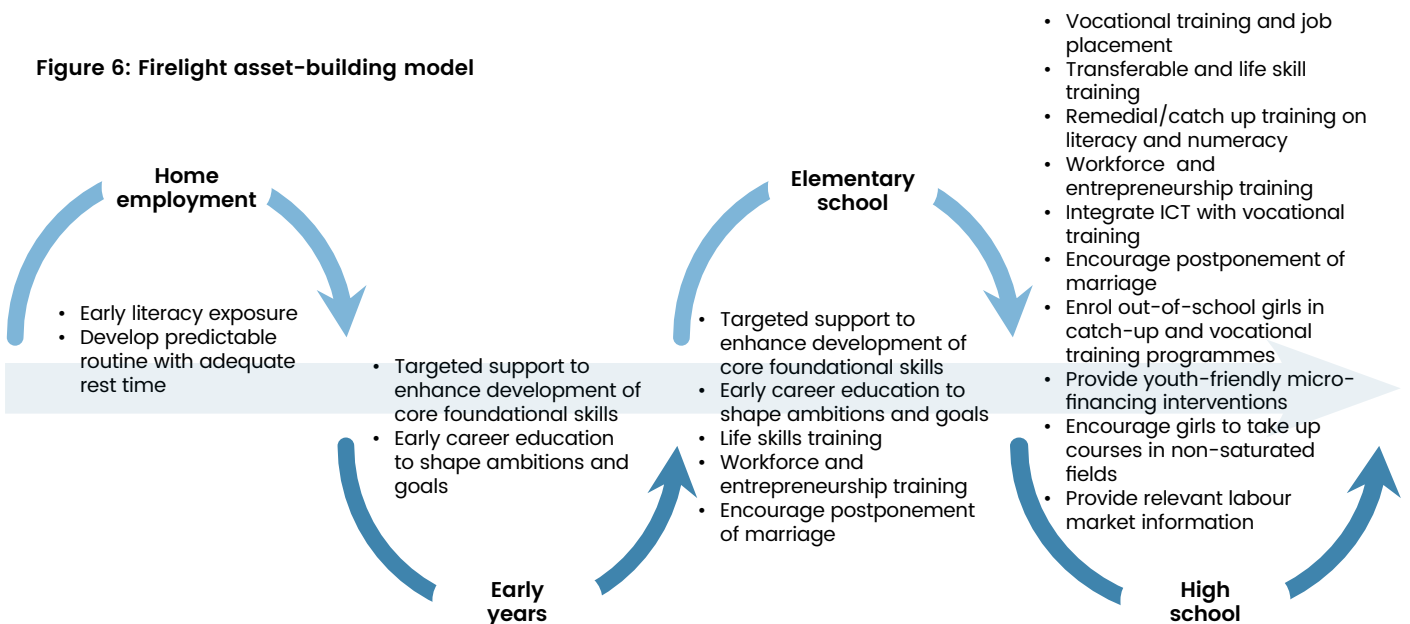
Owing to the nature of individual programme commissioning, funding and development, it can be all too easy for government policy and reform to become a disconnected collection of separate approaches. At the same time, there may be some elements of an education system that require deeper and broader strengthening than others. This is true for all areas of government policy but perhaps none more so than in the area of transition. Barriers that are not addressed can easily derail the transition process in later stages, even for girls who experience progress early in the process.

This review points to and reinforces the importance of a multifaceted and integrated approach to the provision of support for girls at each stage in their transition from home to school and school to work. Figure 5 proposes a map for the key areas that should be audited and targeted at each point within such an integrated approach. Overall, the importance of basic education as the foundation for transition to higher education or work cannot be overemphasised. From the early years, schools bear the cardinal responsibility of supporting development of foundational skills, behaviours and dispositions for their pupils as they transition to the next levels. In particular, early literacy and numeracy skills development should be given more attention, as they affect later success in school and beyond.

Targeted support to ensure school retention and completion for marginalised girls is equally important in enhancing effective transitions. In low-resource settings where early childbearing is still common, encouraging postponement of marriage can enhance the likelihood of development of core skills needed for transition. In contexts where disadvantaged girls drop out of school or are unable to develop foundational skills, literacy and numeracy catch-up programs should be integrated into vocational and life skills training, offering a second chance to develop the core skills.

Entrepreneurship training similarly holds promise for facilitating transitions, considering that not all girls who complete primary and secondary school progress to higher education. The ever-shrinking employment opportunities caused by shocks in the world's education systems have also created the need to prepare disadvantaged girls for self-employment by nurturing entrepreneurship from an early age while in school. This can be achieved by integrating entrepreneurship training into the school curriculum and giving learners practical opportunities to innovate and practise business skills.

**Figure 6: Firelight asset-building model**



In summary, policy-makers should take into consideration that:

- » Transition is a complex process and needs support at many levels and at different points in time. Although it may be tempting for government to focus on single isolated interventions there needs to be a coherent strategy and integration of activities.
- » As foundational skills are key enablers of transition to work and further education, more attention should be paid to early reading and mathematics, and where learners are unable to develop the skills, remedial programmes should be offered.
- » Gender norms and their influence can confine girls' selection of courses to a few saturated fields with limited opportunities for employment. There is a need for career counselling to challenge supply-side biases by encouraging girls to pursue male-dominated fields with high demand for labour.
- » Given the dynamic nature of the job market, vocational skills training should be informed by labour market information and forecasts to ensure girls pursue courses with high demand for labour.
- » Empowerment interventions can be more effective when the private sector is involved in development and validation of the curriculum to ensure alignment of training with labour market needs.





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