

 Education Innovation · Sub-Saharan Africa

Leapfrogging the Gap

Transforming Girls' Education in Africa — skipping outdated systems and jumping straight to modern, effective approaches.

Explore the Story 



The Scale of the Challenge

Global education faces a crisis — and the most marginalized children are falling furthest behind.

100_{yr}

Learning Gap

At the current pace, it will take a century for the most marginalized children to reach the learning levels of today's wealthiest students.

800_M

Youth at Risk

By 2030, 800 million young people may lack the basic skills needed for the modern workforce and civic participation.

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Access ≠ Learning

The issue isn't just access to school — it's access to quality learning: critical thinking, communication, and creativity.

THE CONCEPT

What is Leapfrogging?

Leapfrogging means **skipping outdated systems** and jumping straight to modern, effective approaches — just like countries that skipped landlines and moved directly to mobile phones.

In education, it focuses on teaching **adaptive 21st-century skills**, using technology to personalize learning, and empowering communities to help deliver education.

"Leapfrogging isn't about catching up; it's about creating a faster, smarter path to prepare all students for the future."



Legacy Approach

Build landline infrastructure first, then slowly expand



Leapfrog

Skip straight to mobile — reaching everyone faster



In Education

Skip rote memorization → jump to 21st-century skills

How We Chose Our Topic

Our topic emerged from researching the Sub-Saharan African section of the Brookings catalog. We found that girls across the region face multiple, compounding barriers to gaining a quality education.

The struggle of girls in this region compelled us to investigate the barriers and innovations involved with the girls in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Figure 1: Barriers to Education Photo



From A teacher interacts with students during a phonics lesson at the Nal'uxolo Primary School in Cape Town, South Africa, by Gates Foundation, 2025-26, Gates Foundation <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/our-work/programs/global-growth-and-opportunity/global-education-program>. 2025

Barriers & Innovations

Barriers: The barriers include forced marriage, poverty, health struggles, and systemic gender inequality.

Innovations: The Global Catalog of Education Innovations highlights a range of impactful initiatives across the region that directly empower girls to overcome these struggles and succeed.

REAP 2

The Rwandan Girls' Education and Advancement Programme 2 (REAP 2) is a targeted education-and-transition initiative.

It is specifically aimed at enhancing school results and securing better future prospects for underprivileged, marginalized girls living in rural areas, especially within the Nyaruguru District.

Funding & Support: REAP 2 is funded under the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC-T), a UK-aid funded challenge fund managed by the Department for International Development (DFID).

Achievements & Support Systems

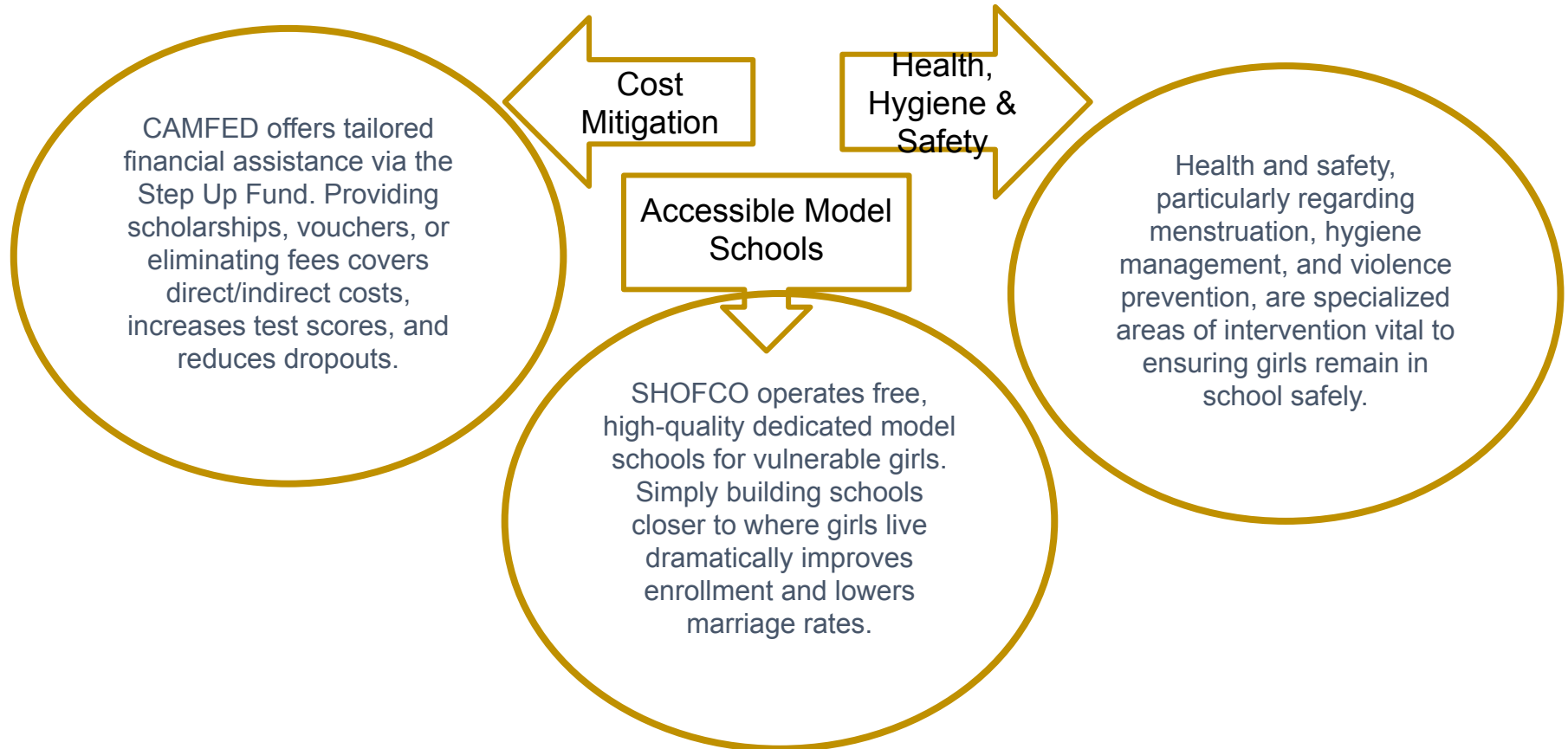
Achievements: Achieved significant success in improving girls' education by increasing overall school attendance and notably enhancing learning outcomes.

Created safer, more supportive school environments, successfully strengthened community involvement, and promoted girls' personal health and confidence.

Support Systems: Trained teachers in modern, gender-sensitive methods and provided after-school study groups to ensure academic success.

Improved critical menstrual hygiene facilities and successfully engaged parents and local communities to champion girls' education.

Key Themes Across Cases





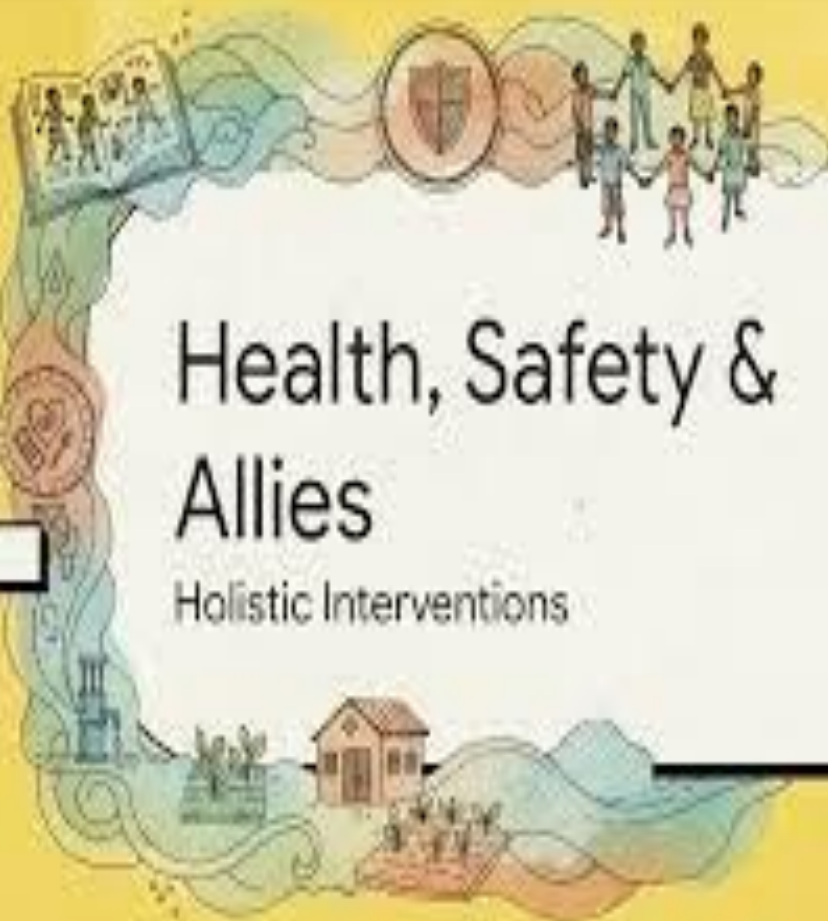
Improving girls' education isn't just about access. It's about creating a holistic, supportive, and inclusive system where every girl has the tools, support, and opportunity to thrive.

— FROM THE NARRATION

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Health, Safety & Allies

Holistic Interventions



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RESEARCHERS

The Team Behind the Discovery

Aimie McKenzie-Smith, Elizabeth Elie, and Kareen

Ogunmakinwa explored the Brookings Global Catalog of Educational Innovations to surface the growing movement of organizations breaking barriers for girls across sub-Saharan Africa — turning research into a story of real, lasting change.

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Aimie McKenzie-Smith

E

Elizabeth Elie

K

Kareen Ogunmakinwa

References

Winthrop, R., Barton, A., and McGivney, E. (2018). *Leapfrogging inequality: Remaking education to help young people thrive*.

Washington DC: Brookings Institute. (Ebook available free at <https://www.brookings.edu/book/leapfrogging-inequality-2/>)

Gates Foundation. (2025) *A teacher interacts with students during a phonics lesson at the Nal'uxolo Primary School in Cape Town, South Africa*, by Gates Foundation, 2025-26, Gates Foundation

<https://www.gatesfoundation.org/our-work/programs/global-growth-and-opportunity/global-education-program>.