RESEARCH BRIEF

Improving Girls' Access and Learning Outcomes in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Evidence from a DFID-Funded Randomized Control Trial of VAS-Y Fille!

BACKGROUND

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has the potential to become a rising economy, yet it is held back by an education system plagued by chronic deficiencies. The DRC's current levels of public education spending are amongst the lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa. The gains in enrollment at the national level over the last fifteen years have not been uniform; at least 7 million children aged 6-17 were excluded from education in 2017/2018, many in the conflict-affected eastern DRC. Furthermore, the country suffers from low levels of completion, weak learning outcomes and marked gender inequalities. Dropout is higher for girls for all grades and increases strongly between the end of primary and the beginning of secondary school: on average 40% of girls enrolled in primary school drop out before completion of the primary cycle, a figure that is 20% higher than that for boys. Only about 12 percent of girls complete secondary education.

There are numerous and interconnected barriers to accessing quality education in the DRC.

Economic barriers. Probably the most common driver of exclusion from education in the DRC is financial hardship. Families' low income leads to their limited ability to pay school fees. The opportunity cost of foregone child labor also makes a difference to low-income households. Child labor takes many different forms, and although it does not prevent access to education per se, it reduces the time available for reading or homework, and may hinder students' regular school attendance, negatively affecting learning.

Crisis and displacement. The DRC is experiencing one of the world's most complex humanitarian crises, in which 7.3 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Both the lack of basic social services and persistent conflict have led to the internal displacement of a cumulative 3.8 million people, the highest number of internally displaced people in Africa (OCHA). Displacement has become one of the most significant drivers of out-of-school status, since it causes loss of income, increases uncertainty and makes schools harder to access.

Low levels of education amongst mothers and inter-generational perpetuation of gender inequalities. There are clear inequalities to the disadvantage of girls at both primary and secondary level, and they tend to become more acute in rural areas. Disparities in enrollment between provinces can be mainly explained by average household income, the degree of urbanization of the province and the population of uneducated adult women. Discrimination against girls in education spending is particularly acute when the mother has no education at all[1].

Early marriage and pregnancy. About 40 percent of girls (as opposed to 20 percent of boys) who enter primary school do not reach the end of the primary cycle[2]. In secondary school, early marriage and pregnancies may partly explain the higher rate of dropout, but it is hard to disentangle the contribution of early marriage on dropout from the contribution of income poverty or other factors correlated with early marriage.

Low teacher capacity. The DRC has been historically a low investor in education: in 2013, the DRC invested just 2.45 percent of GDP on education, less than half of the Sub-Saharan average.[3] Low budgetary allocations to education result in the inability of the public sector to attract, train and retain skilled teachers. Teachers in the DRC typically lack training in both their disciplines and in pedagogy, and receive extremely low wages—often between 100 and 150 USD per month—with many lacking motivation and facing strong incentives to leave their jobs for more lucrative occupations.

VAS-YFille!

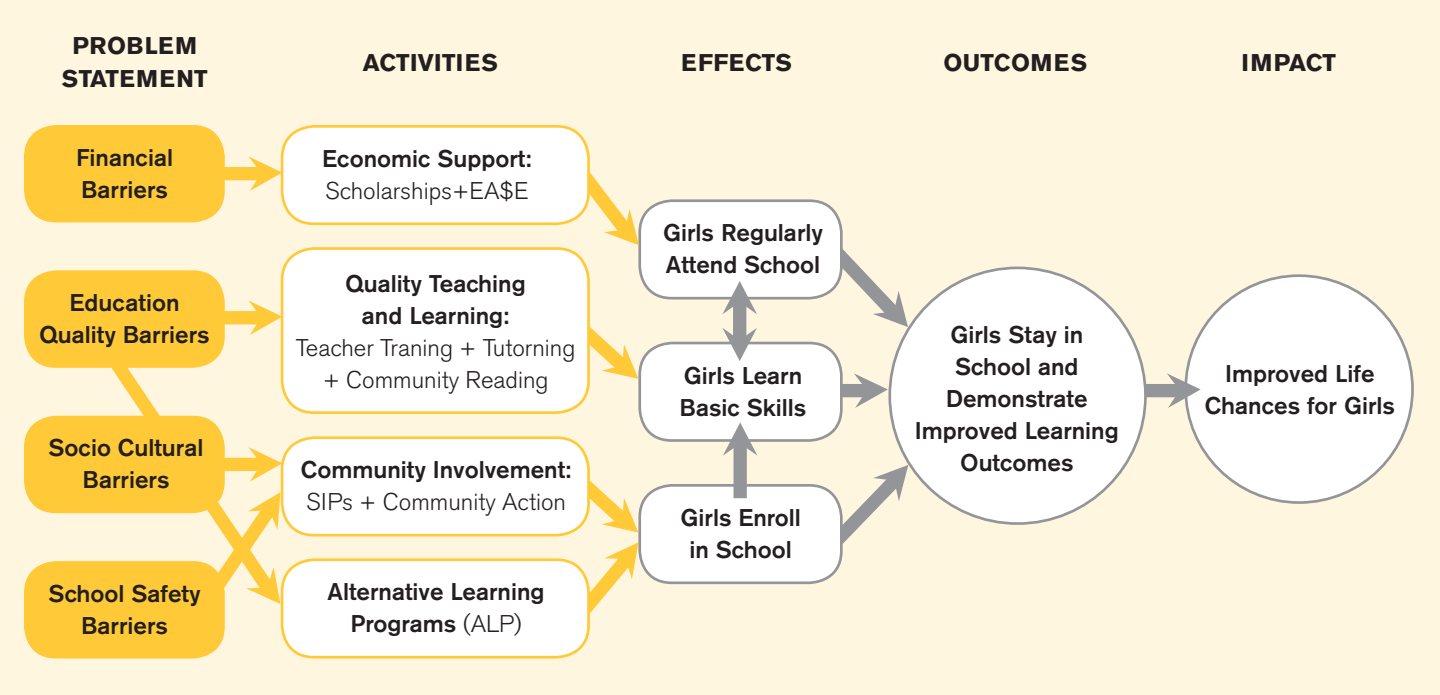
To respond to the economic, social and educational barriers that have kept many poor rural Congolese girls from school, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), in consortium with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Save the Children International (SCI), received funding from the UK Department for International Development's (DFID) Girls' Education Challenge Fund (GEC) to implement the *Valorisation de la Scolarisation de la Fille* (VAS-Y Fille!) project in 400 schools of five provinces in the DRC from 2013-2017. The project's goal was to ensure that 66,303 marginalized girls across the targeted provinces stay in school and that 44,662 girls demonstrate improved learning outcomes.

VAS-Y Fille! 'aimed to address the main obstacles' to girl's education in the DRC through four key project outputs: (i) increased parental financial capacity to support girls to succeed in and complete primary school; (ii) improved quality of education in schools; (iii) increased community involvement to ensure girls' access to quality, safe education; and (iv) increased access to alternative learning opportunities for over-age, out-of-school girls.

VAS-Y Fille! designed and implemented a series of interventions to address the main barriers to girls' education in the DRC to ensure that girls in formal schools and out-of-school girls had access to quality education opportunities and improve their numeracy and literacy learning outcomes.

1. VAS-Y Fille! developed three interventions to target **In-School Girls:**

   - **School-level intervention:** VAS-Y Fille! invested heavily (approximately 3.4 M USD) in improving the quality of education provided in formal schools. The program provided professional development opportunities to teachers based on global best practices and delivered training modules approved by the Ministry of Education on teaching reading, writing and mathematics, as well as gender-sensitive pedagogy. To support teachers in rural areas—who often had never been formally trained—the project supported "pedagogical exchange forums" that strengthened their capacities by providing them an opportunity to share experiences and lessons learned with colleagues. VAS-Y Fille! also provided school grants to parent-teachers associations to develop school improvement projects that responded to girls' safety needs in and around schools, such as construction of separate latrines, and conducted information campaigns to promote on-time enrolment, championing the importance of education for boys and girls and combating socio-cultural barriers to girls' education.



- **Scholarships:** VAS-Y Fille! invested about 10.5 M USD to provide scholarships, conditional on attendance, for over 75,000 girls so they could pay for school fees, uniforms and textbooks. While the scholarships were initially given to according to financial need, starting in 2015 all girls in grades 5 and 6 of intervention schools received scholarships.

- **Tutoring sessions:** VAS-Y Fille! invested 3.9 million USD to provide tutoring services for approximately 129,000 girls in grade 3-6, who benefited from 16 hours of additional instruction per week so they could improve their performance in reading and math. The program trained approximately 7000 tutors who reached at least 4th or 5th grade of education, provided them with relevant materials and paid them a stipend to hold tutoring sessions two or three times per week after regular classes. Tutoring targeted children in the bottom 50 percent of the class according to academic performance, measured through standardized tests.

2. VAS-Y Fille! invested 5.1 M USD to create **Accelerated Learning Programs (ALP) for Out-of-School (OOS) Girls** so they could have access to quality non-formal education opportunities. VAS-Y Fille! worked with local civil society organizations to provide free access to non-formal learning opportunities for marginalized OOS girls who had never enrolled in school or have had their education interrupted. The project created 29 ALP centers that enrolled about 2500 students each every year, for a total of 24,600 formerly out-of-school children (52% girls), who attended a **three-year course** that represented a government-accredited "compressed" version of the primary school curriculum, designedto prepare 9-15 year old children to take the national end-of-primary exam (ENAFEP), which, if passed, would allow them to enrol into secondary school. Supporting a formerly out-of-school child to complete a three-year-long ALP cost between 220 and 290 USD per child, in line with costs associated to cover school fees over the six-year-long primary cycle of the formal education system.

3. VAS-Y Fille! created **EA$E** to help **caregivers and community members** increase their households' financial capacity and improve their attitudes towards girls' education. The program supported 787 groups across 5 provinces with 20-25 participants in each group for a total of 21,099 members. EA$E used a three-pronged approach:

   a. Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs): VSLAs provide a saving facility and affordable credit for borrowers, along with a return on their savings that exceed those provided by local banks or microfinance institutions. The VSLAs followed the model of Accumulating Savings and Credit Associations—ASCAs—in which members contribute savings at regular intervals to constitute a pool from which interest-bearing loans can be provided to members for a short duration. Initially the program targeted parents of scholarship recipients, and later all community members. At program closure approximately 800 VSLA groups were functioning across five provinces, for a total number of about 21,000 members, alongside 174 additional VSLA groups which formed spontaneously.

   b. Discussion groups for both parents: The series focuses on household financial well-being and budgeting, communication and negotiation skills. Themes related to gender roles, violence against women and socio-cultural norms towards girls were woven in sessions to shift negative attitudes and behaviors towards women and girls and increase allocation of financial resources to girls' education.

   c. Business Skills Training—*Competence, Entreprenariat pour la Formation de Enterprise* (CEFE): An action-oriented and participatory training which are designed to help EA$E members invest their money in income-generating activities. The groups were given technical and strategic insight as to how to identify and develop business opportunities, manage funds, administer and operate a small commerce.

RESEARCH, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

To evaluate the impact of VAS-Y Fille!, the University of Massachusetts in Amherst conducted a mixed-methods clustered randomized control trial (RCT)[4], using a stratified random sampling framework where school clusters within each Province were randomly assigned to receive treatment and the unselected clusters served as control. Researchers collected four waves of longitudinal data over a period of 3 years, using a protocol to replace girls who they were not able to track down after baseline. The project aimed to identify the impact that VAS-Y Fille! activities had on marginalized girl's reading and math outcomes, and document how the treatment activities worked and why.

Participants

For the quantitative study, researchers collected data from a randomly selected sample of 86 communities (43 treatment and 43 control) who had been randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. Within these communities, researchers collected data from girls who were attending school in treatment or control communities: A total of 3,434 3-6th grade in-school girls in 93 schools participated at baseline, 3,407 at annual, 3,590 at midline, and 3,677 at endline. Within the treatment schools, some girls received scholarships based on financial needs, some girls received tutoring based on academic needs, and some girls did not receive any of these supports, but still benefited from the school-level intervention that provided teachers with professional development opportunities and materials, and parent-teacher associations with grants to develop projects for school improvement. Researchers also collected data in the same treatment and control communities from a total of 410 out-of-school girls who joined 11 ALP centers at baseline, 412 at annual, 522 at midline, and 625 at endline. To provide a basis for comparison for girls in ALP centers, 162 out-of-school girls from the same intervention communities were assessed at Baseline, but not subsequently for ethical reasons. The majority of ALP girls only participated in one (64%) or two (30%) data collection waves—only 21 were present from baseline through endline.

For the qualitative study, fifteen intervention communities were selected. Three teams (one in each area, including Equateur, Kasai Orientale and Katanga) visited each area for two days to collect data at the community and school. A total of 30 focus groups with children were organized (2 in each school; with an average of 6 children per focus group, for a total of 200 children of which 153 were female). Additionally, smaller focus groups and interviews were organized for VSLA members, COPA members, school directors and teachers, ALP attendees, as well as parents and caregivers. A total of 115 were interviewed (individually or in a focus group setting) in Equateur; 132 in Kasai Orientale; 144 in Katanga; with 228 female respondents and 163 male).

Instruments

- Background information questionnaires: School demographic data was collected through surveys administered to school directors, community demographic data was collected through household surveys administered orally to caregivers and children's demographic data was collected through surveys administered orally to girls.
- EGRA: Girls' reading skills were assessed using the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA; RTI International, 2009) which included five subscales which were equated, converted to percent correct scores and weighted: letter recognition (20%), invented word reading (15%), oral reading fluency (45%) and reading comprehension (10%) and oral reading comprehension (10%).
- EGMA: Girl's math skills were assessed using the Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA, Reubens & Kline, 2009), using five subsections for each assessment. Raw subsection scores were equated, converted to percent-correct scores and weighed.
- Protocols for interviews and focus groups: Qualitative data were collected through instruments that contained open-ended questions that aimed to explore the scale and type of change that had occurred in targeted communities, and to explore exposure to project activities, and changes in awareness and attitudes of caregivers.

Process

All instruments were translated from French into local languages, including Swahili, Lingala and Tshiluba. The quantitative data were collected by temporary staff hired, managed, trained, and supervised by the IRC. The qualitative data were collected by a team that operated independently to mitigate bias and ensure participants' freedom of expression. Four waves of data collection were collected over a period of 3 years. A third party entered the data and researchers from the University of Massachusetts conducted all of the analysis.

Analytic Strategy

To identify the overall impact of VAS-Y Fille! on girls' literacy and numeracy achievement, researchers used difference-in-difference cross-sectional models for the in-school and out-of-school samples, to identify the changes, from baseline to midline, annual, and endline, that can be causally attributed to the program. The models accounted for existing baseline differences between the treatment and control groups and for unobservable national trends. To obtain an estimate of the effects of the different treatments provided by VAS-Y Fille! on the learning outcomes of the in-school girls' sample, researchers used multi-level regression models with covariates that controlled for the effects of different VAS-Y Fille! treatments (school-level intervention, scholarships and tutoring) as well as for other observable characteristics that could affect girls' outcomes. Finally, to explore how the intervention worked, researchers coded data from focus groups and interviews in NVivo, a qualitative research software platform, using preexisting categories of analysis and letting new categories emerge from the data.

RESULTS BY PROGRAM COMPONENT

1. What impact did VAS-Y Fille! have on in-school girls'literacy and numeracy skills?

The results of the impact evaluation show that VAS-Y Fille! caused in-school girls to significantly improve their reading and math standardized scores. From baseline to end-line[5], VAS-Y Fille! beneficiaries improved their estimated average EGRA scores by 11 points (See Figure 2) and their estimated average EGMA scores by about 7 points (See Figure 3), relative to the increase they would have seen had they not received the treatment. These results reflect the effect of VAS-Y Fille! as a packet for in-school girls when compared to girls in schools who did not benefit from VAS-Y Fille!, but without specifying differences in the effects that different interventions provided by VAS-Y Fille! had on girls who benefited from specific aspects of the program (e.g. teacher trainings and materials, scholarships and tutoring).

Figure 2. Mean EGRA Scores by Treatment Status

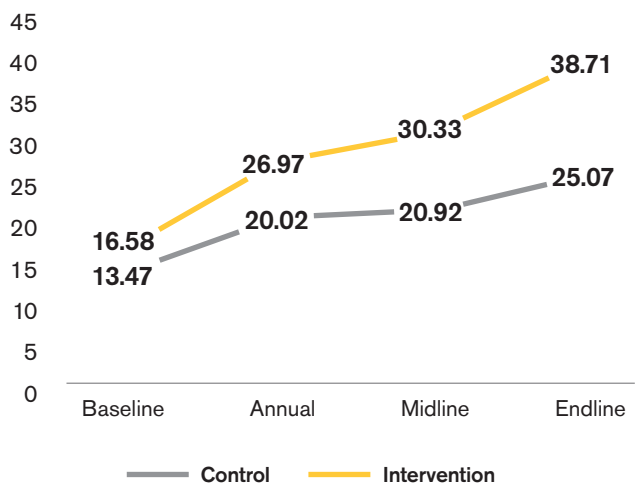
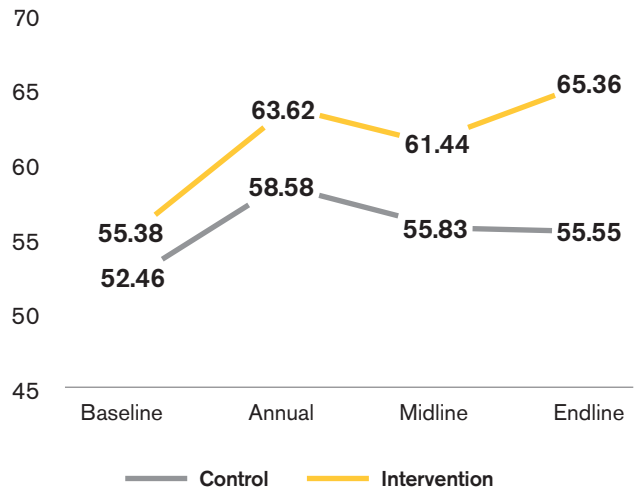


Figure 3. Mean EGMA Scores by Treatment Status



2. How did the impact of VAS-Y Fille! vary for students who only benefited from the school level intervention (teacher trainings, materials and school grants) vs. those who also benefited from scholarship and/or tutoring? What worked and why?

To disentangle the effects of different interventions received by in-school girls, researchers conducted multi-level models that included covariates for the different treatment: 1) No treatment, 2) school improvement through PD for teachers, provision of teaching materials and school grants, 3) scholarships, and 4) tutoring. Given that randomization took place at the school level, and that within treatment schools girls were not randomly assigned to tutoring and scholarships, but received the treatment based on financial or academic needs, estimates for these individual-level interventions need to be interpreted with caution. Results show that, when compared to girls in non-treatment schools, girls in treatment schools who benefited from school-level treatment supports but who did not receive tutoring or scholarships showed positive and statistically significant learning gains in literacy and numeracy. Additionally, we observe that both scholarships and tutoring alone had positive effects on EGRA scores, but tutoring had the greatest impact. Specifically, we observed that, on average:

- Girls in treatment schools whose teachers benefited from the provision of teaching materials and teacher trainings, but who did not receive any individual supports such as tutoring or scholarships, obtained 6.53 more points in EGRA ($p<.0001$) and 2.51 more points on EGMA ($p=.05$) that girls in non-treatment schools.
- Girls in intervention schools who benefited from scholarships obtained 10.38 more points in EGRA ($p<.09$) and 3.10 more points in EGMA (not statistically significant) than girls in treatment schools who did not receive scholarships,
- Girls in intervention schools who received tutoring obtained 14.73 more points in EGRA ($p<.0001$) and 10.04 more points in EGMA ($p<.001$) than girls who did not receive tutoring,
- Girls in intervention schools who received both scholarships and tutoring obtained 13.15 more points in EGRA ($p=.07$) and 4.76 more points in EGMA ($p<.01$) than girls who did not receive these supports.

A big obstacle for learning not addressed by the project is that students speak a different language at home than the French spoken at school and it is therefore hard for them to improve their levels of literacy and math before they obtain better mastery in French. Despite the valuable teacher trainings in reading, writing, math and a gender sensitive pedagogy, teachers had extremely low levels of preparation and were hardly literate themselves. Data from interviews show that teachers in treatment schools were better able to create friendly and equitable environments for girls, but at endline, there were still cases of corporal punishment and gender-based violence in schools.

Data from qualitative interviews indicated that scholarships may have improved girls' learning by improving school attendance because it prevented girls from being sent away from school because of non-payment of school fees. But in spite of the positive impact on learning, provision of scholarships to selected 5th and 6th grade girls had a disruptive effect in some schools. An increase of violence was recorded towards scholarship recipients on behalf of children excluded from financial support. These children—mostly boys of the same age bracket and girls found to be ineligible for support by the program—felt their fellow students were unjustly helped out, and this perceived injustice triggered an increase in violence.

Data from interviews suggest that tutoring sessions were successful because they enabled underperforming students to devote more time to learning, the materials developed jointly with the Ministry of Education proved relevant; and the program reduced students' anxieties and fears of teachers, as it built rapport between pupils and educators. Additionally, tutoring generated positive spillover effects because tutors were teachers employed in the formal system who received training and were provided with better teaching materials, which would then be re-used in the classroom when tutors act in their capacity of regular teachers. Finally, the extra income paid by VAS-Y Fille! to teachers reduced incentives to seek other forms of employment, thus facilitating retention while giving teachers additional motivation to perform. In turn, provision of more teaching hours with better quality of teaching encouraged parents to keep children in school: some parents' associations volunteered to pay for tutoring when they learned that VAS-Y Fille!—supported tutoring was about to be phased out.

3. What is the effect of VAS-Y Fille! 's ALPs for out-of-school girls? What worked and why?

The VAS-Y Fille! evaluation found positive impacts of ALPs on students' literacy and numeracy learning outcomes. EGMA scores doubled on average, while EGRA scored increased as much as five times. These large impacts were calculated assuming continued out-of-school status as a counterfactual, hence the large estimated size of impacts should not come as a surprise. The differential size of impacts between reading and mathematics skills—impacts on EGRA are six times larger than impacts on EGMA—confirms the difficulty of building solid teaching skills in mathematics compared to French.

Considering data from all girls who were present at least for one year, results indicate a steady increase in reading performance from baseline through midline, and a pronounced increase from midline to endline. This trend is somewhat different for math performance, where there was slight drop in scores across all levels between annual and midline, followed by a notable increase from midline to endline. Based on results from difference-in-difference analysis, girls who attended an ALP center at least from midline to endline scored approximately 15 percentage points higher on the EGRA ($p < 0.001$) and 10 percentage points higher on the EGMA ($p < 0.001$) compared to the girls who remained out of school. Note that research results may be overestimating effects for two reasons: First, researchers only collected baseline data for the control group for ethical reason, and scores were assumed to remain the same throughout, due to the lack of formal instruction, but it is possible that girls in the control group had in fact improved their learning. Second, attrition was high, and the girls who dropped out of the program are likely to be more marginalized than those who stayed. Even though researchers used replacement protocols, impacts for the original sample are likely to be lower than impacts for the girls that remained and their substitutes of those who left.

Approximately 80 percent of ALP students who took the ENAFEP were successful—a significant success in terms of equity, since the target group consists of vulnerable and formerly out-of-school children. Nonetheless, a challenge connected with ALPs is ensuring that the appropriate sub-group of children will benefit from it—namely, children who have been out of education for a certain time. Data from some interviews indicated that poor households saw in ALP centers a "shortcut" to free-of-charge completion of the primary cycle, which functioned as an incentive to switch their children from the formal system to ALP.

Figure 4. Out-of-School Girls: Mean EGRA Scores by Treatment Status

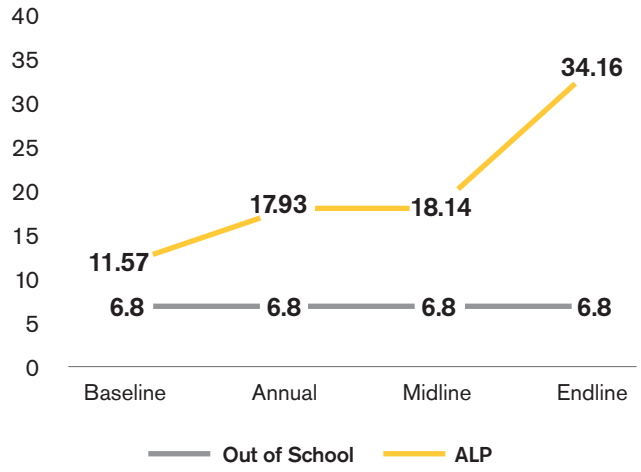
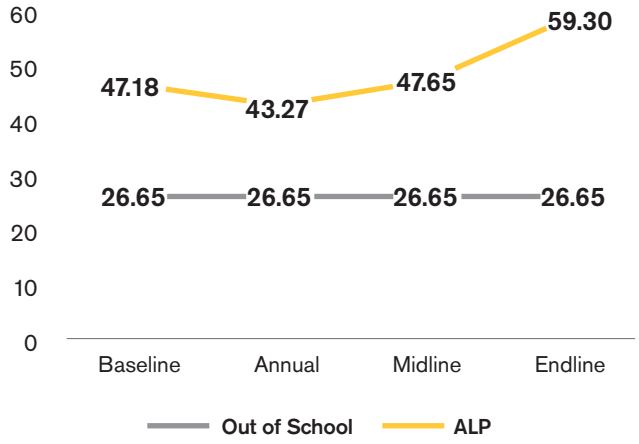


Figure 5. Out-of-School Girls: Mean EGRA Scores by Treatment Status



4. How did EA$E contribute to support girl's Education?

VAS-Y Fille! did not include an experiment or quasi-experiment to specifically evaluate the causal impact of EA$E on girls´ education outcomes. However, the IRC conducted an operational mixed-methods study to understand how EA$E may have affected the livelihoods of members and the ways in which it contributed to increase their financial capacity and ability to support girls' education[6]. In January of 2016, researchers administered a survey to 551 participants (370 women and 181 men) in 70 randomly selected VSLA in 5 provinces, and conducted focus groups and interviews with 150 participants in 18 VSLA groups. The findings of the study suggest that:

- EA$E responded to caregivers' and community members' needs to access financial services. Before the program, 42% of participants had never saved money, while 47% had never taken any loans. All participants engaged in saving, and 91% took loans from the VSLA.
- Approximately 68% of participants invested money from loans in microbusinesses and 62% in school fees. Similarly, 52% used money from the share-out to invest in business and 51% to pay school fees. To a lesser degree, participants used loans to cover health expenses (13%) and improve their household's food security (14%). 59% of participants stated they had experienced a financial emergency, and 63% used money from the VSLA groups to recover from the shock without having to sell their assets.
- EA$E appeared to have helped participants keep girls in school through two ways: 1) Using money from VSLA loans and the share-out to pay for school fees, and 2) Using money from VSLA loans and share outs to invest in businesses opportunities identified through CEFE trainings, which in turn, increased their financial capacity to cover the costs of school. Participants who invested money from loans and share-outs in business activities were better able to enrol, keep and re-enrol children in school the next year than participants who used the money to directly pay for school fees, or those who used it to cover health expenses and improve food security. Participants who engaged in collective enterprises were more successful at increasing their income—and consequently also better able to cover the costs of schooling—than those who invested funds in individual initiatives.
- In addition to supporting girls' learning outcomes by removing financial barriers to education, EA$E provided a valuable entry point for awareness campaigns, cooperation and trust-building among community members. Participants reported that the discussion groups improved communication between mother-father and parents-children, and created better family dynamics because family members started engaging in joint decision making and financial planning, and felt encouraged to adopt less traditional roles within the household.

Note that given the lack of a control group, the findings from this operational study are strictly descriptive and observational, and are not intended to establish causal relationships.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- VAS-Y Fille! caused in-school girls to improve their average EGRA scores by 11 points and their average EGMA scores by about 7 points, relative to the increase they would have seen had they not been part of a treatment school. Below, we see estimates for each type of treatment:
  - The school-level intervention (teacher trainings, materials and school improvement grants) led to significant literacy and numeracy gains for in-school girls. Qualitative data suggest that teacher trainings improved teachers' competencies and ability to create more friendly and equitable environment, which contributed to improve learning gains. And yet, teachers' extremely low levels of education and literacy continued to be perceived by stakeholders as an obstacle to girl's education, as teachers struggled to teach French as a second language and to provide adequate support for student with different needs.
  - Tutoring raised girls' EGRA scores by approximately 15 points, and their numeracy EGMA scores by approximately 10 points, which made it the single most effective driver of learning for underperforming in-school students. Costing less than a fifth on an individual basis, tutoring was twice as effective as scholarships in increasing learning outcomes in literacy (EGRA) scores, and had a large positive effect on math (EGMA) tests scores, whereas scholarships did not have a significant effect on numeracy skills. Data from interviews suggest that, in addition to increasing the number of instruction hours for students, tutoring may have been effective because it improved the quality of the student-teacher relationships in the classrooms.
  - Scholarships raised girls' reading scores by approximately 10 points, but did not have a significant effect on their numeracy skills. Data from interviews suggest that scholarships increased school attendance for children who otherwise would have been sent away home for being unable to pay school fees.
- At a cost in the region of 210-290 USD per child, ALPs represent a cost-effective opportunity to provide OOS children with access to quality education from which they have been excluded, as they were observed to double EGMA scores on average and increase EGRA scores as much as five times. An unintended effect of ALPs is that they can provide an incentive for poor families to switch their children from formal schools to ALPs.
- The VSLAs filled a gap in provision of financial services and the CEFE groups a gap in entrepreneurship trainings and both components were universally praised. There is clear evidence that VSLA and CEFE are associated with members' increased capacity to support the education of both girls and boys (as well as other outcomes such as food security, ability to cover health expenses and recover from unexpected shocks), but the available data does not allow for the identification of the causal effects on education expenditure or changes in enrolment or attendance. Data from interviews suggest that support to improvement of income generating opportunities in collective enterprises and cooperatives are better contributors of positive change in education expenditure than one-off payments of school fees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Scale up the provision of tutoring services for in-school underperforming children:** The tutoring curriculum obtained government authorization, and the opportunity can be used to use an iterative approach to test, improve and mainstream tutoring tools associated with higher learning outcomes. Consider adding modules on socio-emotional learning, reproductive health and life skills to the tutoring programs. Conduct research on long-term effects of tutoring on learning.

2. **Limit provision of scholarships to children at risk of dropping out of school due to financial barriers:** Conduct research to identify the effect of scholarships on school attendance, completion and progression, and identify effects of scholarships on caregiver's school expenditure.

3. **Increase emphasis on the provision of on-going professional development opportunities for teachers in formal schools:** Consider creating peer learning communities of learning and providing coaching for teachers. Provide additional trainings on positive discipline methods and development of socio-emotional competencies.

4. **Scale up the creation of ALP centers to meet the large demand and need for this service, but take preventative actions to ensure ALPs remain an emergency measure for long-time out-of-school children.** Consider creating a flexible model which would allow children who complete the first year of ALP (covering the first two grades) to transition into third grade in the formal school system—current regulations do not allow for partial completion of ALPs and all students must complete the three-year program and pass the end-of-primary exam before being mainstreamed. Conduct research exploring how ALP students fare in the secondary cycle to fully assess the cost-effectiveness and long-term effects of ALPs on children's learning.

5. **Leverage the popularity of EA$E's financial services and entrepreneur trainings as a viable entry point for activities aimed at promotion of education at community level.** Increase emphasis and provide additional training on the creation of collective enterprises. Evaluate the causal effects of EA$E on education expenditures and attitudes towards education, and other metrics such as empowerment and social cohesion.

6. **Maintain the gender lens alongside a "do no harm" approach:** In one of the world's most gender unequal context, maintaining the gender lens remains a must, yet care should betaken not to exclude male students from receiving some supports to retain a "do no harm" programming approach. Conduct research on the effect of treatments on gender equity outcomes.

For more information about programmatic aspects of VAS-Y Fille! contact Andrew Mathew, Education Technical Advisor, at andrew.mathew@rescue.org

For more information about the research conducted to evaluate VAS-Y Fille! contact Silvia Diazgranados Ferráns, Senior Research Advisor, Education at silvia.diazgranadosferrans@rescue.org

ENDNOTES

[1] UNICEF (2015), *Analyse de la situation des enfants et des femmes en RDC. Vers la réalisation du droit à une Éducation de qualité pour tous.* Available at https://www.unicef.org/drcongo/french/Rapport_SITAN_RDC_2015_VF.pdf.

[2] UNICEF, retrieved at https://www.unicef.org/drcongo/french/Rapport_SITAN_RDC_2015_VF.pdf (pag.23). The figure should be considered as an underestimate since it does not take into account the hundreds of thousands of children who must have dropped out of school during the 2016/2017 school year as a result of the crisis in Kasai.

[3] World Bank. Retrieved at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS?end=2013&locations=ZG-CD&start=2004 on August 18, 2017.

[4] University of Massachusetts Amherst (2017), VAS-Y Fille! Endline Report, unpublished.

[5] The endline evaluation did not provide estimates from baseline to endline due to high attrition.

[6] Diazgranados, S (unpublished), The EA$E approach and children's outcomes in education: Evidence from the DRC. Unpublished Technical Report. International Rescue Committee.

The International Rescue Committee responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises, helping to restore health, safety, education, economic wellbeing, and power to people devastated by conflict and disaster. Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, the IRC is at work in over 30 countries and 26 U.S. cities helping people to survive, reclaim control of their future and strengthen their communities.

New York
122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168-1289
USA

London
3 Bloomsbury Place London
WC1A 2QL
UK

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