



Girls' Education Mentoring and Support (GEMS)

Project report - January 2024

Girls' Education, Mentoring and Support

Since March 2022, World Vision has been working in participation with communities in Zimbabwe to ensure that adolescent girls and young women are safe, protected and thriving. After huge success in our first year of implementation, where we reached over 3,000 young people, we have had another incredible year supporting out-of-school girls and girls at-risk of dropping out of school.

Overall, 6,035 people have been supported through this initiative since the project began.

2023 Contextual Update

Communities across Zimbabwe continue to live in complex environments, facing poverty, hunger and insecurity. Zimbabwe's economic situation remains unstable due to fluctuating prices and exchange rates, which has the largest impact on the poorest people. Financial difficulty remains the largest challenge to a child's education and over 60% of school age children lack access to a quality education. This disproportionately affects young girls, who on average in Zimbabwe only attend school for 12 years.¹

Project success at a glance

2,636 people have been positively impacted by the GEMS project this year.

3,000 textbooks have been distributed across the participating schools.

189 more adolescent girls and young women have taken part in vocational training and subsequently **received start-up kits.**

3 new schools have partnered with World Vision, bringing the total number of schools participating in GEMs to 18.

Images (left to right): Image one and four: Girls receive their Cosmetology & Hairdressing start-up kits after completing the vocational training. Image two: Girls receive their Hotel & Catering start-up kits after completing the vocational training. Image three: Young mothers are able to bring their babies and children to both the vocational training and to subsequent project activities such as the start-up kit distribution ceremonies.

¹ UNDP (2023). Gender Development Report. Zimbabwe.

Outcome 1: Increase non-formal pathways for out-of-school adolescent girls and young women.

Over the past year, 189 out-of-school adolescent girls and young women have received training on a vocation of their choice, and were provided with start-up kits to practise their skills and start their own business. These vocational training courses include Hotel & Catering, Cosmetology & Hairdressing, and Clothing Technology.

For the adolescent girls and young women who had previously attended the training, the project has continued to support them in their journeys. **270 trained girls received in-person visits, and virtual check-ins to assess their progress on their chosen pathways, and to monitor their monthly earnings.**

Of the adolescent girls and young women who are using their vocational training:

- **85 girls are self-employed, using their newly learned skills.**
- **67 girls are practising their skills at home.**
- **19 are renting a space in community shops.**
- **13 are employed by someone else, but using the skills they developed through the training.**

18 adolescent girls and young women have re-enrolled in education, and others have begun learning an alternative vocational skill, or have secured jobs in other areas. It should be noted that transition from training to employment takes time, and these girls have only recently graduated. These graduates are being encouraged to continue pursuing their desired pathways and practising their skills.

Outcome 2: Adolescent girls and young women have the choice to remain, re-enter or re-integrate into formal education.

The project continues to work with mentors and peer leaders to ensure girls' leadership clubs are active and functional. These groups are vital to identifying and resolving the challenges which lead to girls leaving education. **34 clubs are operational across the participating schools, and with the addition of 11 new peer leaders who have joined in 2023, there are 70 peer leaders in total. Across the 15 schools, 705 students are members of leadership clubs.**

Peer leaders are working well with the mentors and their peers to make sure that the leadership sessions are conducted effectively, and on schedule. **In 2023, 59 instances of peer support were observed within the clubs, through activities such as singing, playing games, and delivering public speeches.** This has contributed to the development of girls' confidence and will encourage them to speak up on any challenges facing their education.

215 additional career booklets were printed and issued to at-risk girls, serving as a guide on career pathways. 41 career guidance sessions were conducted where teachers encouraged learners to start planning their career pathways, with the use of career booklets. Learners can now decide what career to follow and ensure they excel in subjects related to the pathways they want to take. This will also act as motivation to remain in school.

Six schools that were supported with either crop production or poultry income generating activities are beginning to earn a profit. From the income, 107 leadership members were given exercise books, notebooks and pens for school. The schools are motivated to continue with the projects as they have seen that it assists the at-risk learners with their basic school needs, and will limit the number of girls forced to leave education due to a lack of resources.

As part of this project, schools have also been provided with educational items to support at-risk girls. **400 backpacks, 200 footballs and 17 football pumps have been distributed across participating schools to allow teachers to lead sporting activities.** This has led to an improvement in attendance, as at-risk girls now have backpacks to carry their stationery to school, and motivated young people to attend school every day to participate in fun activities.

The project distributed 3,000 textbooks across the 15 schools where each school received 40 per each 5 subjects (History, English, Combined Science, Mathematics and Geography). To date, 1,870 learners have access to the textbooks. Many girls have said that they use the textbooks frequently in their classrooms, and use exercises and tests from the textbooks for self-assessment. Boarders sometimes borrow them and use the textbooks during evening studies after school. This has eradicated the problem of having too few textbooks for the number of learners, and will contribute to increased exam pass rates which currently stands at 0% in some schools.

In the last six months 18 girls have been identified and supported to re-enroll in school. We continue to monitor and support the 57 girls that re-enrolled back to school last year. They report to be integrating well and are now part of the leadership club in schools, and taking part in motivational activities.

Outcome 3: Adolescent girls and young women will have improved safety, protection and resilience in their schools and communities.

During 2023, score carding action plans were created and reviewed in all the project schools, using the challenges highlighted in last year's score carding sessions. Community leaders in 7 schools took the initiative to address the issue of 'after-tournament parties' where girls were exposed to child protection issues. The issue was also escalated to the District Child Protection Committee, encouraging the police to address it.



Age relevant sexual reproductive health sessions and substance abuse awareness sessions were conducted in 15 project schools by the Ministry of Health. Key issues that were noted included:

- Peer pressure which leads to many school children becoming sexually active, primarily with peers of their own age.
- Both boys and girls use any available product for drugs (chalk dust, glue, used diapers, jolly juice), and buy strong alcohol to consume without diluting. When the learners are under the influence of drugs and alcohol, they run a risk of being exposed to sexual activities.

The expression of complaints in schools are continuously encouraged, with posters detailing information on how to report issues of abuse having been made available to all the schools. The project has identified that young people favour the face-to-face reporting option, where they directly approach relevant actors in their schools. The identification of this has led to an increase in the number of reported cases and incidents.

The project has been collaborating well with the Department of Social Development in receiving, reporting, and handling child abuse cases received from the communities and schools. **This year, five cases have been reported and referred, with the perpetrators facing court appearances and being charged with fines or community service.**

Images (left to right): Image one and two: Girls receive their Hotel & Catering start-up kits after completing the vocational training. Image three: Girls receive their Clothing Technology start-up kits after completing the vocational training. Image four: Girls receive their Cosmetology & Hairdressing start-up kits after completing the vocational training.



Outcome 4: Ministries endorse and scale up standardised curricula for Financial Literacy and Vocational Training short courses.

Certificates of completion for the adolescent girls and young women training on vocational skills were printed and issued to 189 graduates during the certification ceremony held in 4 schools. This was witnessed by the graduates' caregivers, community members, partners and the local business community. **Financial literacy continued to be facilitated by the Ministry of Women Affairs during the vocational skills training.**

Coming soon: GEMS in 2024

In 2024, the GEMS project will continue the momentum of support for adolescent girls and young women. We will continue to offer post-vocational skills training support ensuring graduates continue to practise their chosen vocation, and delivering financial literacy training. For in-school support, the focus will be on engaging those that have dropped out and encouraging them to return using lessons learnt on the best way to achieve this. We will also be working in participation with the 3 new schools to support as they progress through the project activities for the first time, setting up leadership groups, scorecarding sessions and monitoring and re-integrating adolescent girls and young women. Sexual and reproductive health sessions, and career guidance events are also in the pipeline for the upcoming year. **In 2024, we are aiming to directly reach a further 1,155 people, in addition to further support for current GEMs project participants.**

In the latter part of 2024, we will begin to assess the future of the GEMS project, and conduct reflection meetings with heads of schools, mentors and peer leaders. It is our hope that this will encourage cross-learning with line ministries, organising reflection meetings with representatives from the various levels (local, district, province and national), in the hope that they take on recommendations from the project.



Spotlight on: Start-up kits

Start-up kits have proved to be vital to the success of the GEMS project, enabling girls to practise and perfect the skills they learn through the project's vocation training.

Over the past 12 months, 189 start-up kits have been distributed to girls who have completed their training.

This has meant that girls instantly have the resources available to use their skills as income-generating activities, and many have since been able to purchase additional equipment for their businesses. For some girls, like Nelly (see next page), the start-up kits have also provided a gateway to re-integration into the education system.



77 girls received hairdressing start-up kits including a set of 9 combs, hair dryer, hair tong and a set of rollers.



61 girls received catering start-up kits including a set of three cake tins, two muffin trays, three mixing bowls, one wooden spoon and a measuring jug.



51 girls received clothing technology start-up kits including a sewing machines (two machines per five girls), overlocking machine (one machine per 10 girls), cutting shears, tape measure and a box of pins.

Jessica's story: I can pick myself up and be functional

I am a 17-year-old young mother who dropped out-of-school because my parents could not afford to pay my school fees. Being the first-born child I had no choice but to assist my parents with menial jobs such as clearing fields or fetching firewood so that we could put food on the table. I then became pregnant, life was more tough than usual as I had to navigate prejudice and provide for the coming baby and my family.

In July 2022 I heard that World Vision was registering out of school girls and young women who are interested in pursuing vocational skills. I was so relieved to hear that I am allowed to bring my child along to the training as I did not have anyone to leave my child with. **In August 2022 I then went for the training at the Vocational Training Centre where I did a cosmetology and hairdressing course.** Whilst I was there I saw many young girls with children and I realised that having a child is not the end of the world. I can still pick myself up and be a functional person again in the community.

During the training we learnt hairdressing, pedicure, and manicure, we also learnt about horticulture and poultry production. When I went back home I started practising hairdressing for free, and after some practice, I started charging my customers. After I earned about \$40 I started a poultry project with 20 chickens. When the chickens were mature I sold them and bought equipment for my business. In February 2023 I received a start-up kit from the GEMS project. This has really improved my business and I am sure I will grow and make more money. I use my income to buy groceries for the family, essentials for my baby and other equipment for my business. The community is slowly warming up to me and accepting me as a person regardless of me being a young mother. In the future I see myself renting a shop or owning a salon and earning more than I am earning now. **Even though I didn't get the privilege to complete my schooling, I am determined to work very hard and educate my daughter and make sure she has a bright future.**



Nelly's story: The upcoming tailor

Nelly, an 18-year-old out of school girl, participated in the clothing technology training led by the GEMS project in February 2023. Once completed, in March 2023, she received a start-up kit to enable her to continue practising her skills.

Nelly then engaged with the textile teacher at her local secondary school to help her continue developing her vocational skills. Since then, she has been coming to the school from Monday to Thursday to practise. In June 2023, Nelly started taking orders from people in the community. She now makes dresses, skirts, and school uniforms for people to purchase. Her prices range from \$3-\$10 depending on the designs, and she is currently earning between \$20-\$40 USD per month. From the money she has earned, she has bought two blankets, two black pots and a set of plates. She also managed to raise money to register for exams and to take Science and Maths classes. When she attends the school for textile practice, she is able to meet with the teachers of these subjects who can help her revise and prepare for the exams. One of these teachers said ***"Nelly has proven to be the most improving out-of-school girl, and is heading in the right direction"***.



Nelly says she is so grateful for the GEMS project, and feels as though she wouldn't have been as successful without the start-up kit. She plans for a brighter future, and aspires to be a great tailor with her own shop.



Lisa's story: The local baker

Lisa, an 18-year-old girl who attended vocational training for catering in February 2023, received her start-up kit in March 2023. She started baking at home and selling produce in local shops. Lisa is delighted to have received some mixing bowls, a wooden spoon, a measuring jug, and muffin and cake tins, as she says they make her baking much easier. To begin with, Lisa was baking plain buns and selling them at \$0.05 USD each. Then she realised that the community prefers doughnuts, so she now bakes 50 doughnuts per day, and sells them at \$0.16 USD each. She buys 1 kg of flour twice a week and bakes 50 doughnuts per day. She now earns approximately \$60 USD a month from selling her baked goods. She has since managed to buy other baking utensils and expand her business. She is hoping that in the future she will rent a shop in the community.

Thank you for your commitment and support for the GEMS project. Our on-going partnership is having an incredible impact on young girls' lives, year on year. Partners like you mean that World Vision can ensure thousands of young women across Zimbabwe are safe, supported and empowered to choose the best path for them. Whether they remain or re-enrol in formal education, or develop vocational skills, your partnership means they have the tools to thrive.

Thank you.

World Vision UK

World Vision House, Opal Drive, Fox Milne, Milton Keynes, MK15 0ZR
tel: +44 (0) 1908 84 10 00 fax: +44 (0) 1908 84 10 01 email: info@worldvision.org.uk

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At World Vision, our focus is on helping the most vulnerable children, in the most dangerous places, overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian faith, we've worked together with communities, partners, local leaders and governments, for over 70 years, so that children – of all faiths and none – are empowered to experience fullness of life. World Vision UK is a registered charity no. 285908, a company limited by guarantee and registered in England no.1675552. Registered office as above. All images: © World Vision.