



Hearing from communities

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO



LOCATION: South East Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)



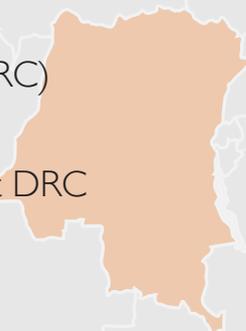
PROJECT NAME: Girls Education Challenge (GEC) project DRC
funded by DFID



GOAL: To make education accessible to girls in South-East DRC



DURATION: 4 years 2018 – 2021



OVERVIEW

Education is vital to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. Sadly, in DRC the attendance rate for boys and girls of secondary school age is just 35%¹. Girls in DRC experience multiple barriers to education including low income. Over 63% of the population is below the national poverty line and if the fees are unaffordable, sending boys to school tends to take priority.

Since 2017 World Vision DRC, in partnership with other organisations² has been running an education project providing bursaries for girls to attend school, training to teachers and education equipment to schools. The project also provides support to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) clubs that are linked to schools.



1,930 children, (1,077 girls) are currently enrolled in **66 learning clubs**.



55 parent sessions on how to support their children with reading and mathematics have been conducted



111 Sexual and Reproductive Health clubs have been created in secondary schools and mentors have been trained to support these clubs



An average of **34% of teachers across schools showed progress with regards to teacher's competencies** in using adapted resources during teaching.



¹Net secondary school attendance rate (Unicef statistic) <https://data.unicef.org/country/cod/>

²Project implemented in partnership with Save the Children (lead agency) and Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

FOCUS ON

Aligning to best practice in Humanitarian standards.

The Core Humanitarian standard³ sets out nine commitments which organisations should seek to meet. Two of these are

“communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints” and “humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve”.

To this end, the GEC project opened a hotline in April 2019 for members of the local community to provide feedback, make complaints and ask questions. The hotline also provides an opportunity for girls and other members of the public, to report child abuse cases, including pregnancies in young girls.

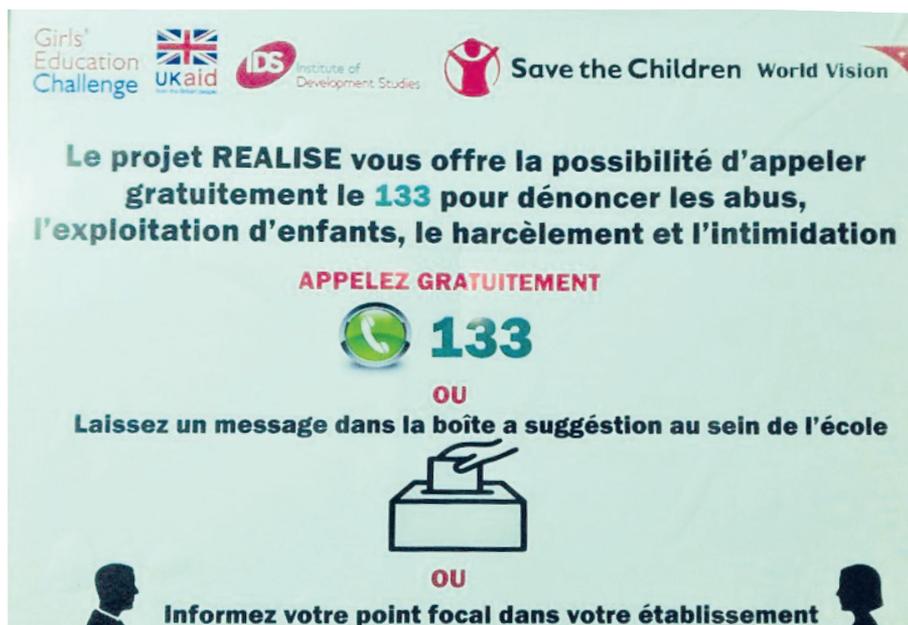
Since the opening of the hotline World Vision has received a total of 680 calls. 58 of these calls regarded incidents around the welfare of a child including unsafe construction of classrooms (19), verbal aggression by an adult (2) and cases of assault or sexual exploitation (37)⁴. 377 calls to the hotline in this period were requests for more information – with a substantial number of questions relating to sexual health.

The cases have been reported to government authorities, local and school authorities, where appropriate. And the authorities have supported project staff to conduct investigations, establish the facts and take necessary actions. Families with children who have experienced abuse are continuously encouraged to report matters to the police and take the child for medical check-ups, while the project staff are working with officials of social affairs to provide counselling to those children.

In some cases, arrests have been made, although, unfortunately, this doesn't guarantee justice as the justice system in DRC is weak.

“The hotline has been a game changer in this project. Thanks to the hotline, communities that were afraid to report cases of abuse...now have the courage to report because they have realised that nobody has died in the process. Children especially are very sensitive and systematically report cases of abuse. This practice is now a major deterrent for perpetrators of abuse.”

(Bernadette Fonge, GEC WV Staff member)



COVER: Girls attending a sexual and reproductive health club session in their school.

LEFT: Parental awareness session on the activities of a school sexual and reproductive health club.

ABOVE: Poster to advertise the freephone number, (the Greenline) and other ways to report abuse, child exploitation, harassment and intimidation.

³<https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard>

⁴Of the 58 calls regarding child welfare, none involved staff of World Vision or partner organisations.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

At the start of the project, there were frequent reports of girls dropping out of school for reasons including pregnancy. For the girls who were pregnant, there was no follow-up and they would disappear off the radar. Often, no one tried to find out whether the pregnancy was the result of abuse. And there weren't any activities in place to help protect girls from getting abused.

Project staff now understand that girls get pregnant mainly by boys in their peer groups. This information is useful in designing sexual health education activities for both girls and boys. According to project staff, the hotline has created a more open environment in villages where people now increasingly discuss and talk about sexual assault and abuse against girls. Based on empirical evidence, the general public are challenging views on the acceptability of sexual exploitation. The project staff think, based on observation, that cases of sexual exploitation are declining as people are aware that they may be reported.

The information received so far has informed programme changes and adjustments to the messaging the project gives in schools.

An integral part of the project is the Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) after-school clubs. These clubs provide a safe space for older girls to learn about SRH issues, and with skills to support their own decisions, choices and rights. Between April and September 2019, 377 hotline calls were classified as requests for information, which included questions around SRH issues. The team collated these questions according to theme and identified the most frequently asked. The topics discussed in the SRH after school session have been adjusted to incorporate these topics, so information is shared rapidly. The SRH sessions prove to be a successful initiative as the same hotline regularly gets calls from children and their carers to join the clubs.

The introduction of the hotline has enabled staff to better understand what is going on in villages, the reasons for early pregnancy in children and questions around SRH that girls and boys may have. This information has enabled project staff to design activities which are more relevant.



ABOVE: Creating awareness with parents on sexual and reproductive health activities within a school.

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World Vision believes that by working together with children, their communities, and our supporters and partners, the lives of the world's most vulnerable children can be transformed. As a Christian organisation, we aspire to reflect God's unconditional love in all we do.

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