Learner converses with educator in front of Hub Conduct Rules, developed to aid girls' safety in hubs

SAFEGUARDING TECHNICAL LEARNING PAPER

ABOUT THIS SERIES

The Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE) Learning Brief series is a collection of four papers produced by Plan International UK that capture lessons from a seven-year flagship education programme that was implemented between 2018 and 2026 in Zimbabwe. The papers in this series present learning related to each of the four core components of SAGE's programme as presented on the right. The learning paper for each component can be read as a standalone piece, or together with its companion papers to form a more comprehensive picture of worked well and what worked less well during the design and implementation of SAGE. A detailed annex is included at the end of each paper that describes the SAGE model and how it worked in practice.

Learning paper one: Lessons on Accelerated Teaching and Learning (ATL) from the SAGE programme

Learning paper two: Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOP) in SAGE

Learning paper three: Champions of Girls' Education (CoGE) sessions in SAGE

Learning paper four: Safeguarding in SAGE

PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

This Brief is the fourth paper in the SAGE Learning Brief Series. Its purposes is to share lessons from the design and implementation of the Safeguarding component, one of the four key components of SAGE. This Brief introduces the safeguarding component, summarises its impact, and highlights key factors that both facilitated and hindered success. The Brief concludes with a set of recommendations targeted at practitioners and service providers across NGO, government and commercial sectors that can aid in the adoption and replication of the success of SAGE.

IMPACT OF SAGE

Full information on the SAGE programme impact and result can be found in its endline evaluation report, which is available on the Girls' Education Challenge website: sage-endline-evaluation-report__final-adj.pdf (girlseducationchallenge.org)

OVERALL SAGE RESULTS

- Learning improved with over 70% of learners demonstrating Grade 5 competency in literacy and numeracy
- Over 70% of learners successfully transitioned into vocational traning, employment, or formal education on completion of the programme
- Strong support existed for SAGE at national and district levels of government as well as at community level to continue in some form

RESULTS SPECIFIC TO GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

- **Self-efficacy:** Girls gained confidence and began participating in household decisons
- **SRHR**: Girls were able to better negotiate safe sex discussions and improved awareness of early pregnancy and contraception choices
- **Community support:** 92.8% girls felt they were supported to stay in learning environment
- **Safeguarding:** revitalised child protection structures and increased reporting of abuse

METHODOLOGY

This learning paper compiles lessons learnt and utilises a variety of data sources that tracked the progress and performance of SAGE over its project cycle. It reflects the views of thematic experts within the SAGE consortium of the factors that supported or hindered success based on their specialist knowledge of the area, their engagement in the SAGE programme and the varied data sources available on their thematic. The main data sources reviewed to produce this learning paper include:

EVALUATIVE EVIDENCE

- Independent endline report including data from 600+ girls and caregivers and almost 250 stakeholders such as government officials and community members
- Internally led midline evaluation which utilised programme collected data including learning progress assessments, Most Significant Change Stories, girl to girl conversations and an external research study.

MONITORING EVIDENCE

- Learning data from over 21,000 girls
- Transition data from over 16,000 girls
- Quarterly monitoring data over 7 years including interviews, observations, and survey data

SPECIAL STUDIES OR UNIQUE THEMATIC DATA SOURCES

- Outcome mapping exercises
- Commissioned research studies
- Girl to girl dialogues
- Case Studies

EXPERT VIEWS

- Discussions with frontline team members
- Expertise of thematic lead at Plan International

INTRODUCTION

An estimated 246 million girls and boys experience violence in and around schools globally – on the way to school, on school grounds, and within classrooms[1].

In Zimbabwe the situation is particularly acute. Both girls and boys experience high rates of physical,sexual, andemotionalviolence – 17% for girls and 23% for boys[2]. Boys are more likely to experience physical violence, while 9% of girls experience sexual violence compared to 1% of boys[3]. Violence can occur in the home, community, and at school. 15% of girls have missed school because of sexual violence and 18% of boys due to physical violence, of those only 16% of girls and 8% of boys received any safeguarding services[4]. For girls not enrolled in school the prevalence of having experienced sexual violence rises 7.1% higher[5].

Girls in Zimbabwe experience high levels of violence due to pervasive gender inequality and high levels of acceptability of intimate partner violence[6]. The impacts of gender-based violence (GBV) have been extensively documented which includes effects on survivors' self-esteem and psychological well-being. Several studies have specifically demonstrated that experience of GBV negatively impacts on girls' retention and performance in school[7].

The Zimbabwe government has taken steps to end violence against children, although recent endorsement of a court ruling that corporal punishment is permissible in certain circumstances has undermined that progress. In 2019 it became a Pathfinder country of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) became a signatory to Safe to Learn's Call to Action to end violence in school (see figure 1). Shaped by Safe to Learn, Strategic Priority 3 of the Zimbabwe government's Education Sector Strategic Plan 2021-2025 (ESSP) focuses on safeguarding[8] and is the second largest budget (15.1%) after school infrastructure[9]. The Non-Formal Education (NFE) Policy[10] of Zimbabwe is a uniquely Human Capital approach to education without any reference to safeguarding or other social purposes such as child protection, although the ESSP recognises NFE can as an important resource for reaching out of school children.

The Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE) programme was designed to respond to the challenges listed above. SAGE was an £11.9 million project funded by UK aid through the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) within its Leave No Girls Behind funding window. The programme ran from 2018 to 2026 and was led by Plan International UK, and its partners (Plan International Zimbabwe (PIZ), The Open University (OU), Christian Blind Mission (CBM) UK, the Apostolic Women's Empowerment Trust (AWET), ECONET, and under the oversight of the MoPSE.

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1   Safe to Learn | End Violence (end-violence.org)
2   Zimbabwe-school-related-gender-based-violence-fact-sheet.pdf (mutualcdn.com)
3   Ibid.
4   Ibid.
5   Ministry of Health and Child Care Zimbabwe (October 2019, p.81) Young Adult Survey of Zimbabwe.
6   School-related gender-based violence is preventing the achievement of quality education for all | UNGEI
7   Ibid.
8   1. Effective and efficient responses to SRGBV. 2. Staff undertake training in positive disciplining approaches 3. Holistic school health and safety programme rolled out. 4. Roll out of school health and safety themes integrated into curriculum learning areas from ECD to Form 6.
9   ESSP 2021-2025.pdf (mopse.co.zw) p.14
10   NEP Policy 2015 (mopse.co.zw)

The programme supported over 2100 out-of-school, highly marginalised adolescent girls in 11 districts in Zimbabwe to improve their learning outcomes and assist their transition into formal education, vocational training, or employment. It was a gender transformative education programme, that sought to promote and improve education for girls by tackling the root causes of gendered social and economic barriers and create an enabling environment for transforming unequal gender norms.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Global initiatives have developed School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) frameworks to both prevent violence in schools, and leverage schools as platforms for ending violence within the family and wider community (see figure 1).[11]

The common approach between these three SRGBV frameworks is that they are informed by a socio-ecological model of child protection. Standard socio-logical models see violence as not rooted in one cause or one solution but interacting across socio-economic and cultural factors at four levels – individual, family, community, and societal[12]. The model determines the protective environment in which the child is situated by assessing the interacting risks and protective factors across each of the levels.

The SRGBV socio-ecological model differs to the standard socio-ecological model in two ways. Firstly, it has an additional fifth level – the school level, which encompasses internal safeguarding systems within the school. Secondly, it places the school as the central pinnacle point to coordinate protection across different sectors and over multiple levels[13].

> ### FIGURE 1: SCHOOL-RELATED GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (SRGBV) FRAMEWORKS
>
> 1. Safe to Learn sets out a five-point call to action and diagnostic tool which is informed by INSPIRE's Seven Strategies to End Violence Against Children.
>
> 2. UNGEI has developed a set of minimum standards: Taking a Whole School Approach to Prevent School-Related Gender-Based Violence
>
> 3. UN Women have developed Global Guidance: School Related Gender-Based Violence.

This paper conceptualises safeguarding using an SRGBV socio-ecological model because safeguarding on SAGE was a combination of both internal safeguarding policies and procedures (e.g. safe recruitment, systems), programmatic interventions (e.g. social norms change) and child protection activities (e.g. setting up external community child protection committees (CPCs)). For the purpose of this paper, all these activities will be referred to under the umbrella term of 'safeguarding.'

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11 Safe to Learn | End Violence (end-violence.org), A whole school approach to prevent school related gender-based violence | UNGEI, Global guidance on addressing school-related gender-based violence | UN Women – Headquarters
12 Inspire: | INSPIRE (inspire-strategies.org) p.15.
13 Global guidance on addressing school-related gender-based violence | UN Women – Headquarters p.85

While the SRGBV socio-logical model refers to schools, in the SAGE programme, learning sessions were delivered at Community-Based Learning Hubs (CBLHs) which were positioned as the central point to coordinate multi-sectoral collaboration, for example between MoPSE and the Department of Social development (DSD). The CBLHs were integrated into the formal sector through approval gained by Plan International from the MoPSE to deliver NFE. Importantly, they were overseen by the local primary school head teacher, with many hubs also being based in schools that had free spaces. This created a symbiotic relationship between formal schools and CBLHs because the former, through barriers to entry and exclusionary and unsafe environments, necessitates the latter. CBLHs were multi-vectoral with entry/exit points in and out of schools and into other education and vocational provision.

As a gender transformative education programme SAGE was informed by Plan's Gender Transformative Programming framework,[14] Plan's Inclusive Quality Education framework[15] and Plan's Safeguarding Policy and Standards. All these frameworks are governed by the principles of a gender responsive intersectional approach which means they consider the multiple forms of inequality and a person's risk of harm based on their social identities and recognise the interlinked factors of gendered and harmful social norms at all socio-ecological levels.

SAFEGUARDING IN THE SAGE PROGRAMME

Safeguarding was one of the four key components[16] through which SAGE achieved its intended impact. Safeguarding at Plan International are the internal organisational efforts to keep children and programme participants safe and protected and includes the prevention of sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse (PSHEA)[17].

On SAGE safeguarding practices were mainstreamed across all project activities to create safe and inclusive environments where all programme participants, staff, volunteers, partners and associates could thrive and feel secure, and understand how to exercise their rights and report any concerns.

This section outlines the safeguarding activities delivered across the socio-ecological model. It is structured to draw out the most important factors that led to creating a safer environments for girls.

Level[18]	What SAGE did	What SAGE achieved
Girls & Boys	• Provided 93 single sex community-based learning hubs (CBLHs) for girls • Delivered COGE life skills programme. • Gave safeguarding briefings, refreshers, girls and boys dialogues and messages incl. SMS. • Provided Psycho-Social Support (PSS) and access to Guidance and Counselling Teachers.	• Increased awareness of safeguarding and GBV issues and confidence to speak out • Tackled the stigma of violence and underreporting. • Received 127 safeguarding and protection reports. • Girls' and boys perception of Safety increased[19]

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14 2 1 230 – GLO-GT_Summary_Guidance_Note-Final-IO-ENG-jul18.pdf (wikifplan.org)
15 Overview: Inclusive quality education | Plan International (plan-international.org)
16 Key SAGE Programme Components: Teaching and Learning (ATL), Champions of Girls' Education (CoGE), Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOP), Safeguarding.
17 Global Policy on Safeguarding Children and Programme Participants | Plan International (plan-international.org)
18 1 230 – GLO-GT_Summary_Guidance_Note-Final-IO-ENG-jul18.pdf (wikifplan.org)
19 Perceptions of Safety improved Index (PSI) mean score increased from 3.75 out of 5.00 at baseline to 4.30 at endline.

Level[18]	What SAGE did	What SAGE achieved
Family	• Conducted community sensitizations • Liaised with families about safeguarding • Delivered inter-generational dialogues • Set up men and boys clubs • Conducted focused work with husbands and partners	• Families had more positive gender attitudes[20] • Improved attitudes towards girls • Shift in harmful gender norms and attitudes • Reduced incidences of intimate partner violence (IPV)
Hub	• Recruited community endorsed volunteers, screening, and police vetting. • Continuous volunteer training in safeguarding and inclusion • Child friendly reporting mechanisms in every CBLH and survivor-centred response • Hub Development Committees (HDCs) formed of 1144 local community members • Removed physical barriers for girls with disabilities in CBLHs • Continuous teaching of TVET teaching and non-teaching staff on safeguarding, disability and inclusion	• 99% of girls reported feeling safe in CBLHs[21] • 93% aware of where to go if experiencing violence[22]. • 60% of volunteers were women (CEs). • Hubs adapted with ramps, grab rails etc. for accessibility. • 90% of Volunteers using inclusive gender-responsive pedagogies[23].
Community	• Revitalised and restored 93 Child Protection Committees (CPCs). • 15 GBV Rapid Response Committees set up to prevent and report GBV	• Increase in the community accessing external child protection services • Community beginning to report child marriage and child abuse
Societal	• Connected HDCs and CPCs with DSD to coordinate child protection. • Facilitated DSD volunteer training in child protection, reporting pathways and (PSS) • Strengthen CPCs capacities in case management and referral pathways	• CBLHs and CEs referring into government protection systems. • Greater compliance by CPCs government child protection policies. • Strengthen linkages between MoPSE, DSD and other sectoral agencies.

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20 Increased Positive Gender Attitude Scores of parents and caregivers from 8.23 baseline 9.22
21 Endline p. 74
22 Ibid, 74
23 Ibid p.14

FACTORS ENABLING SUCCESS

1. Take a cumulative and cross-cutting approach to raising girls' awareness of safeguarding and exercising their rights

In SAGE's endline evaluation, the Gender Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey found girls had increased their knowledge, confidence, and ability to speak out about safeguarding issues by 37%, with 93% of girls reported to have awareness of where to go for support if experiencing violence.

A key factor was SAGE's cumulative and consistent approach to awareness raising of safeguarding. Safeguarding was consistently messaged through briefings, dialogues, posters and mainstreamed into other programme component materials. All project activities and gatherings were fronted with safeguarding messages and SMS messages were sent throughout the COVID pandemic response phases. Deeper critical reflection of gendered norms and girls' rights was provided through a two-hour weekly Champions of Girls' Education (CoGE) sessions. Endline interviews reported girls taking up their rights, negotiating safer sex, speaking out and acting against child abuse, early marriage and challenging IPV. It was the cumulative effect of the safeguarding messaging across all project interventions that led to changes in beliefs and practices.

> **" I have knowledge now on how to report cases of abuses and gender-based violence and I can help other women as well by educating them especially those who had not been to SAGE. "**
>
> SAGE Learner, Mutoko

2. Incorporating an intersectional approach which assesses the specific vulnerabilities and risks to marginalised girls is critical for safe and inclusive learning environments.

From project start, SAGE identified seven sub-groups[24] of girls to specifically target support for and then tailored its safeguarding interventions in line with their needs. This meant individuals' gender and overlapping identities and the discrimination they face were risk assessed and mitigated throughout. For instance, safety measures for the sub-group of girls with disabilities (1139 girls) included overcoming travel barriers by establishing CBLHs and satellite hubs nearer to where girls lived. Hub environments were physically adapted with grab rails and accessible toilets which allowed girls with disabilities more independence. All safeguarding information and communications were adapted into multiple visual forms and audio and volunteers were trained in sign language and braille. Materials were also translated into all the community languages. Intergenerational dialogues and Men's Clubs created an enabling environment without which there was a risk of backlash to the girls utilising their agency. Girl-led safeguarding dialogues were facilitated to prevent bullying and discrimination between girls.

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24 Sub-groups included married girls, young mothers, girls who have never been to school, girls from the apostolic community, girls living with disabilities, girls from ethnic minorities, and girls engaged in labour.

> **At CoGE, the main issues taught were the rights of women. Culturally women were mistreated with no rights, so they were now teaching us that as women, we have our rights, and we were supposed to stand up for them, which was very important. There was the issue of gender, the equal access to opportunities between men and women. I really liked that one because at least now I know that I can attend school just like the boy child, I can also go to work like the boy child, I can be in leadership positions like the male counterparts which was previously not recognised by our culture. Also, the issues of sexual violence and gender-based violence – these are issues we would always face in the community but without the knowledge of where we would report but now, we have been enlightened we now know how to deal with these issues, thanks to SAGE.**

SAGE Learner (GWD), Nenhowe

3. Guidance, support and accountability from donors helped to strengthen project safeguarding and create lasting change.

While Plan International has robust and extensive organisational safeguarding standards and audit systems, the GEC's Minimum Standards for Safeguarding were assessed by the submission of evidence by the SAGE consortium. The GEC Fund Manager and FCDO Zimbabwe then provided a Safeguarding Action Plan (SGAP)[25] which provided independent and highly detailed feedback to SAGE's governance steering committee and technical working group to understand specific recommendations for improvement. For instance, the SGAP prompted the consortium to develop more inclusive safeguarding materials in multiple languages and modalities such as in audio and braille. It accelerated the development of Plan International's PSEAH Policy which was adopted across consortium partners and became embedded into project operating and monitoring systems. A crucial outcome of this was that it prompted additional budget reallocation to ensure overall safeguarding compliance could be achieved. In addition, the GEC Fund Management and FCDO Zimbabwe team provided valuable technical assistance when incidents were reported as part of their survivor-centred case management approach.

4. Safeguarding policies and procedures should be underpinned by an effective safeguarding strategy and culture.

Policies and procedures alone are not enough to create a safe environment for girls, building a strong safeguarding culture is equally important. From the onset, SAGE recognised that the vulnerabilities of the participants, the power imbalances, and the diverse belief systems specific to the project could result in exposure to harm and abuse and hence needed to be addressed. SAGE developed a standardised safeguarding strategy to ensure collective understanding of these risk factors, and established shared assumptions, values and beliefs to govern all project staff and volunteers' behaviours. These values were embedded into project governance structures, risk management systems, human resources, curriculum, and teaching and learning. This led to a culture in which all staff and participants felt confident to cases. Girls reported feeling safe to disclose life challenges to CEs and Guidance and Counselling teachers[26] which facilitated further reporting.

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25 protection_is_possible_report_final.pdf (girlseducationchallenge.org)
26 Endline p.62

5. **Building a multi-levelled network of technical support around the dedicated safeguarding focal point can maximise their impact.**

SAGE invested in a dedicated safeguarding focal point (FP) which enabled safeguarding quality assurance throughout the project-cycle. Safeguarding is technically complex because it involves higher levels of risk and accountability, and it cuts across both operating systems and project components. SAGE did not leave the responsibility of safeguarding to the one FP, but instead built a multi-levelled network of accountability around them. The Plan International Zimbabwe Safeguarding Lead provided day to day supervision and support to the FP while the FP was part of the technical group so received support and collaboration with other technical leads. Mentoring and technical assistance was provided by Plan International UK Safeguarding Advisor to the FP, and case management support from Plan International UK and Plan's regional and global safeguarding teams, additionally the GEC Fund Manager and FCDO Zimbabwe team also provided dedicated safeguarding support.

6. **Utilise existing protection structures to ensure project safeguarding measures will continue after project end.**

In 2021, during COVID lockdown, 78% of girls reported they had no access to child protection services[27]. SAGE responded by popularising existing CPCs and CCWs strengthening their capacities, so they were safe to respond to girls. This was done in partnership with DSD using their existing policies and training manuals and leveraging DSD officers to deliver trainings to CEs. These interventions embedded CPCs at the community and societal level which have become well utilised protection services to the community and will exist beyond the project. Because SAGE developed CPC procedures in line with the National Case Management System and Zimbabwe Protocol and the Multi-sectoral Management of Sexual Abuse and Violence, the CPCs are now better integrated into government protection systems so are more likely to sustain.

7. **Taking an adaptive approach and with dedicated safeguarding resources led to the SAGE programme being more resilient to the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic.**

During COVID-19 lockdown incidences of GBV and IPV soared[28] and calls to the Zimbabwe's national GBV hotline increased by 90%[29]. SAGE was well positioned to adapt to the challenges posed by the COVID 19 outbreak because of the strong monitoring systems and community feedback structures already in place. Having a dedicated safeguarding staff member allowed new systems and tools such as Standard Operating Procedures which focused on maintaining safe contact and communications (known as 'Keeping in Contact') to be established quickly despite lockdown measures. Community Educator's (CEs) were trained in remote safeguarding and supported girls' well-being by phone. Bulk SMS/Audios adapted for low literacy levels were sent and girls noted this was their main source of reliable safeguarding information. Through stakeholder feedback, SAGE developed multi-modal learning options at hubs, in small groups, door-to-door, and through phones. Girls and caregivers selected the safest mode according to their personal safety and health needs which gave them confidence to return to learning.

27 Midline p.46
28 Policy brief – SRGBV and school reopening Final.pdf (end-violence.org)
29 gbv_covid_short_final.pdf (unfpa.org)

FACTORS THAT HINDER SUCCESS

1. Overlooking a formal SRGBV analysis at the onset can restrict synergies and impact.

In the SAGE model, the safeguarding activities between individual, family and classroom were highly optimised. However, those between hub, community, and societal levels were less so due to a few practical reasons. For one, safeguarding was a uniquely project-based system and therefore did not integrate at the societal level into national safeguarding policies. For another, at hub level, the HDCs safeguarding monitoring activities did not report prevalence of SRGBV incidences that fed into any district or national data nor was there a formalised cyclical approach of diagnosis, implementation, and adaptation[30]. The practical realities of a project-based approach aside, an SRGBV analysis at the start could have mapped out the SRGBV policy environment and identified possible synergies and opportunities to tap for technical assistance in areas of policy, staff development, data management and monitoring of SRGBV, thereby enhancing impact.

2. Misaligned MEL and Safeguarding expertise left critical gaps in the data.

SAGE recognised that delivering gender transformative and inclusive NFE provision safely demands multi-level engagement with the existing protective environment. For safeguarding, while these assumptions were addressed in the project proposal and the project's safeguarding efforts they were not always fully realised in the logical framework. One reason is that safeguarding, and MEL technical expertise were not as well integrated as other programmatic areas, for instance Plan International's menu of safeguarding indicators[31] is more focused on organisational compliance rather than defining and measuring the activities required to make programmatic interventions safe. This left critical gaps in monitoring, for example the HDCs coordination of safeguarding in the hubs, which played a crucial role in achieving high safety perception scores, was not measured formally. Another reason is that some safeguarding risk mitigations evolved into full scale activities that warranted becoming a recognised project output. For example, considerable investment and effort was put into building external protection systems that could respond to the disclosures of abuse emerging from the social norms change activities. Additionally, there were unintended outcomes such as reduction in child marriages that could have been developed into output indicators. Applying a review of education programme design against Plan's Protection from Violence or a SRGBV framework could strengthen the logical framework.

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30 A whole school approach to prevent school related gender-based violence | UNGEI p.12
31 Plan International (2014, p.25) Safeguarding in Programmes and Influencing Work

3. Without a focus on sustainability throughout, policies and procedures for safeguarding may disintegrate when project ends.

The safeguarding system within the CBLHs was approached as a project operating system rather than a project intervention. The CBLH's safeguarding policies, procedures and systems belonged to Plan International, while the reporting mechanisms and safeguarding case management were resourced by Plan staff. As part of safe project closure SAGE mapped local protection reporting mechanisms and integrated hubs into local primary schools safeguarding systems and policies. However, in the absence of safeguarding included within Zimbabwe NFE Policy there is a gap in a specifically hub-based safeguarding system that can continue post-project and local policies and skills may not meet Plan's standards in survivor-centred response. It is therefore paramount that future project designs should consider a two-track approach to safeguarding. On the one track, it is to implement an internal safeguarding operating system to prevent the risk of the project causing harm, and on the other track consider what technical assistance is required to develop the external safeguarding system and skills of the context the project operates in.

4. Safeguarding interventions should be complemented by strong government engagement at national and district level.

While SAGE connected to wider societal safeguarding structures it did not intervene to make local policies, procedures, and systems safer. One factor is that whilst SAGE's link into the mainstream system was through local primary schools, as a non-formal education adolescent programme, SAGE did not necessarily have a remit or the resources to affect change within the primary sector. This posed challenges, for instance CBLHs were linked to local primary schools which provided mentoring of CEs and had oversight for hub safeguarding as the local School Heads chaired the HDCs. SAGE did not link back into school to assess their internal safeguarding environment, nor was it clear if schools internally were aligned to SAGE's positions on gender, inclusion, or safeguarding practices. At endline girls with disabilities did not perceive formal schools as a safe inclusive option to transition into. It is therefore important to assess how and where NFE programmes can best deliver technical assistance to support safer environments at the societal level and consider more likely progression routes into community vocational learning or colleges.

5. Less consideration was given to risks of peers on peer violence which led to cases of bullying in the early stages of the project.

As SAGE was highly focussed on the safeguarding risks posed to girls by adults, it initially neglected to consider that girls could be perpetrators of violence. At the midline evaluation, 1.5% of girls cited bullying as a reason for missing learning sessions[32]. Bullying usually involves a power imbalance[33] and in this case it was older participants bullying younger participants. SAGE participants were grouped altogether in ages 11-19 years. Limited resources and hub space meant SAGE could not stream girls into age brackets. More could have been done to differentiate for the different age ranges within the classroom and manage their interactions in and around the hubs. In response to the bullying disclosures, SAGE reinforced safeguarding messages and reporting mechanisms and volunteers received anti-bullying training. Girl-led codes of behaviours were developed, and girls' dialogues were initiated for awareness raising and critical self-reflection. By the endline evaluation, no bullying was reported and overall feelings of safety were high. It is worth noting future programmes may also consider positive parenting to young mothers who made up 39% of SAGE's participants.

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32 Ibid p.155

33 Global guidance on addressing school-related gender-based violence | UN Women – Headquarters p.10

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 **Apply an SRGBV analysis to education programme design to ensure all interacting risks and protective factors are considered across the socio-ecological model.**

Applying an SRGBV analysis at project design can strengthen integration with the existing safeguarding environment, including safe government policy and systems as well as school infrastructure. It can increase local ownership while also identifying gaps where technical assistance may be required.

2 **Investment in safeguarding budgets and dedicated resources is key for effective safeguarding.**

SAGE faced significant challenges to adequately resource safeguarding activities and ensure compliance to GEC standards. To do safeguarding properly a fully costed safeguarding budget based on a risk assessment and mitigation plan should be in place rather than a blanket percentage of a project budget. For large scale and high-risk projects, it is essential to have a dedicated safeguarding staff member.

3 **All safeguarding policies and procedures must be applied and adapted for ISOP activities.**

Risks to girls can be greater in vocational activities as girls encounter a wider group of adults and unsafe community locations. SAGE ensured reporting mechanisms were extended to remote locations. All master trainers were vetted, trained in safeguarding, and monitored. Community hotspot mapping was conducted to identify risks in commercial and male dominated locations such as marketplaces.

4 **Working with local partners can provide considerable value-add.**

Working with local partner Apostolic Women's Empowerment Trust (AWET) led to some of the most significant project gains in strengthening safeguarding. AWET was a trusted community actor, understood the unique challenges the community faced and was able to engage community leaders. This led to Apostolic communities going beyond project led activities. They set up 15 GBV Rapid Response Committees to prevent and report GBV cases in the community. They also established 'Dare Guru' which is a larger men's interfaith group with a constitution to prevent GBV and child marriage. Engaging other local partners and women's civil society organisations could intensify and add value to creating safer environments for girls.
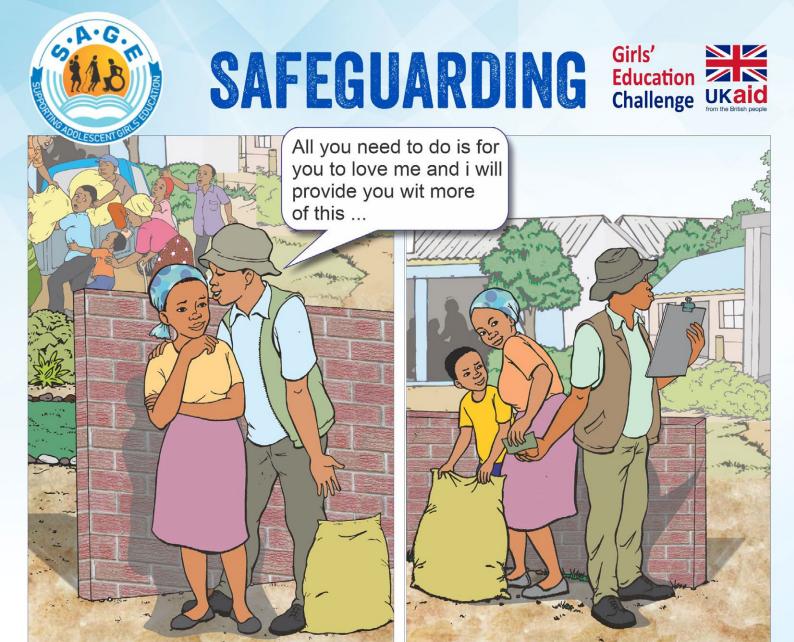
5 **Take a participatory approach to ensure the inclusion of all vulnerable sub-groups.**

Some of the most successful safeguarding strategies on SAGE were those that involved engaging girls directly such as girls' dialogues, peer-conversations, and community hotspot mapping. More participatory approaches should be expanded to include girls in project design and governance, development of reporting mechanisms and risk assessments with focus on girls with disabilities participation.
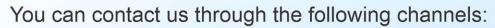
6 **Organisations should take a pro-active approach to underreporting of safeguarding concerns.**

SAGE's safeguarding reporting mechanisms were highly trusted and utilised by stakeholders. This success prompted comparisons internally to the number of safeguarding reports received on similar Plan International UK projects. This led Plan International UK to consider how to develop a pro-active approach to monitoring the number of safeguarding reports and develop an indicator where the number of expected reports is set based on project size and context and then monitored. Where numbers are above or below the indicator, feedback can be gathered from stakeholders to determine feelings of safety and how to strengthen the mechanism.

SAFEGUARDING

Girls' Education Challenge

UKaid from the British people

If what is in these pictures happens to you or someone you know, please let Plan International know so that we can support you & help in stopping the abuse.

You can contact us through the following channels:

1. You may contact Plan International Community Mobilisers on

2. You may get in touch with Plan through any trusted person who is able to contact Plan staff and office.

3. Call or write to Safecall which will contact Plan International headquarters: +44 1915167774 (English) or plan@safecall.co.uk

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ANNEX 1:
THE SUPPORTING ADOLESCENT GIRLS' EDUCATION (SAGE) PROGRAMME MODEL

Plan International's global approach to ensuring Inclusive Quality Education aims to help overcome the barriers that prevent the most vulnerable and excluded children, particularly girls, from accessing and completing education, from pre-primary through to secondary level. It champions children's and young people's education, and that of girls, as a human right, a global development priority and a core humanitarian need.

Inclusive Quality Education is integrated with wider intervention areas to actualise children and young people's sexual reproductive health and rights, protection from violence, supporting girls, boys and youth as active drivers of change and ensuring that education contributes to the development of skills and opportunities for youth employment and entrepreneurship.

The SAGE programme model is an innovative, intersectional and gender transformative programme model, which has been tested across five years of implementation funded by UK Aid through the Girls Education Challenge (GEC) between 2018-2023. Implemented under the oversight of the Government of Zimbabwe's Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, the programme operationalised the national Non-Formal Education (NFE) Policy which promotes alternative pathways to increasing access to quality education for marginalised learners.

SAGE's Theory of Change assumes that reducing barriers at the household, learning-space, community, and system-levels will improve girls' access to high-quality education and skills acquisition, improve their confidence to learn, identify and proceed into positive transition pathways, as well as create sustainable supportive and enabling environments at the community, district, and national-level.

SAGE's overarching programme outcomes are:

1. **Learning:** the improvement in foundational literacy and numeracy performance of out-of-school girls and their increased self-efficacy and life skills.

2. **Transition:** an increase in the likelihood of highly marginalised adolescent girls transitioning through non-formal education or back into formal education, into vocational or life skills training or into fully paid employment which could be self-employment.

3. **Sustainability:** the expectation that the changes brought about through SAGE are sustainable following the end of the programme due to fundamental shifts in social norms, practices, behaviours or attitudes in the programme communities and through the continued efforts and increased capacity of local stakeholders and by relevant government stakeholders including the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprise Development (MWACSMED).

To achieve this a multi-component and holistic model is utilised in which four components intersect with one another to maximise impact at the girl, hub, community, district and national level. By being a gender-transformative model, SAGE seeks to work at multiple levels to promote and improve education for girls and young women by tackling the root causes of gendered social and economic barriers and creating an enabling environment for transforming unequal gender norms.

Results have evidenced the testing of the model's ability to successfully integrate high-quality interventions, leading to significantly improved learning outcomes for over 13,400 educationally marginalised adolescent girls in Zimbabwe.

Evaluation results for the SAGE model can be found here: https://girlseducationchallenge.org/projects/project/supporting-adolescent-girls-education-sage/

Key SAGE Programme Components

Programme components	Details
Accelerated Teaching and Learning (ATL)	Providing out-of-school girls with high-quality, accelerated learning in Community Based Learning Hubs and eliminating barriers to education through free, accessible, inclusive, and flexible learning opportunities. A multi-modal delivery model enables volunteers to support girls via phone, at the household (door-to-door) and in small community groups. Leading continuous professional development (CPD) of community educators (CEs) to enhance their capacity to deliver inclusive, gender-responsive pedagogy through a range of methods, including creating mentoring linkages with the support of district-level education officials, virtual and in-person training and establishing communities of reflective practice (CORP).
Champions of Girls' Education (CoGE) sessions	Supporting adolescent girls and boys to improve their selfesteem and life skills through Plan International's Champions of Change Model, where community-based sessions encouraged the exploration of issues such as sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender rights and economic empowerment. Establishing men's clubs and intergenerational dialogues, whereby community members, including men, boys, and local leaders, are mobilised to adopt more positive gender attitudes and support and protect girls and young women through intergenerational dialogue and to act as champions of positive masculinity..
Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOP)	Improving access to skills training through an integrated skills outreach programme whereby girls are mentored and trained by local master craft people in a community-based vocational training programme to increase livelihood opportunities for the girls and their families.
Safeguarding	Delivery of direct activities complemented with mainstreaming of good practice across all SAGE project activities to create a safe and inclusive environment where all programme participants, staff, volunteers, partners, and associates could thrive and feel secure. It also aims to support people to understand and exercise their rights and report any concerns. Activities include safe recruitment practices, capacity development, awareness raising, strengthening of child protection structures, service mapping and referrals to specialised services, case management and monitoring well-being and safety in hubs.

Celebrating SAGE learners success at graduation events

![Plan International UK logo — For children and equality for girls](logo)

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