



How do you transform a school  
and its community into a

# **A GENDER-RESPONSIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT?**



# RESEARCH PROJECT

A development research project to **scale up FAWE's gender-responsive school model for gender equity and girls' success** was carried out by the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), the Laboratoire de Recherche sur les Transformations Économiques et Sociales de l'Université Cheikh Anta Diop (LARTES) and the Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie, in **Burundi, Mali, Senegal** and the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**. The goal of this study was to generate knowledge and solid evidence on the impact of the Centre of Excellence model on girls' retention and success in school. The research also aimed to analyze the conditions for scaling it up to promote gender equality.

More specifically, this four-country study had the following goals:

- Collect and analyze evidence to increase knowledge about FAWE's Centre of Excellence model
- Evaluate the impact of the components and features of the model on girls' enrolment, retention and success in school
- Analyze the conditions for scaling and the factors limiting the roll-out of the Centre of Excellence model
- Evaluate the cost of model's components in different countries
- Propose an optimized cost scheme for scaling the model



## FAWE'S GENDER-RESPONSIVE SCHOOL MODEL

According to the FAWE, a gender-responsive school is committed to creating an academic, social and physical environment that takes into account the specific needs of girls and boys. This requires coordination among teachers, parents, school administrators, community members and students, all of whom are committed to promoting gender equality.

The Centre of Excellence model is based on five key dimensions: management, pedagogy, learning materials, school environment and community involvement. These dimensions are embodied in eight essential components:

- Gender-responsive management training for school principals
- A gender-responsive approach to teacher training
- Incentives to encourage girls' participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)
- Bursaries for underprivileged girls
- A program to empower young people, especially girls, called Tuseme clubs
- A sexual maturation management program
- Gender-responsive school infrastructure
- Community involvement in school management



## GENDER-RESPONSIVE MANAGEMENT

Gender-responsive management integrates equality into school administration and pedagogy. It involves the active participation of women, training for school staff in girls' schooling, the creation or strengthening of mothers' associations and arrangements that facilitate placing women in positions of responsibility. The approach includes, for instance, gender-equitable rules, zero tolerance of gender-based violence, a gender focal point, standards for essential infrastructure, and databases to monitor student well-being.

## GENDER-RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

Gender-responsive pedagogy adapts teaching processes to meet the specific needs of girls and boys. It includes a gender-sensitive approach for planning, teaching, classroom management and evaluations. Promoting equality and equitable participation, a gender-responsive lesson plan includes activities that are interesting for everyone, a variety of pedagogical approaches, the elimination of gender bias in materials, any necessary adaptations and the promotion of equitable participation, thus creating an inclusive and equal educational environment.

## STEM INCENTIVES

To promote girls' participation in STEM fields, incentives are put in place, including specific activities and remedial workshops focusing on STEM subjects. Teachers play a crucial role in motivating girls to choose scientific paths. These initiatives aim to reduce gender disparities in STEM fields by creating an environment conducive to the empowerment of girls, boosting their interest and confidence in these disciplines.

## SCHOOL BURSARIES

Financial insecurity often leads students to drop out of school. Bursaries provide financial support for students. In Senegal, for example, 40% of girls in the first part of high school and 53.9% in the second part had difficulty paying their school fees.

## TUSEME CLUBS

Tuseme, meaning "let us speak out freely" in Kiswahili, is a youth empowerment club program. The clubs aim to improve young people's ability to make informed decisions, resist negative influences and avoid risky behaviours. They seek to empower girls by helping them develop skills such as self-confidence, self-esteem, decision-making and negotiation, to overcome gender-related barriers. At the same time, the program aims to empower boys by freeing them from oppressive attitudes such as machismo, bullying and sexist behaviours, while cultivating the confidence needed to sincerely embrace gender equality.



## SEXUAL MATURATION MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Empowerment clubs, and Tuseme in particular, include a sexual maturation management program that provides a safe space to openly discuss issues related to growing into an adult. This promotes understanding of the natural aspects of maturation, enabling informal discussions on sensitive topics such as HIV/AIDS prevention and puberty. These clubs aim to provide sexual health education, creating a respectful environment where young people can exchange knowledge and experiences.

## SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

The model incorporates adapted infrastructures, such as boarding schools, separate toilets and access to water, taking gender differences into account. Menstrual hygiene management is also considered by providing a safe environment with safety standards, lighting and fencing, and preventing gender-based violence. Proximity to school and accessible transport play an important role in girls' access to and retention in school.

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Community involvement in school management is crucial to promoting gender equality and supporting girls' education. Awareness-raising activities targeting parents, leaders, teachers and students are planned to create gender awareness and increased support for girls' education. Parents' associations play a key role in raising community awareness of the value of girls' education, providing guidance on menstrual hygiene and preventing gender-based violence. Key elements of this community-based approach include the composition of the management committee, the role of women and the involvement of parents in monitoring girls' education.



## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of the educational model in four countries is based on quantitative and qualitative data. Questionnaires for the schools (160 responses per country) explore the model's operation, benefits, obstacles and enabling factors. Questionnaires for the students (835 responses per country) analyze girls' experiences regarding access to and success at school, assessing their perception of the model. Life stories (84 total) focus on the impacts on girls' educational paths. Qualitative data include interviews (186 total) and focus groups (110 total) with various players. Observations (106 in all) examine classroom interactions. Cost-feasibility studies compare implementation expenditures between countries, analyzing total and component-specific costs, and look at the proportion of the operating budget, the share of salaries and the unit costs for eight educational components.



# OVERALL RESULTS

## HIGHLIGHTS

In general, the model seems to have a positive impact on girls' school retention. Of students who used the model, 82.8% feel that it has had a positive impact on keeping them in school, as this teacher explains.

*« Here at the Torokorobougou school, the environment has changed a lot thanks to our participation in the various training courses organized by FAWE as part of the KIX project. After the various training sessions, under the supervision of the instructors and with the involvement of the members of the School Management Committee, students in the Fondamental II level at the Torokorobougou school took the following initiatives:*

- Starting a Tuseme club,
- Separating and labelling toilets,
- Holding awareness-raising sessions that increased library use,
- Holding awareness-raising sessions empowering students to plant and maintain flowers, as well as to clean the yards, classrooms and toilets to make the school environment more appealing

*Consideration is being given to mobilizing partners and resources to equip the school with an infirmary. »*

The components that have had the greatest impact are **gender-responsive management, gender-responsive pedagogy** and the **Tuseme clubs**.

The Tuseme clubs seem to have had a significant impact on school retention in three of the four countries: 81.5% in the DRC, 54.1% in Mali and 49.1% in Burundi. The figure is only 11.2% in Senegal, but this can be explained by the fact that only 10.1% of schools in the country have an operational Tuseme club.

School management support was the second most influential component:

- Burundi = 67,3%
- RDC= 24,7%
- Mali=35%
- Sénégal=12,9%

After attending the gender-responsive management training courses, most principals support their teaching staff in incorporating gender-responsive pedagogy. In Burundi, 94.2% of principals support their teaching staff; in Mali, 91.7%; and in Senegal, 68.4%.





# RESULTS BY COUNTRY



## BURUNDI

In terms of **management practices**, testimonials highlight an improvement in the inclusion of women on School Management Committees.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the school administration said it ensures that student representation is inclusive by strongly encouraging girls' participation<sup>2</sup>. Over 66.7% of schools have adopted non-discrimination and gender-equality policies and regulations<sup>3</sup>.

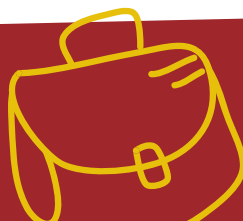
To date, 52.2% of the teaching staff has been trained to implement the **Tuseme model**. The clubs were developed on an experimental basis and are operational only in schools that were already benefiting from the model prior to the research project. In addition, eight out of ten teachers said they ensure that girls and boys participate equally in the classroom and have equal responsibility and leadership opportunities<sup>4</sup>. **Sexual and reproductive health** is taught in 81.6% of schools, particularly in the latter part of high school.

The various model components have had an impact on the girls' sense of freedom of expression, with 97.3% reporting feeling entitled to express themselves freely<sup>5</sup>. Two-thirds of the girls surveyed felt they have a say in what is learned in class and how lessons are conducted. Thus, the model has had a real impact on the learners' agency.

Overall, **81.7% of beneficiaries observed that the model has had an impact on their school retention rate**. In terms of the effectiveness of the model's various components, the percentages of beneficiaries surveyed who state that the component has had an essential impact on girls' retention rates and success are:

- 89,9% for gender-responsive management
- 78,3% for gender-responsive pedagogy
- 71% for Tuseme training
- 68,1 % for menstrual hygiene management
- 52,2 % or encouraging girls to pursue scientific fields and for adapting materials to gender considerations
- 50,7 % for initiatives against violence and harassment

Despite this, there are still obstacles to keeping girls in school. The main reason cited by girls for dropping out is the cost of schooling (37.5%). They also noted their household chore obligations (12.5%) and their parents refusing to allow them to continue their education (12.5%)<sup>6</sup>. It would therefore be interesting to work more on community buy-in, especially since only 7.3% of schools have an operational Association of Mothers of Students. The lack or inadequacy of infrastructure, such as separate, clean toilets and access to drinking water, was cited by one-quarter of girls as the main reason for their absence during menstruation.



1 Rapport Burundi, p44.

2 Rapport Burundi, p44.

3 Rapport Burundi, p44.

4 Rapport Burundi, p50.

5 Rapport Burundi, p53.

6 Rapport Burundi, p62.



## MALI

In Mali, 87.5% of schools have policies and practices in place to promote non-discrimination and gender equality among teachers<sup>7</sup>. In addition, 79.2% of schools have a gender-integrated school administration system, on average made up of 41.7% women<sup>8</sup>. A total of 91.7% of principals support and supervise teaching staff in the incorporation of gender-responsive pedagogy.

Among teaching staff, 95.8% said they are aware of girls' safety. And 93.3% strive to ensure that girls and boys have equal opportunities to take an active part in the classroom and act as leaders<sup>9</sup>. The proportion of girls actively participating in class discussions is 62.4% in preparatory schools (*lycées*), 38.8% in upper secondary schools and 37.3% in technical and vocational schools<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, only half of teachers make sure they use gender-responsive learning materials (52.6%) and provide students with information on sexual and reproductive health (46.7%).

As in Burundi, the model has had an impact on girls' freedom of expression: 84.4% of girls at all education levels said they feel they can express themselves freely in class. Training with FAWE has enabled students to regain confidence, enjoy freedom of expression and note a change in behaviour toward their classmates and teachers. It has encouraged girls to take responsibility for being active in school and extracurricular activities.

Overall, **84.4% of beneficiaries observed that the model has had an impact on their school retention rate**. In terms of the effectiveness of the model's various components, the percentages of beneficiaries surveyed who stated that the component has had an essential impact on girls' retention rates and success are:

- 91,7% for Tuseme training
- 83,3% gender-responsive management
- 79,2% for gender-responsive pedagogy
- 25% for community support
- 12,5% for bursaries for girls

Most principals and teaching staff stated that, when implemented properly and in partnership with all the players, the model can greatly improve girls' access to and success in school, as well as their retention rates<sup>11</sup>.

A few issues were raised in relation to menstruation, which sometimes forces girls to stay at home or even, in rare cases, drop out of school (3.3%). In fact, only 48.8% of girls use school toilets. The main reasons cited for not using them are a lack of cleanliness (79.8%) and lack of soap (20.2%), and that they are frequently in use (19.7%)<sup>12</sup>. School fees can also be a barrier to girls' education: 34.1% said they have had difficulty paying for school supplies<sup>13</sup>.



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7 Rapport Mali, p51.  
8 Rapport Mali p146.  
9 Rapport Mali p58.  
10 Rapport Mali p59.

11 Rapport Mali, p51.  
12 Rapport Mali p146.  
13 Rapport Mali p58.





## RÉPUBLIQUE DÉMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO



In the DRC, only one-third (37.5%) of respondents confirmed the availability of a **gender-inclusive school administration system**<sup>14</sup>. Women are often excluded from School Management Committees. Principals are generally the decision-makers in all areas of school life<sup>15</sup>. Only 20.8% of schools have an operational Association of Mothers of Students. However, most schools (83.3%) have **policies** and **practices in place to combat discrimination and gender inequality**<sup>16</sup>. The challenge then seems to be to transform these regulations into action within school management.

In the schools surveyed, the **Tuseme clubs** (87.5%), **gender-responsive pedagogy** (41.7%) and **gender-responsive management** (41.7%) components have had the greatest impact on keeping girls in school. Despite sociocultural gender norms, Tuseme clubs have been implemented in 83.3% of schools, facilitating a move toward greater confidence and increased participation in school activities. Most girls (81.5%) reported that Tuseme training is the model component having had the most positive impact on their perseverance in school. In addition, 80% of principals reported having supervised their teaching staff to ensure the inclusion of gender-responsive pedagogy. Several training courses have been developed. The most popular are gender-responsive language use (58.3%), analysis of teaching and learning materials used (50%) and classroom interaction between girls and boys (50%).

In terms of **meaningful participation** in educational activities, 91.1% of girls said their teachers encourage them to participate in class, and 61.6% said their level of participation is equal to that of the boys<sup>20</sup>. Most girls (96.6%) reported feeling free to express their opinions on various life issues that affect them<sup>21</sup>.

Despite the components' success, girls still face a multitude of barriers. Due to gender stereotypes, their **representation in technical schools** is still low. They also face financial difficulties: 54.1% of girls said they have had difficulty covering school fees<sup>22</sup>. In terms of infrastructure, despite the existence of **separate toilets**, they are not considered clean enough to be used. This issue was cited by 50% of girls as a reason for missing school while menstruating. And, although 83.3% of teachers said they are aware of **gender-based violence** in the school environment, only 33% of schools have set up mechanisms for reporting violence and taking care of victims.



14 Rapport RDC p44.

15 Rapport RDC p43.

16 Rapport RDC p46.

17 Rapport RDC p82.

18 Rapport RDC p84.

19 Rapport RDC p88.

20 Rapport RDC p62.

21 Rapport RDC p63.

22 Rapport RDC p75.

23 Rapport RDC p119.



## SENEGAL



In terms of **gender-responsive management practices**, 86.5% of School Management Committees are mixed. On the other hand, only 10.5% of schools have an operational Association of Mothers of Students. Thus, parents are not sufficiently involved in school management, even though they have a direct impact on community awareness (36.8%), the organization of remedial classes outside school, specifically targeting science subjects (29%) and the distribution of school kits (13.2%)<sup>24</sup>.

A total of 68.4% of principals said they support teaching staff in incorporating gender-responsive pedagogy. Teachers received training in gender-responsive lesson planning (26.3%); classroom interactions between girls and boys, students and teachers (23.7%); strategies to encourage girls' participation in the classroom (21.1%)<sup>25</sup>; and developing girls' participation in the classroom (21.1%). These training courses are effective. After completing them, 97.4% of teachers said they encourage girls to pursue scientific fields<sup>26</sup>, and 77% of girls generally felt free to express themselves in class<sup>27</sup>.

Overall, **81.6% of beneficiaries observed that the model has had an impact on their school retention rate**. In terms of the effectiveness of the model's various components, the percentages of teachers stating that the component has had an essential impact on girls' retention rates and success are:<sup>28</sup>

- 55,3 % for gender-responsive management
- 39,5 % for remedial education
- 36,8 % for Tuseme training
- 23,7 % for encouragement to pursue STEM fields
- 18,4 % for reproductive and sexual health education and hygiene management

Through financial support and remedial courses in particular, FAWÉ's interventions have enabled girls benefiting from its model to continue their studies and improve their academic performance.<sup>29</sup>

The issue of **component sustainability** is highlighted by the fact that former beneficiaries of the model were generally less satisfied (62.3%) with the model's impact on their school retention than new beneficiaries (89.7%). Therefore, we need to ensure that the implementation of the components is maintained over time and is perhaps occasionally re-evaluated. It has been pointed out that only 15.8% of teachers have access to **adapted teaching materials**<sup>30</sup>. And, despite the existence of separate toilets for girls and boys, the girls generally do not use them, most often due to the facilities' lack of cleanliness (52.1%). This is one of the reasons for missing school during menstruation.



24 Rapport Sénégal p127.

25 Rapport Sénégal p85.

26 Rapport Sénégal p88.

27 Rapport Sénégal p55.

28 Ces statistiques se trouvent à la page 76 du rapport Sénégal

29 Rapport Sénégal p75.

30 Rapport Sénégal p95.

# PERSISTENT CHALLENGES

In all four countries participating in the study, school material remains an important issue, with only 23.2% of teachers having access to gender-responsive teaching materials in their schools: 24.6% in Burundi, 33.3% in the DRC, 20.8% in Mali and 15.8% in Senegal.

*"The teaching materials are insufficient. They are given to us by the Ministry and it's inclusive [...]. There is no chapter that covers the gender aspect in my class [...]. However, after the training sessions, if I saw material containing stereotypes, I would be able to identify and deconstruct them. The material we have doesn't encourage reflection on stereotypes."* (woman, aged 47, teacher)

## SCALING

**Scaling** involves "scaling the positive impacts of innovation while carefully studying how scaling unfolds" (IDRC, 2019). More precisely, it is the process, and its capacity, of increasing the reach of the innovation, whether qualitatively (through densification and/or intensification) or quantitatively (by expanding the geographical area or number of beneficiaries). With this in mind, we can examine the scaling of the Centre of Excellence model by analyzing the factors that promote its success and the barriers that stand in its way.

## SUCCESS FACTORS FOR SCALING

**Sharing success stories** is critical to bringing FAWE's achievements to a wider audience. **Pooling resources** is an effective strategy for allowing more establishments to share the benefits. **The availability of skilled human resources** is vital, emphasizing the necessary synergy between political will, human expertise and financial support. **Educators and school administrators** play a pivotal role as drivers of change who influence parents and students.

## BARRIERS TO SCALING

Scaling requires **training, appropriate infrastructure** and **awareness-raising sessions**. Lack of **integration of the model into school policies and programs** is an issue, which will require greater Ministry involvement. For long-term sustainability, these initiatives must be integrated into **national education policies**. **Lack of funding** is a major barrier, stressing the programs' dependence on economic resources. **The importance of infrastructure**, such as school canteens, is necessary to support student attendance and performance. **Economic poverty, cultural resistance** and **differing interpretations of gender** have been identified as constraints, and integrated solutions are required to overcome these complex challenges. In addition, teachers point to obstacles such as a lack of **time, financial resources and follow-up** to ensure the sustainability of gender equality initiatives.



# COST

In terms of **cost**, the interventions cost US\$33,714 on average, ranging from US\$38,882 in Burundi to US\$28,318 in Senegal. Based on minimum costs, and all other things being equal, a scaling program targeting 1,000 people (girls, teaching staff and management) would cost US\$142,208.

Three components stood out above the others in the study: gender-responsive management, gender-responsive pedagogy and Tuseme clubs.

- **Gender-responsive management** proved to be the most expensive, but it was one of the most effective components, with a minimum cost of **\$225 per participant** observed in Mali.
- Gender-responsive teaching cost an average of \$245 per participant. However, it is interesting to note that the DRC managed to keep costs to a minimum, spending around \$167 per participant.
- The **Tuseme clubs** component, which involves setting up a training program to empower girls and boys, was deployed in all the countries. On average, this initiative cost **\$246 per participant**, with Senegal recording the lowest cost, at \$133 per participant.

Tableau 1 Principale composante du budget par pays (en dollars USD)

	Budget global	Budget dédié aux opérations	Budget gouvernance/dé gestion
RDC	35090	31594	2296
Burundi	38882	38882	2544
Mali	32569	29238	3331
Sénégal	28318	26335,7	1982,2
Moyenne	33714,7	31512,4	2538,3

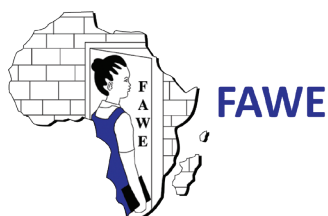
Source 1 LARTES (2023)

Cost analysis shows that budgets are largely dominated by the operational portion (93.5% of the budget on average), which implies an **intervention largely focused on change activities**.



# CONCLUSION

The research project, carried out by a consortium between the Forum for African Women Educationalists, the Laboratoire de Recherche sur les Transformations Économiques et Sociales and the Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie, measured the impact of the gender-responsive school model developed by FAWE. The results unequivocally show the effectiveness of the model and its components, while identifying areas for future improvement. In addition, the research project gave us a snapshot of the gender-responsive school model and estimated the costs associated with its implementation. We hope this documentation will make it easier to understand the model and move to scaling it across the African continent.



**The Forum for African Women Educationalists** is a pan-African non-governmental organization founded in 1992 by five women ministers of education, to promote the education of girls and women in sub-Saharan Africa by ensuring that they have access to schools and can complete their studies and realize their potential. FAWE operates in 33 African countries through a network of 34 national offices.



**Laboratoire de Recherche sur les Transformations Économiques et Sociales** was established under this name in 2012 at IFAN Ch. A. Diop. As part of the Doctoral School of Human and Social Studies (ETHOS), it coordinates the Social Sciences Applied to Development doctoral program, as part of the Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD) reform.



**L'éducation de qualité pour tous**

**Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie** is a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote access to equitable, quality, lifelong education for all children, youth and adults, guaranteeing each person the means to shape their own futures and that of our societies. It operates in 11 countries: Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Haiti, Mali, Rwanda, Senegal and Togo.

This research project is funded by:

