

Case Study

Girls Rising and Global Education Fund

Author: Albiana Jasiqi, supported by NORRAG

Introduction

Together, Girl Rising and Global Education Fund (GR–GEF) have launched a four-year Venture Philanthropy Fund. Using the principles of traditional venture capital financing for philanthropic grant-giving, GR–GEF aim to support social entrepreneurs in leading organizations toward growth and positive change in their communities (Girls Rising, n.d.).

GEF is a foundation with the mission to “improve the lives of children living in poverty around the world through education” by working with “local partners that are leading innovative approaches to increase access, quality, and relevance of education for children living in poverty” (Global Innovation Exchange, 2017). GEF, however, has recently merged with the Girl Rising foundation.

Girl Rising was founded in 2009, first as a film production company that, with the film *Girl Rising*, raised awareness for girls’ education and empowerment and in 2017 changed into a non-profit organization keeping that initial aim. The foundation aims to draw attention to the fact that to this day, millions of girls worldwide still are “kept out of school, married as children, abused, trafficked, and discriminated against” (Girls Rising, 2020). Thus, Girls Rising wants to make sure that all girls receive access to education. The foundation uses storytelling as a transformative tool and has programs in India, the United States, Northern Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan, Thailand, and Guatemala.

As a joint foundation, GR–GEF have developed programs in India and Kenya. Their aim is to find and invest in leaders intending to promote gender equality and to improve the quality of education for girls and boys living in poverty.

Motivation and Goals

The GR–GEF Foundation believes that quality education can transform the lives of children living in poverty. To date, overflowing classrooms and ill-equipped teachers overwhelm the system, and schools tend to reinforce harmful gender norms for girls. Girls all over the world lag behind in completing secondary school and generally face obstacles that boys do not encounter in school, which inhibit their learning and limit future options. However, the issue of insufficient funding to support local, early-stage ideas to address these problems remains, and one-off grants are not reliable to support and grow promising innovative ideas. “Social entrepreneurs need multi-disciplinary support, including how to address gender norms and tell their stories of impact” (Girls Rising, n.d.), suggests GR–GEF.

Venture Philanthropy (VP)

Private sector engagement in education is generally defined as the “provision of education or education services by non-state private actors” (Srivastava & Read, 2019, p. 15). Non-state private actors work with three different strategies: profit-oriented or commercially driven entities, non-profit orientation with an aim of positive social impact, and a hybrid solution of both a profit and a social impact motive (ibid.). Literature reviews have shown that “[I]nvestors are increasingly orienting towards social impact and blended value investment strategies, resulting in intensified interest in hybrid actors and strategies” (Srivastava & Read, 2019, p. 15).

VP can be considered as an investment strategy for social impact and can have the following characteristics:

- VPs provide financing for social enterprises (for-profit and not-for-profit) that wish to expand but lack financial capital
- Like traditional venture capital investment, VP does “due diligence” before entering a formal relationship with a social venture
- Like traditional venture capital investment, VP provides capital and services to organizations to add value to their work and maximize the social return of investment (Scarlata & Alemany, 2010)
- The support includes financial (grants, loans, or equity) and non-financial resources “to identify and support self-sustaining, systemic and scalable solutions to development challenges, with the goal of achieving the greatest impact” (OECD Development Centre, 2014; Scarlata & Alemany, 2010; Srivastava & Read, 2019, p. 22)
- VP adopts a performance-based approach to social investment; therefore, performance is monitored with defined goals, targets, and timelines.

To source and select the most impactful investments, GR–GEF have “collaborated with thoughtful local and global leaders, activists, and other stakeholders engaged in improving gender equality and the quality of learning for girls and boys in Kenya and India” (Girls Rising, n.d.). With their input, GR–GEF reportedly identified a promising number of non-profits that could potentially fit their fund criteria. Finally, the foundation has selected four organizations to invest in that are led by social entrepreneurs doing innovative work. Furthermore, they have found a number of local non-profits in both countries who are interested in incorporating Girl Rising’s curriculum into their own ongoing programs. GR–GEF aspire to bring these organizations together to “exchange ideas and lessons learned and where relevant also engage with existing networks identified to contribute to local ecosystems.”

GEF has already piloted a VP fund 2014–2018 and invested in a program called PACE. PACE was established in 2013 with the support of GR–GEF (first time in collaboration) and is now part of the developing learning network of Kenya under GR–GEF. Since then, PACE has benefited “approximately 600 fellows as well as teachers and primary students across 40 schools” (Girls Rising, n.d.).

Programs

Currently, GR–GEF are funding four organizations in India and Kenya. All four of them address the issues of gender equality and education in the chosen country. Because GR had already developed a curriculum based on their well-recognized film *Girl Rising*, the organization found that it would fit well into the existing programs of the four grantees to help achieve their mission. The supported programs will be briefly summarized in the following:

India

Slam Out Loud (SOL)

This organization was founded in 2014 by a former “Teach for India Fellows”. It now aims to help children express themselves using performance and visual arts. Trained artists promote the development of the socio-emotional skills of girls and boys. It “believes that through art forms such as spoken word poetry, theatre, visual arts and storytelling, essential skills like communication, collaboration and empathy are developed and enhanced” (Girls Rising, n.d.). In collaboration with Pratham, a large local non-governmental organisation (NGO), children are provided with access to creative art education resources. GR–GEF support their work with the GR curriculum as well as mentoring support and networking.

Milaan Foundation

During their time at university, four students, who later became founders of the Milaan Foundation, established a secondary school near Uttar Pradesh. Based on their experiences, they developed the

program Girl Icon in 2014. The Girl Icon program is a “girl-led leadership and mentorship initiative for rural girls that focuses on core areas: staying in and succeeding in school—particularly finishing (at least) secondary education, girls’ health and well-being, gender-based violence, and developing agency and confidence in pursuing their dreams” (Girls Rising, n.d.). A crucial component is the girls’ willingness to address the issues/problems within their communities and to think of ways to implement change. Like in the previous project, GR–GEF provide support with GR educational tools and accompany Girl Icon in evolving and understanding its ongoing educational and personal journey.

Kenya

Big Picture Learning Kenya (BPLK)

This program was established in 2018 based on the founder’s longstanding experience as an educator, trainer of teachers and school leaders and her significant work with teachers in Nairobi. With her team, she provides intensive training for teachers and school leaders to create more practical and professional internships. The focus lies especially on students risking to fail/drop out of secondary school. “BPLK’s founder learned of the BPL model as she researched existing solutions to high school failure around the world and has since been adapting the model to the Kenya context” (Girls Rising, n.d.). A long-term goal is to adapt the schools and learning to the current, quickly changing world. Again, the support through GR–GEF is provided in the form of the GR curriculum that can be adapted to the BPLK program.

Sunflower Trust

Two women (American and Kenyan) founded this program in 2017. Their goal is to change the “trajectory of girls’ learning opportunities and future life paths” (Girls Rising, n.d.). With learning programs, they aim to improve literacy, comprehension, and leadership skills. The program has already shown successful growth in reading, comprehension, and self-confidence. GR–GEF support the work of Sunflower via GR educational tools and an adapted curriculum for Kenya, accompanied by Pathways to Alternative Learning and Education (PALE) for highly at-risk girls in Grades 5–8. PALE also offers communication technology bootcamps to teach girls about their health and rights.

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