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Getting girls back to school in Kenya: The 4Ts ('Trace, Track, Talk and reTurn') Initiative implementation report

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Getting girls back to school in Kenya

The 4Ts ('Trace, Track, Talk and reTurn') Initiative

Implementation Report

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List of Acronyms

4Ts	Track, Trace, Talk, and return
CBC	Competency-Based Curriculum
CSOs	Curriculum Support Officers
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
KDHS	Kenya Demographic and Health Survey
MoE	Ministry of Education
PPGs	Pregnant or Parenting Girls
SBTS	School-Based Teachers Support

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to devastating economic and social disruptions including in the education sector globally. In Kenya, the government closed institutions of basic education and training on 15th March 2020 to curb the transmission of the coronavirus. Consequently, the education of an estimated 18 million learners was disrupted, with a total of about 15 million children and adolescents in primary and secondary schools remaining at home for more than 9 months without access to structured learning, social protection and other benefits associated with schooling. The unprecedented disruption to education systems has had a particularly devastating impact on the situation of girls' education, with many at risk of not returning to classrooms once schools reopened¹. The pandemic disrupted access to sexual and reproductive health services (including contraceptives) and access to safe spaces such as girls' clubs due to preventive measures such as lockdowns². As a result, many girls faced multiple vulnerabilities that inhibited their ability to access basic education, including risks of child marriage, early pregnancy, gender-based violence, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), sexual exploitation and child labor.

The negative impact of COVID-19 on girls' education underscores the need for interventions geared towards addressing its impact on school re-entry and retention, particularly of marginalized and vulnerable girls such as those pregnant or parenting. Kenya has a favorable policy environment to support retention within, and re-entry into, schools for vulnerable girls. For example, Kenya's school re-entry policy implementation guidelines are designed to support all out-of-school children, regardless of gender³, while the national school health policy⁴ specifically supports retention for pregnant learners in school. Moreover, in the recent past, notable core challenges to girls' education such as teenage pregnancy and other harmful cultural practices such as child marriage and FGM/C have received considerable attention by policymakers, programme implementers, researchers and other key stakeholders⁵. Such opportunities provide a robust environment for the operationalization and institutionalization of school re-entry guidelines to promote inclusive education for sustainable development in Kenya.

Whereas approaches to delivering solutions to promote school re-entry during the COVID-19 pandemic period and beyond are at a nascent stage of a transformation process, many positive lessons and new models are emerging as well as barriers and unforeseen

¹ UNICEF, 2020. COVID-19 and Girls' Education in East Asia and Pacific- Issue Brief.

https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/7146/file/Issue_Brief%3A_Issue_Brief%3A_COVID-19_and_Girls%E2%80%99_Education_in_East_Asia_and_Pacific.pdf

² Amina Mendez Acosta and David Evans (2020). COVID-19 and Girls' Education: What We Know So Far and What We Expect. <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/covid-19-and-girls-education-what-we-know-so-far-and-what-we-expect-happen>

³ Ministry of Education, Republic of Kenya. 2020. National guidelines for school re-entry in early learning and basic education. https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2020RH_NationalSchoolReEntryGuidelines.pdf

⁴ Ministry of Education & Ministry of Health, Government of Kenya. 2018. Kenya School Health Policy. Republic of Kenya. https://www.ncikenya.or.ke/documents/KENYA%20SCHOOL%20HEALTH%20POLICY%20BOOK%2020_11_2018.pdf

⁵ : Population Council, Regional Education Learning Initiative, & Mannion Daniels. (2021). Advancing Girls' Education in Light of COVID-19 in East Africa: A Synthesis Report. Nairobi, Kenya: Population Council. https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2021SBSR_GirlsEducSynthesisReport.pdf

challenges. This report documents key lessons learnt from implementing an intervention designed to expand out-of-school girls' access to, and inclusion in, education during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya.

The 4Ts Initiative-Phase II

The intervention involves the operationalization of the school re-entry policy guidelines by providing technical support to the Ministry of Education (MoE) to increase pregnant/parenting girls' primary school re-entry rates through the implementation of a back-to-school campaign referred to as the 'Track, Trace, Talk, and reTurn' (4Ts) initiative. Specifically, the campaign entails tracking down and tracing of out-of-school girls by the MoE in collaboration with other stakeholders; talking to such girls and their families about the school re-entry policy guidelines to inform them of the girls' right to return to school; and ensuring that girls who want to, do return to school.

The 4Ts intervention phase II builds on phase I, an adaptation of a similar intervention by the Homa Bay County Department of Education in late 2019. The 4Ts phase I was implemented in two sub-counties, namely, Ndhiwa and Suba South in Homa bay County from January to February, 2021 and focused on out-of-school pregnant or parenting girls only. In contrast, phase II 4Ts was implemented in two counties (Homa Bay and Narok) and targeted all out-of-school girls irrespective of the reason for being away from school.

Goal and Objectives

Goal

The overall goal of the 4Ts intervention is to increase school re-entry and retention rates for pregnant and parenting girls across Kenya by operationalizing Kenya's school re-entry policy guidelines in the time of COVID-19.

Objectives

Specifically, the 4Ts initiative objectives include:

- Tracing girls who dropped out of primary school.
- Tracking them down at the household level in communities.
- Talking to them (and their parents/guardians) about the school re-entry policy; and, ultimately
- Promoting their return to school.

Intervention Sites

The 4Ts intervention phase II was implemented in two counties namely, Homa Bay and Narok. Both counties experience poor health and education outcomes.

Administratively, Homa Bay county is divided into 8 sub-counties namely: Homa Bay Town, Rachuonyo North, Rachuonyo South Rachuonyo East, Ndhiwa, Rangwe, Mbita (Suba North) and Suba South. The county is further divided into 42 zones with a total of 881 public primary schools. Homa Bay County is predominantly rural with population of 1.3 million as of 2019 housing and population census⁶. The main economic activities in Homa-Bay are fishing and fish trade, agriculture (mainly crop and livestock farming), commercial business and small-scale industries. According to the 2014 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS, 2014)⁷, Homa Bay County had the second-highest prevalence of teenage pregnancy in the country after Narok—about 1 in 3 adolescent girls had begun motherhood. Furthermore, the county has a perpetual burden of high unintended pregnancy and overall high HIV prevalence estimated at 19.6%⁸, the second-highest in Kenya. These unfavorable sexual and reproductive health compounded by widespread poverty contributes to poor education outcomes. A study by the Population Council in Homabay revealed that in nearly 70 percent of out-of-school teenage girls in this county, pregnancy was the primary reason (reported by girls themselves) for school dropout⁹.

Narok County is divided into six sub-counties namely, Transmara West, Transmara East, Narok North, Narok South, Narok West and Narok East. The county is further divided into 32 zones with a total of 664 public primary schools. Narok County had a population of 1,157,873 million as of the 2019 Kenya population and housing census¹⁰. The county is predominantly inhabited by the Maasai people. Teenage motherhood and harmful cultural practices such as child marriages and FGM/C are widespread. According to the 2014 KDHS, the prevalence of teenage motherhood and child marriages was more than 40 percent¹¹. Coupled with poverty, these factors all conspire to disadvantage girls' education with only one in 15¹² girls enrolled in primary school transitioning to secondary school.

⁶ Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS). Kenya population and housing census volume I: population by county and sub-county 2019; 2019 [Nairobi].

⁷ Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Health [Kenya], National AIDS Control Council [Kenya], Kenya Medical Research Institute, National Council for Population and Development [Kenya], ICF International. (2015). Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2014. Nairobi.

⁸ National AIDS and STI Control Programme (NAS COP), Preliminary KENPHIA 2018 Report. Nairobi: NAS COP; 2020. <https://www.health.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/KENPHIA-2018-PREL-REP-2020-HR3-final.pdf>

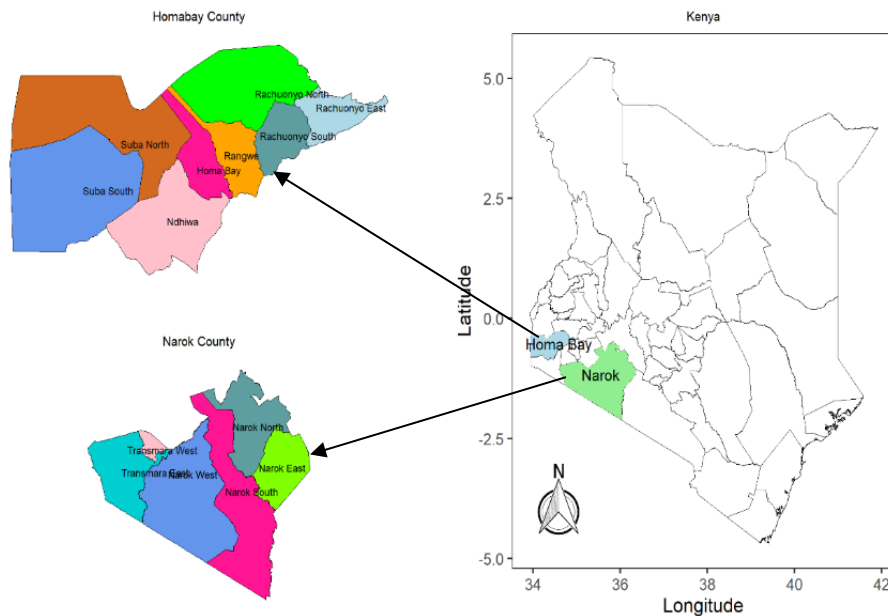
⁹ Undie, C, Birungi, H, Odwe, G. and Obare, F. (2015). "Expanding access to secondary school education for teenage mothers in Kenya: A baseline study report," STEP UP Technical Report. Nairobi. https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2015STEPUP_EducTeenMothersKenya.pdf

¹⁰ Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS). Kenya population and housing census volume I: population by county and sub-county 2019; 2019 [Nairobi].

¹¹ Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Health [Kenya], National AIDS Control Council [Kenya], Kenya Medical Research Institute, National Council for Population and Development [Kenya], ICF International. (2015). Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2014. Nairobi.

¹² <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2017/07/25/how-girls-education-intersects-with-maasai-culture-in-kenya/>

Figure 1: Map of Kenya showing Homa Bay and Narok County



Target population

The 4Ts intervention phase II targeted out-of-school adolescent girls of primary school-going age whether they had enrolled in school and dropped out for whatever reason, or never enrolled at all. The focus on the primary school level was informed by evidence that a vast majority of out-of-school girls are most likely to drop out of school at the primary school level¹³. Moreover, adolescent girls face extra challenges not faced by boys in staying in school.

13 Undie, C, Birungi, H, Odwe, G. and Obare, F. (2015). "Expanding access to secondary school education for teenage mothers in Kenya: A baseline study report," STEP UP Technical Report. Nairobi. https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2015STEPUP_EducTeenMothersKenya.pdf

Methodology

Activities

Sensitizations of Stakeholders

Two separate meetings were held with CSOs from Homa Bay (held on May 20th, 2021) and Narok (held on June 7th, 2021) counties. Both meetings were conducted virtually via Zoom and aimed at inducting CSOs, county and sub-counties education on the 4Ts. The meetings clarified their roles in the 4Ts implementation. Participants were taken through the revised 4Ts monitoring forms and information, education, and communication (IEC) materials containing key messages for out-of-school girls and their parents/guardians. Participants were also taken through safeguarding measures as part of the strategies to protect vulnerable girls, parents/guardians, and the intervention team. During the virtual meetings, participants discussed contextual factors, and challenges and opportunities that would influence implementation of the 4Ts in Homa Bay and Narok counties. A total of 66 participants comprising of CSOs, county and sub-county education officers (42 from Homa Bay and 26 from Narok county) were in attendance.

In addition, the first 2 weeks in each site were spent sensitizing other key stakeholders including headteachers, parents and community leaders about the 4Ts initiative. With the support from the County Department of Education, the 4Ts teams leveraged MoE-organized meetings and training workshops such as the School-Based Teachers Support (SBTS) forums, Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) trainings, as well as parents meetings at schools to reach more stakeholders with 4Ts information. More than 5000 stakeholders (2837 from Homa Bay and 2123 from Narok) including headteachers, teachers, parents, and school boards of management (BOMs) were sensitized about the 4Ts initiative. The CSOs were also part of these training sessions and had a chance to strategize with school heads on how to trace out-of-school girls. School heads provided lists of out-of-school girls who were yet to return to school.



Photo 1: Ongoing sensitization of head teachers on 4Ts, Awach Zone, Homa Bay.

Credit: Carol



Photo 2: Ongoing sensitization of head teachers on 4Ts, Lolgorian zone, Narok

Credit: Wesley



Photo 3: On-going sensitization of parents on 4Ts, Enaibelbel zone, Narok

Credit: Allan

4Ts Documentary

The 4Ts initiative was documented by Citizen Television on July 3, 2021, as an innovative parental engagement model. The eight-minute [documentary](#) on the 4Ts demonstrates the benefits and challenges faced by teen mothers to re-enter schooling. It highlights the important roles parents or guardians play to support school re-entry for teen mothers and headteachers' experiences in promoting and institutionalizing school re-entry guidelines within school contexts, It also advocates for the need to reframe perceptions about teenage motherhood and to eliminate associated stigmas.

Distribution of the School Re-Entry Guidelines

Unavailability of the school re-entry guidelines in schools was identified as a major challenge for school re-entry during the 4Ts phase I implementation. As a result, many headteachers who are supposed to oversee its implementation were not aware of, or lacked clarity on, the key provisions of the school re-entry guidelines, making it difficult for them to implement and monitor the school re-entry guidelines. The Population Council printed and distributed a total of 2000 copies of the school re-entry guidelines to primary schools across the two counties to foster awareness of the school re-entry guidelines. The school re-entry guidelines were distributed during meetings organized by the MoE that brought together headteachers at the sub-county level or by the 4Ts intervention coordinators as they visited schools to monitor the 4Ts implementation progress.



Photo 4: The 4Ts intervention coordinator issuing a re-entry guideline to a school head, Enabelibel zone

Credit: Allan



Photo 5: A school head receiving a copy of the school re-entry guidelines from sub-County Director of Education, West Kochia zone, Homa Bay County

Credit: Beatrice Guna, CSO

WhatsApp Group

Two WhatsApps groups were created, one for Homa bay and another for Narok county teams to allow exchange of information among 4Ts team members in a timely manner. The WhatsApps groups allowed team members to communicate with each other, share their experiences, and ask questions or seek clarifications. In addition, it was used to share 4Ts material and tools in soft copy, such as the re-entry guidelines, the monitoring tools, key messages, and the consent form for photography.

Tracking and Monitoring

The actual tracking, tracing and monitoring was conducted over a 3-month period from May to July in Homa Bay and from June to August in Narok. A monitoring tool (see Annex 1) was used to capture information on every out-of-school girl reached by the 4Ts intervention teams. Specifically, the monitoring tool captured information on out-of-school girls' location (sub-county, zone, village); details (name and, age), parent/guardian's details (name and mobile contact); the main reason for being out-of-school (i.e., pregnant/parenting, lack of childcare, marriage, sick or taking care of sick parent and lack of school fees); and whether the main reason for being out-of-school come about as a result of the pandemic. In addition, the monitoring form captured information on girls' school re-entry status (i.e., whether they had re-entered, were planning to re-enter, or were not planning to re-enter school) for girls who dropped out of school due to pregnancy or parenting, as well as the CSO's contacts.

Similar to the 4Ts phase I, back-to-school campaign messages (see Annex 2) targeting out-of-school girls and their parents or guardians were developed and used to facilitate dialogue between CSOs, out-of-school girls and their parents or guardians. The main message acronym 'SCHOOL' was meant to help pass a clear, memorable message about unconditional school-re-entry opportunities for all out-of-school children.



Photo 6: Photo 7: In this photo, we have the father, mother, CSO, headteacher and a pregnant girl traced via 4Ts, Kilgoris Central zone, Narok county.

Credit: Buttuk Simon, CSO



Photo 8: Monitoring team engaging a parenting girl successfully returned to school via 4Ts, Homa Bay County.

Credit: Millicent Nyabunga, CPC

Fieldwork assessment led by a team from the Ministry of Education (Directorate of Policy, Partnerships and EAC Affairs) was conducted in Narok county from 2nd to 6th August 2021. The fieldwork monitoring aimed at tracking 4Ts implementation progress by verifying successful school re-entry of girls reached by the 4TS intervention, and documenting opportunities and challenges that might influence scale-up of the 4Ts initiative. The team conducted a spot-check in a sample of 9 schools spread across Narok County. In Homa Bay county, the monitoring was led by the County Department of Education officials in collaboration with 2 Council-affiliated intervention coordinators. Fieldwork monitoring was conducted using a monitoring form (see Annex 3) that captured information on availability of school re-entry policy guidelines, mechanisms/systems within the school setting that would support school re-entry of pregnant and parenting girls, and the process of re-integrating back to school girls who got pregnant during the long break from education occasioned by Covid-19 pandemic

Data Analysis

Data for this report were obtained from the CSOs' monitoring dataset, the field assessment dataset and the intervention coordinators' weekly reports, as well as field notes. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive (frequency and percentages) methods, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results

Number of Out-of-School Girls Reached Via 4Ts

Number of girls reached by sub-county

A total of 1424 out-of-school girls (773 in Homa Bay and 651 in Narok) were reached by the 4Ts initiative (Table 1). In Homa Bay county, Ranchunyo North sub-county had the highest number of out-of-school girls reached 132(17.1%) followed by Ndhiwa 128(16.6%) and Rachounyo East 103(13.3%) while Homa Bay town sub-county recorded the least

number of out-of-school girls at 69(8.9%). In Narok County, Transmara West sub-county recorded the highest number of out-of-school girls reached via 4Ts at 149(22.9%), followed closely by Narok South 147(22.6%) and Narok West 124(19.1%) while Narok East had the lowest at 34(5.2%). It is worth noting that the ranking does not in any way represent the actual population of out-of-school girls in these sub-counties.

Table 1: Number of out-of-school girls reached via 4Ts by sub-counties, June-August, 2021

Homa Bay			Narok		
Sub-county	n	%	Sub-county	n	%
1. Rachuonyo South	80	1.0.4	1. Narok East	34	5.2
2. Rachuonyo East	103	13.3	2. Narok North	100	15.4
3. Rachuonyo North	132	17.1	3. Narok South	147	22.6
4. Suba South	96	12.4	4. Transmara East	97	14.9
5. Ndhiwa	128	16.6	5. Transmara West	149	22.9
6. Mbita (Suba North)	74	9.6	6. Narok West	124	19.1
7. Homa Bay	69	8.9			
8. Rangwe	91	11.8			
Total	773	100.0	Total	651	100.0

Number of out-of-school girls reached by Age

In both counties, a vast majority of the out-of-school girls reached by the 4Ts intervention were aged between 14 and 16 years (73.7% for Homa Bay and 71.3% for Narok) which is above the average primary school-going age in Kenya (6-13 years). This is not surprising as most of the girls may have dropped out of primary school a few years ago for various reasons. In addition, late entry into primary school and grade repetition, which are common in rural areas, could cause children to be over-age for their grades.

Table 2: Number of out-of-school girls reached via 4Ts by sub-counties, June-August 2021

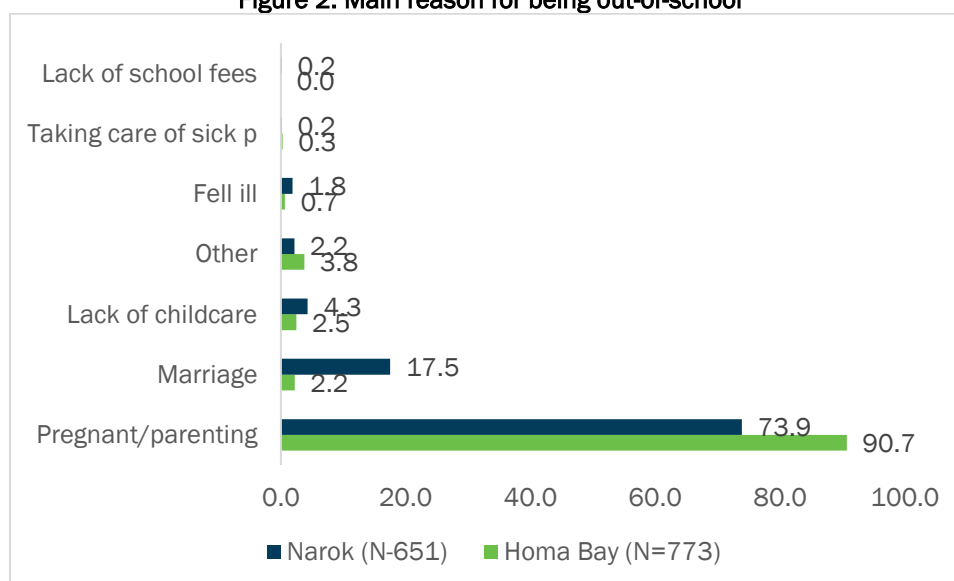
Age	Homa Bay		Narok		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<12	23	3.0	33	5.07	56	3.9
13	69	8.9	69	10.6	138	9.7
14	185	23.9	130	19.97	315	22.1
15	212	27.4	164	25.19	376	26.4
16	172	22.3	172	26.42	344	24.2
17	74	9.6	63	9.68	137	9.6
18 +	38	4.9	20	3.07	58	4.1
Total	773	100.0	651	100.0	1424	100.0

Pregnancy is the main reason for dropping out of school for the majority of girls

Being pregnant or parenting was the main reason for being out of school for many girls (91% for Homa Bay and 74% for Narok), followed by marriage. Compared to Homa Bay county, early marriage is a major reason for girls' school dropout in Narok county – about 1 in 5 out of school girls were not attending school due to being married. Lack of child care

also limited some parenting girls from attending school in both counties. However, lack of finances was rarely mentioned as a barrier to school re-entry in both counties.

Figure 2: Main reason for being out-of-school



IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON GIRLS' EDUCATION

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing problems

The 4Ts also assessed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on school re-entry. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing problems related to girls' education such as early marriage and teenage pregnancy. An overwhelming majority of pregnant or parenting girls (85%) and married girls (82%) blamed the COVID-19 pandemic which forced them to remain at home without access to education, hence exposing them to the risk of pregnancy or marriage. Whereas these problems existed prior to the pandemic, the COVID-19 stipulations may have contributed to an increase in their magnitude.

Table 3 Did this reason come about as a result of the pandemic (COVID-19)?

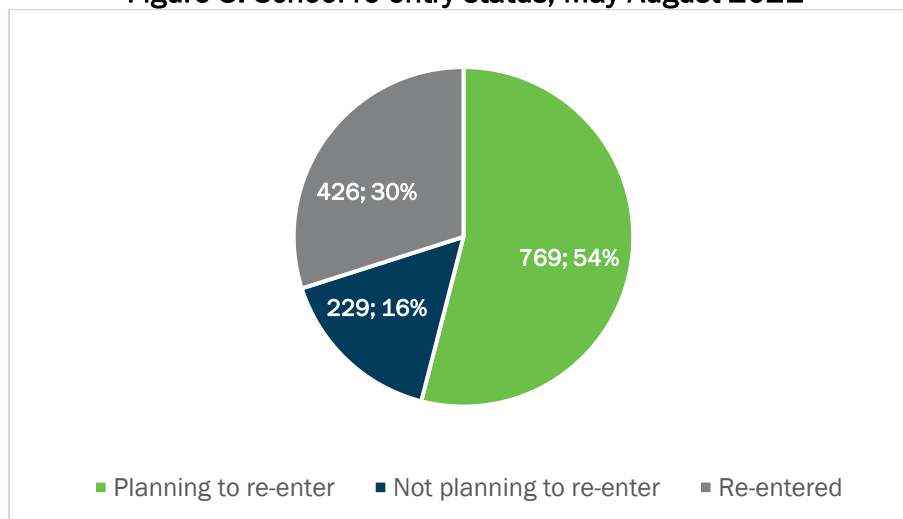
	Homa Bay		Narok		Total	
	%Yes	N	%Yes	N	%Yes	N
Pregnant/parenting	83.7	701	86.5	481	84.9	1,182
Lack of childcare	68.4	19	78.6	28	74.5	47
Marriage	70.6	17	84.2	114	82.4	131
Fell ill	60.0	5	33.3	12	41.2	17
Taking care of sick parent	50.0	2	100.0	1	66.7	3
Lack of school fees	0.0	0	100.0	1	100.0	1
Other	51.7	29	92.9	14	65.1	43

SCHOOL RE-ENTRY

The 4Ts enhanced education access by marginalized girls

Thirty percent (n=426) had re-entered school, 62 percent (n=266) of whom returned to school during the intervention period (between May and August, 2021). About 54 percent (n=769) were planning to re-enter during the intervention period while 16 percent were not planning to go back to school.

Figure 3: School re-entry status, May-August 2021



Further analysis by county shows that about 43% (n=334) in Homa Bay County had already re-entered school, 57% (n=191) of whom returned to school during the intervention period. About 46 percent of out-of-school girls were planning to return to school, while 11% were not planning to return to school. In Narok County, 14%(n=92) of girls had re-entered school, 82% (n=75) of whom returned to school during the intervention period. About 63%(n=412) were planning to re-enter school, while 23%(n=147) were not planning to return to school.

Homabay County had a high number of girls who already re-entered school before the 4Ts intervention compared to Narok county, which can largely be attributed to Phase I of the project, coupled with earlier work by PC Kenya involving interactive media campaigns that targeted schools and communities; evidence-based advocacy to promote policy implementation; and policy dialogues with headteachers and Ministry of Education officials^{14,15}.

In both counties, child marriage was a major barrier to school re-entry. A significant majority of girls who were married (more than 80%) were not planning to go back to school despite being reached by the 4Ts intervention (See Table 5).

¹⁴ Undie, C, Birungi, H, Odwe, G. and Obare, F. (2015). "Expanding access to secondary school education for teenage mothers in Kenya: A baseline study report," STEP UP Technical Report. Nairobi.

https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2015STEPUP_EducTeenMothersKenya.pdf

¹⁵ Undie C, Mackenzie I, Birungi H, Barongo S, Ahindikha D, and Omondi C. (2015). "Education sector response to early and unintended pregnancy: A policy dialogue in Homa Bay County, Kenya," STEP UP Meeting Report. Nairobi.

https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2015STEPUP_EducSectorPolicyDialogue.pdf

Table 4: Number of girls who re-entered school by year and month

Year	Month	Homa Bay	Narok	Total
2019	Jan-April	5	0	5
	May-August	4	0	4
	Sep-Dec	6	0	6
2020	Jan-April	14	0	14
	May-August	0	0	0
	Sep-Dec	20	1	21
2021	Jan-April	94	16	110
	May-August	191	75	266
Total		334	92	426

Table 5: Proportion of girls who already re-entered school or were planning to re-enter in Homa Bay and Narok, May-August, 2021

Main reason for being out of school	Homa Bay				Narok			
	Planning to re-enter	Not Planning to re-enter	Already re-entered	N	Planning to re-enter	Not Planning to re-enter	Already re-entered	N
Pregnant/parenting	47.4	5.0	48.6	701	67.4	13.5	19.1	481
Lack of childcare	68.4	31.6		19	64.29	35.7	na	28
Marriage	11.8	88.2		17	19.3	80.7	na	114
Fell ill	40.0	60.0		5	75	25.0	na	12
Taking care of sick parent	0.0	100.0		2	100	0.0	na	1
Lack of school fees	0.0	0.0		0	100	0.0	na	1
Other	27.6	72.4		29	78.57	21.4	na	14
Total	46.2	10.6	43.2	773	63.3	22.6	14.1	651

Key Lessons Learned

This section of the report summarizes a set of lessons drawn from the 4Ts phase II implementation in Homa Bay and Narok Counties. It also highlights some of the challenges and barriers to promoting school re-entry and the implementation of the school re-entry guidelines.

The negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls' access to education

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated some of the pre-existing challenges that disrupted many girls' access to education. The monitoring exercise assessed whether some of these factors that kept girls out of school happened during the pandemic period. This question is key to understanding the causal mechanisms related to the COVID-19 pandemic that are contributing to the decline of girls' educational outcomes, and consequently, to designing appropriate and effective response strategies.

A vast majority of girls who dropped out of school due to pregnancy (86%) or child marriage (82%) were deemed to have happened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, the proportion of early marriages that were blamed on the COVID-19 was significantly higher in Narok county compared to Homa Bay county. According to Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, 2014 (KDHS 2014), Narok County is among the top 10 counties with the highest prevalence of child marriages at 42%, about twice the national average of 23% (KDHS 2014). The finding is in line with the emerging evidence showing that teenage pregnancy, child marriages and other negative adolescent health outcomes increased during the COVID-19 pandemic^{16,17,18}. The COVID-19 pandemic may have worsened such problems, especially during school closure and lockdowns by depriving many girls the much needed social protection and access to services and increasing vulnerability to sexual violence. In addition, the economic impact of COVID-19 particularly on poor families may have forced many girls into early marriages and further, put a strain on resources to take care of the young baby hence exacerbating school dropout.

Targeted school re-entry messages for parents/guardians and girls are effective in promoting school re-entry for marginalized girls

The 4Ts developed IEC materials with key messages targeting out-of-school children as well as their parents/guardians. The key messages were aimed at sensitizing out-of-school girls and their families about the school re-entry policy guidelines, informing them about the opportunity and need to return to school, and the available support to return to school. During the monitoring, CSOs relied on the key messages to initiate dialogues with families of the out-of-school girl thus ensuring that the conversations with families were kept simple

¹⁶ Oulo, B., Sidle, A.A., Kintzi, K., Mwangi, M., Akello, I. 2021. "Understanding the Barriers to Girls' School Return: Girls' Voices from the Frontline of the COVID-19 Pandemic in East Africa." AMPLIFY COVID-19 Research Brief. Nairobi, Kenya
¹⁷ Presidential Policy and Strategic Unit (PASU) and Population Council, 2021. Promise to keep: the impact of Impact of Covid-19 on Adolescents in Kenya. Nairobi. https://knowledgecommons.popcouncil.org/departments_sbsr-pgy/1334/
¹⁸ Dyer, J., Wilson, K., Badia, J., Agot, K., Neary, J., Njuguna, I., Kibugi, J., Healy, E., Beima-Sofie, K., John-Stewart, G. and Kohler, P., 2021. The psychosocial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth living with HIV in Western Kenya. *AIDS and Behavior*, 25(1), pp.68-72.

and to the point. The targeted school re-entry messages were effective in promoting school re-entry for marginalized girls especially out-of-school teenage mothers. From the monitoring data, more than half of the girls reached by the 4Ts intervention (54%) were planning to re-enter school while about a third (30%) returned to school during the intervention period. Most of these girls (83%) were either parenting or pregnant.

Parental engagement and support is key to promoting school re-entry

A key lesson learnt is that parental engagement and support are important for the success of school re-entry for out-of-school girls. During the 4Ts phase II monitoring, CSOs were able to talk to parents/guardians of the tracked girl, sometimes in the presence of the girl herself, about the opportunities that existed for the out-of-school girls to return to school and the available support from the government and other stakeholders. Many parents/guardians engaged appreciated being visited by CSOs/village elders and the fact that the government or someone from school was concerned about their daughter's education. As a result, many of the parents were willing to support their daughters to get back to school. The type of support parents were willing to offer were varied including taking care of the teenage mother's baby, reducing domestic chores to create study time for the teenage mother to study, financial support, providing learning resources and a conducive learning environment at home, and being role models.

The 4Ts strategy focused on persuasive communication with the affected girls and their parents/guardians for informed choice on school re-entry.

“When one of the parents learnt that the girl was expectant, he became so violent that both the girl and the mother fled home. The Chief and I [CSO] managed to come to an understanding with the father and she will be returning home and school too” CSO, Homa Bay County

A number of factors were documented that hinders parental engagement and support for school re-entry for teenage mothers as well as other girls out of school due to other reasons. According to CSOs reports, some of the parents were not aware of their responsibilities making them less concerned about their teenage daughter going back to school. Clearly, some of the parents also needed to be supported due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which affected the financial resources of many families making it extremely difficult for them to afford basic needs. As a result, some of the families did not prioritize their daughter's education leading to many girls dropping out of school due to lack of support for basic needs such as food, school fees, uniforms and menstrual hygiene products.

Out-of-school teenage mothers from single-parent households or those orphaned were most affected by the pandemic since most had no one to care for their baby while they attended school. The monitoring data shows that some of the out-of-school teenage mothers were forced to work to support their families, others were added parental responsibilities while their parents or guardians were away looking for income to support

their families with basic needs such as food. As a result, a number of girls were unable to find time to re-enter school. Another noted barrier to parental engagement was conflicts or disagreements within families which often left many teenage mothers depressed and with no one to offer re-entry support as well as guidance and counseling. In addition, some parents were not willing to disclose the whereabouts of their girls for fear of reprisals from law enforcement officers such as the children's department and the police.

Lack of communication between parents and girls was noted as a major factor hindering parental engagement thus derailing school re-entry for many of the out-of-school girls. Some of the parents were not able to discuss sexual and reproductive issues with their daughters. In some cases, pregnant girls were often blamed for bringing shame into their families/communities and faced violence as a result from their parents. To deal with such shame, some parents sent their pregnant/parenting teenage girl away causing more psychological trauma.

Harmful cultural practices and taboos as major barriers to school re-entry for girls

Monitoring data shows that early marriage was a major reason for school dropout in Narok county affecting about 1 in 5 out-of-school girls. Moreover, the majority of these girls (over 80%) were unwilling to return to school despite being reached by the 4Ts intervention. Some of the married girls were unwilling to return to school because of husband's disapproval, other due to added responsibilities in the home, including housework and caring for children. Moreover, FGM/C and childbirths were sometimes celebrated in the community. The experience of FGM/C raises the girl's stature in the community, making some feel like a 'woman', thus shifting their focus from education to marriage and childbearing. In some cases, some of the girls were married outside the catchment zones which made it hard for some CSOs to trace them due to lack of contact information. Cultural taboos were also documented as a barrier to school re-entry for many girls. For instance, one CSO noted that in parts of Homa Bay county, pregnant or parenting girls were not expected to live with their fathers in the same household. As a result, many were sent away to live with other relatives thus dropping out of school.

"One of the girls was pregnant and since she is not allowed to live in the same house/under the same roof with the father in her condition, she was forced to drop out of school to go put up with a relative until she delivered". (CSO, Homa bay County)

Building a coherent government-led approach as a sustainable solution to promoting school re-entry

Both Homa Bay and Narok County Departments of Education and the Ministry of Education adopted/adapted and led the 4Ts project strategies for improving school re-entry policy awareness and implementation at both county and the national level, respectively. Rather

than creating a parallel model, the 4Ts initiative was designed, implemented and monitored within existing MoE structures in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government with technical and financial assistance from the Population Council. The 4Ts initiative implementation was led by the Ministry of Education, with the Director General's office and the Directorate of Policy, Partnerships and EAC Affairs providing overall coordination and implementation as well as monitoring the intervention while the County Directorate of Education in Homa Bay and Narok supported the implementation process. Using existing MoE structures, the county and sub-county directorate of education ensured that school heads within their remit were informed about 4Ts activities. The CSOs working in collaboration with school heads and the Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government (mainly the local administration- Chiefs, Assistant Chiefs and Village Elders through the 'Nyumba Kumi Initiative') conducted the actual tracing, tracking, and talking to out-of-school girls as well as monitoring and documenting the number of out-of-school girls reached via 4Ts initiative. This approaches revealed that Kenya's long-term solutions to addressing school dropouts require greater inclusion of nationally-led initiatives.

Engaging key stakeholders and establishing supportive collaborations

Both Homa Bay and Narok County's Department of Education, as well as the parent Ministry of Education, were part of the intervention design, planning and implementation from the beginning. We developed a 4Ts roadmap highlighting key activities, timelines and assigned responsibilities to each team member. This arrangement enabled project activities to be relevant and appropriate, as well as laid some of the groundwork for the subsequent awareness, support, and positive reception of the intervention by the others stakeholders and community members. As a result, both Homa Bay and Narok County's Department of Education were able to embrace and incorporate 4Ts activities into their work plans. For example, by embracing the philosophy of partnership, the 4Ts activities were incorporated into MoE-organized meetings and workshops such as the School-based Teachers Support (SBTs) and Competent-Based Curriculum (CBC) trainings as well as parents meetings at schools to reach more stakeholders with school re-entry messages; CSOs were able to dedicate their time beyond their routine responsibilities to trace, trace and talk to out-of-school girls within their remits; and a number of school heads joined efforts to track trace, trace and talk to out-of-school girls in the community in addition to providing a list of girls who had not returned to school. The 4Ts provided a structured way of implementing school re-enting for pregnant or parenting learners as noted by one of the sub-county directors of education in the excerpt below. This further demonstrates the acceptance of the model and ownership of the issue of school re-entry by education stakeholders.

*"We have been implementing school-re-entry for pregnant girls, however, we have been doing the exercise haphazardly. With models like the 4Ts, we are placed in a better position to work effectively with like-minded organizations in addressing this menace **SCDE, Transmara West sub-county***

Challenges

The implementation of the 4Ts initiative faced a number of structural- and system-related challenges that may have affected its optimal delivery. Some of the challenges were similar across the two counties while others were unique to the context.

Competing priorities and workload: CSOs had competing priorities that limited their involvement in 4Ts activities. Some of these competing tasks were planned while others were ad hoc. For example, during the implementation period, a number of CSOs were away attending training and workshops. A few CSOs also felt that the 4Ts was very demanding and an additional burden on their already heavy workload. As a result, a few CSOs were reluctant to commit their time to go around their located zones to conduct the tracking, tracing, and talking of out-of-school girls. However, a larger majority of the CSOs were motivated and willing to go an extra mile for the success of the 4Ts initiative.

Staff turnover: Staff transfers and movements affected the delivery of the 4Ts to some extent. Some CSOs who had already been inducted on the 4Ts initiative were transferred to other counties creating a vacuum in the zones they had been allocated. Some of the CSOs were also promoted to higher ranks while others retired from the service making them unavailable to implement 4Ts activities. To mitigate this challenge, some of the CSOs were requested to cover more than one zone and support affected zones that had no immediate replacements.

Long-distances and poor road infrastructures: Long distances compounded by poor road infrastructures affected the movement and accessibility of some areas. Some areas were rendered inaccessible, especially on rainy days and due to the poor terrains which hampered the movement of the CSOs. Some of the CSOs were able to use phone calls as one of the innovative ways to reach some out-of-school girls and their parents/guardians. However, some parents/guardians were not easily reachable due to lack of cell phones or poor network connectivity thus rendering tracing impossible. CSOs were facilitated with a transport and airtime stipend to facilitate their movement within the zones.

“There was a girl who dropped out of school and was having her second pregnancy. I traced the girl using the girl’s father’s phone. After the conversation, the girl has since returned home and will be joining school when schools reopen “ **CSO, Homa Bay County**

An upsurge of the COVID-19 cases in the Lake Basin region counties: Between June and July, there was an unprecedented upsurge in coronavirus cases in the Lake Basin region which includes Homa Bay county. As a result, the government issued orders tightening restrictions (such as curfews between 19.00 and 4.00hours and prohibition of public gatherings and in-person meetings) to curb the spread of the COVID-19. These restrictions limited CSOs' movement within their sub-counties hence slowing down the tracing process.

Lack of or poor documentation of PPGs in school and out-of-school: Some of the schools did not keep records of PPGs in school and out-of-school, or, in some instances, the records were available but not updated making it difficult to know the exact number of girls who had not returned to school to be traced. In addition to lack of records, some schools did not maintain open communication with the parents and PPGs who had not returned to school which is critical to the re-entry process.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The implementation and monitoring of the 4Ts intervention activities revealed opportunities for operationalization and institutionalization of school re-entry guidelines and other similar frameworks that support improving access to education for vulnerable and marginalized girls. By fostering collaboration between the MOE, and other stakeholders, including parents and school heads, the 4Ts intervention was effective in enhancing access to education for marginalized girls during the COVID-19 pandemic period. More than half (53%) of out-of-school girls reached were planning to return to school and another 30 percent had re-entered school during the intervention period. Most of these girls became pregnant or had a child during the COVID-19 pandemic and were unlikely to return to education if nothing was done. However, the intervention was less effective in promoting school re-entry for married girls as less than 20 percent of girls out of school who were married were willing to return to school. After marriage, young girls' access to formal and even nonformal education is severely limited because of domestic burdens, childbearing and social norms that view marriage and schooling as incompatible. This harmful practice appeared to have affected many girls in Narok compared to Homa Bay which reflects the high prevalence of the practice. Therefore, for scale-up, there is need to take into consideration the context and specific vulnerability that might hinder retention and return of girls and young mothers to schools.

Marginalized girls face a range of pre-existing as well as new challenges that hinder their education. Solutions promoting school re-entry for such groups cannot progress at scale without addressing these challenges. There is need for multi-sectoral and multi-partner approaches involving out-of-school children, parents and the community. Fostering a strong partnership between MoE and other government ministries/agencies as well as other NGO stakeholders is key to providing sustainable solutions to improving teenage mothers' education outcomes. For example, schools could be linked with local health facilities to provide tailor-made ANC and PNC services for teenage mothers in schools to avoid such learners spending long hours away from school to avoid losing learning time.

Annexes

Annex 1: 4Ts Tracking Form



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EARLY LEARNING AND BASIC EDUCATION

The 4Ts ('Trace, Track, Talk, and reTurn') Monitoring Tool

[INSTRUCTION: PLEASE COMPLETE ONE FORM FOR EACH OUT-OF-SCHOOL GIRL WHO SHOULD BE IN PRIMARY SCHOOL. THE TRACKING FORM ONLY NEEDS TO BE ADMINISTERED TO ONE PERSON – THE PARENT/GUARDIAN, WHEREVER POSSIBLE.]

LOCATION INFORMATION:			
County: [Tick one that applies] <input type="checkbox"/> Homa Bay <input type="checkbox"/> Narok	Sub-county:	Zone:	Village Name: Village elder's name: Mob. No:
GIRLS' DETAILS:			
Girl's Name:		Age: [] []	
Parent/ Guardian's Name:		Mob No.:	
Main reason for being out-of-school [Tick ONLY one that applies]	Did this reason come about as a result of the pandemic (COVID-19)? [Indicate Yes=1 or No=2]	Planning to re-enter [Indicate Yes=1 or No=2]	Already re-entered [Indicate Yes=1 or No=2]
<input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant/parenting			
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of childcare			
<input type="checkbox"/> Marriage			
<input type="checkbox"/> Fell ill			
<input type="checkbox"/> Taking care of sick parents			
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of school fees			
<input type="checkbox"/> Other [Specify] _____			

NOTE: COMPLETE THIS SECTION ONLY IF THE MAIN REASON FOR BEING OUT OF SCHOOL IS DUE TO PREGNANCY OR PARENTING. [Please write the name of the school they re-entered or are planning to re-enter. If they don't plan to re-enter, indicate the name of the school they dropped out from]

Name of the Primary School:	NEMIS Code :
Name of the School Head	Contact (Mobile No.)
If already re-entered, enter month and year Month: _____ Year: <input type="checkbox"/> 2019 <input type="checkbox"/> 2020 <input type="checkbox"/> 2021	

Annex 2: Back-to-School Campaign Messages

Key Messages for Parents/Guardians

S upport	Your child has the support of the government, the Ministry of Education, and head teachers to return to school.
C hildren	In Kenya, education is for ALL children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This means that any child in your home who dropped out of school (whether female or male) is free to return to school.
H elp	Why? Because education can help ensure your child has a bright future.
s ow for	Sow today in order to reap tomorrow: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give your child the support she needs to return to school; you never know who she will become tomorrow! Support could be moral (encouraging her to return), material (providing child care so she can return), or financial (school fees, transportation, etc.).
t omorrow	
L et us know	We have a few questions to ask you so that we can inform school about whether to expect your child back in school or not.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EARLY LEARNING AND BASIC EDUCATION
Back-to-school campaign

The 4Ts Program: "T"oon, "T"rack, "T"alk, and "T"eam!"

The following messages are to be shared by all Government Subject Officers and those assisting them (school heads, village education committees, etc.) in all counties, constituencies, sub-counties and wards.

The goal is to reach and reach again. Government Subject Officers are to visit the homes of their parents/guardians to ensure that they are aware of the opportunity and ready to return to school. The key messages below are to be shared with parents/guardians.

The messages are written in simple Kiswahili and English. It is an invitation for the communities to participate in the campaign and to be active. The goal is to reach the parents.

Key Messages for Parents/Guardians

Support: Your child has the support of the government, the Ministry of Education, and head teachers to return to school.

Children: In Kenya, education is for ALL children.

Help: Why? Because education can help ensure your child has a bright future.

sow for: Sow today in order to reap tomorrow.

tomorrow: Give your child the support she needs to return to school; you never know who she will become tomorrow! Support could be moral (encouraging her to return), material (providing child care so she can return), or financial (school fees, transportation, etc.).

Let us know: We have a few questions to ask you so that we can inform school about whether to expect your child back in school or not.

For more information, the government's school is with you. Government's help is available online: <https://www.education.go.ke>

POPULATION COUNCIL
More. Endless Impact.

Key Messages for out-of-school girls

S upport	You have the support of the government, the Ministry of Education, and head teachers to return to school.
C hildren	In Kenya, education is for ALL children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This means that any child in your home who dropped out of school (whether female or male), and including you, is free to return to school.
H elp	Why? Because education can help ensure you have a bright future.
s ow for	Sow today in order to reap tomorrow: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do everything you can to return to school; you never know who you will become tomorrow!
t omorrow	
L et us know	We have a few questions to ask your parent/guardian so that we can inform school about whether to expect you back in school or not.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EARLY LEARNING AND BASIC EDUCATION

Key Messages for PFGs

Support: You have the support of the government, the Ministry of Education, and head teachers to return to school.

Children: In Kenya, education is for ALL children.

Help: Why? Because education can help ensure you have a bright future.

sow for: Sow today in order to reap tomorrow.

tomorrow: Do everything you can to return to school; you never know who you will become tomorrow!

Let us know: We have a few questions to ask your parent/guardian so that we can inform school about whether to expect you back in school or not.

For more information, the government's school is with you. Government's help is available online: <https://www.education.go.ke>

POPULATION COUNCIL
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Annex 3: Monitoring Tool



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EARLY LEARNING AND BASIC EDUCATION

4Ts (TRACE, TRACK, TALK, and reTURN) INITIATIVE

FIELD MONITORING TOOL -HEADTEACHERS

Instructions:

- This tool is intended to be used during field monitoring of the 4Ts program. It helps guide monitoring teams to track successful school re-entry of pregnant or parenting girls following the implementation of the 4Ts initiative.
- Please complete one form for each school visited.
- Before visiting a school, select at least one 4Ts monitoring tool (completed by a Curriculum Support Officer [CSO] with details of a pregnant or parenting girl who has re-entered that school.

Date of assessment: _____

Name of Assessors: Ann/Truphena

County:	Sub-county:
Zone:	
Name of the School:	NEMIS Code:

Note: Unless specified otherwise, obtain the information in this section from the school headteacher

1. Does your school have a copy of the national re-entry to school guidelines? Yes..... No.....

2. Does the school currently have any pregnant or parenting girls? Yes
 No

3. Does the school keep records of pregnant and parenting girls (Verify) Yes
 No

4. Record the current number of pregnant and parenting girls [Note: recode the number from records or the number given by the headteacher]

	In-school	Out-of-school	Total
Pregnant			
Parenting			

5. How many pregnant and parenting girls returned to school in [month]? **Write zero (0) if none.**

May 2021 [][]

June 2021 [][]

July 2021 [][]

6. What steps has the school taken to support school re-entry of pregnant and parenting girls?

- a) _____
b) _____
c) _____
d) _____

7. What challenges does the school experience in re-admitting or retaining pregnant and parenting girls in school?

- a) _____
b) _____
c) _____
d) _____

8. Suggest how the challenges in No. 7 could be addressed?

<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
10. To check the accuracy of the 4Ts monitoring tool information (completed by a CSO), confirm if the documented pregnant/parenting girl is currently in school	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Ask if you could speak to the documented pregnant/parenting girl who recently returned to school. 11. Was the girl talked to by a CSO before returning to school?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
12. Did the girl receive any material /leaflet from a CSO with messages on school re-entry?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
13. What is the girl's opinion about the directive that requires pregnant /parenting girls to return to school? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
14. What challenges, if any, have the girls faced since returning to school? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

Curriculum support officers (CSOs) (Note: obtain the information in this section by calling the mobile number of the CSO as indicated in the monitoring form of the girl talked to above)	
15. Did the CSO receive a list of pregnant and parenting girls currently out-of-school from [name of school]?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
16. Did the CSO receive lists of pregnant and parenting girls currently out-of-school from all the schools in his/her zone?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
17. If 'No' in Question 16, what were the main reasons? a) _____ b) _____ c) _____ d) _____	
18. Did the CSOs receive support from any of the following people? a) Village elders: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No b) Chiefs or assistant chiefs: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No c) School headteacher or any teacher from the school: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No d) Any other support: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (If yes in d, specify _____)	
19. What main challenges did the CSOs experience while implementing the 4Ts program? a) _____ b) _____ c) _____ d) _____ e) _____	
20. Suggest solutions to the challenges cited in question 19? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
REMARKS:	

Compiled by: Name:	Signature:	Date:
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