

Girl Child Education Fund

Activity Report

2025



ICN
International
Council of Nurses

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Girl Child Education Fund at a glance

The Girl Child Education Fund (GCEF) is a pathway to opportunity for orphaned daughters of nurses in developing countries to continue their education despite financial hardship.

Established in 2005 by the International Council of Nurses (ICN), in partnership with the Florence Nightingale International Foundation (FNIF), the fund enables girls to stay in school and pursue their ambitions by covering school fees, uniforms, books, and other essential educational needs.

The programme is grounded in the belief that education is the key to better health and brighter futures. It addresses the critical barriers to education faced by one of the most vulnerable groups: orphaned girls under the age of 18. Without targeted intervention, these girls are often denied access to education due to financial constraints, caregiving responsibilities, and cultural practices. GCEF is a direct response to these inequities, guided by the vision of achieving gender parity in education and improving health outcomes.

GCEF works closely with National Nurses Associations (NNAs) in **Eswatini, Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia** to ensure that funds are distributed effectively. Local coordinators and volunteer nurses oversee financial support while also providing mentorship, academic monitoring, and psychosocial care.



Edna Tallam (ICN Rep), Vincent (Uganda Nurses & Midwives Union Project Officer) and GCEF beneficiary girls in Ugandan primary school.

These four countries are deeply affected by poverty, natural and human-made disasters, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the resurgence of diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria. These challenges have disproportionately impacted nurses and their families, leaving behind millions of orphaned children.

Research shows that educating girls generates transformative benefits, including improved family planning, reduced infant and maternal mortality rates, and lower HIV infection rates. Education also promotes economic empowerment, with each additional year of schooling increasing a girl's future earnings by up to 15%. The initiative aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those focused on quality education and gender equality, while reflecting ICN's commitment to building healthier and more inclusive communities through education and empowerment.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



2025: A year of reflection and learning for GCEF



Edna Tallam (ICN Rep) and GCEF beneficiary girls in Ugandan secondary school.

In 2025, GCEF continued its mission of supporting vulnerable girls through education while undertaking an important process of reflection and learning. A comprehensive programme review was conducted across all implementing countries to examine programme effectiveness, governance structures, cost drivers, and sustainability opportunities.

The review reaffirmed GCEF's value as a highly impactful programme that enables girls to remain in school, improves wellbeing, strengthens confidence, and protects beneficiaries from risks associated with poverty and educational exclusion. Guardians, school administrators, beneficiaries, and nurse leaders consistently described the programme as transformative.

At the same time, the review highlighted opportunities to strengthen programme governance, standardize procedures, improve documentation, optimize costs, and develop sustainable fundraising mechanisms to secure the programme's long-term future.

The key methodology of this review can be found in [Annex 2](#).

GCEF's long-term impact



Pictured representatives include a class teacher, Charles Openda (GCEF Kenya Coordinator), Nicole (GCEF beneficiary) and Edna Tallam (ICN Rep).

1. Educational access and retention

During two decades of implementation, GCEF has transformed the lives of hundreds of girls across four countries. Today, GCEF continues to remove financial barriers that would otherwise prevent vulnerable girls from completing their education. Beneficiaries across Eswatini, Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia have consistently reported improved school attendance, educational continuity, and stronger academic performance following their enrolment in the programme.

Programme reviews conducted in 2025 reaffirmed GCEF's long-term impact:

1

Kenya has supported 134 girls since the programme's inception, with 117 graduates and no reported school dropouts among beneficiaries.

2

Uganda has supported 176 beneficiaries since 2006, helping vulnerable girls remain in school through financial assistance, mentorship, and academic support.

3

Zambia has supported more than 120 girls, with over 70 progressing to tertiary education and more than 60 achieving economic self-reliance.

4

Eswatini has supported approximately 90 girls since programme inception, with many progressing to higher levels of education.

2. Psychosocial support and protection

Beyond educational assistance, GCEF continues to provide a vital network of care and support for vulnerable girls. A recurring finding across all four country reviews was the significant role played by National Coordinators, nurse volunteers, and NNAs in providing mentorship, counselling, and guidance. Beneficiaries and guardians frequently described coordinators as trusted parental figures whose encouragement and support helped them navigate grief, uncertainty, and personal challenges.

This holistic approach has contributed to:

- Increased self-confidence and emotional wellbeing among beneficiaries.
- Improved educational retention and reduced risk of school dropout.
- Protection from early marriage, exploitative relationships, and other social risks.
- Greater motivation, stronger academic performance, and enhanced aspirations for the future.

3. Contributing to national priorities and sustainable development

Across all four participating countries, GCEF continues to make an important contribution to national development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to quality education, gender equality, poverty reduction, health, and reduced inequalities. NNAs highlighted the programme as a powerful expression of nursing leadership, community service, and social responsibility.

By combining educational support with mentorship and psychosocial care, GCEF continues to create opportunities for vulnerable girls to remain in school, realize their potential, and contribute positively to their communities. The programme's enduring success demonstrates that investing in girls' education is one of the most effective ways to strengthen families, communities, and future generations.

Stories of resilience and transformation

Namirimu Daphine (Uganda)

Namirimu Daphine joined GCEF in Uganda in 2013 at the age of 12. Following her participation in the programme, she completed her secondary education and went on to pursue studies in fashion and design.

Reflecting on her experience, Daphine described GCEF as "my mummies and daddy," explaining that the support she received extended beyond financial assistance and allowed her to build confidence and valuable vocational skills.

Today, she serves as a powerful example of how education can open pathways to independence and opportunity.



Vincent (UNMU Project Officer), Edna Tallam (ICN Rep), Namirimu Daphine (GCEF beneficiary) and Racheal Nankya (GCEF Coordinator).

Hope Nyondo (Zambia)



Hope Nyondo (GCEF beneficiary), Zambia Union of Nurses and Midwives Organisation (ZUNMO) team members and Edna Tallam (ICN Rep).

Hope Nyondo completed her secondary education in 2024 with support from GCEF. Living with her grandmother, she relied on the programme for school fees, supplies, mentorship, and psychosocial support.

Hope described the programme as highly supportive, particularly emotionally. She appreciated the psychosocial support and mentorship she received, noting that the programme coordinators acted as “co-parents,” providing encouragement, regular follow-up, home visits, and school visits. She reported feeling motivated, supported, and highlighted the importance of confidence-building and self-affirmation encouraged through mentorship.

Hope aspires to continue her education and pursue a career in nursing. She credits GCEF for helping her stay focused on her goals and providing encouragement through some of the most difficult moments of her life. Her story reflects the programme's ability not only to keep girls in school but also to inspire future service to others.

GCEF sustainability, a new priority

A major focus emerging from the 2025 reviews was sustainability.

Across all four countries, stakeholders recognized the need to diversify funding sources and reduce dependence on existing donor contributions.

Proposed strategies included:

- Developing structured national fundraising plans
- Engaging local philanthropists and foundations
- Building partnerships with corporations and professional associations
- Expanding community engagement
- Establishing alumni networks to encourage former beneficiaries to give back
- Exploring co-financing opportunities with governments and educational institutions.

Several NNAs have already begun exploring fundraising opportunities and expressed willingness to contribute additional resources to sustain and expand the programme.

In Uganda, UNMU has already supported additional girls using its own resources and indicated willingness to co-finance a portion of programme costs in future cycles.



Financial overview

Total programme funding in 2025 amounted to CHF 103,327 and was allocated across costs and countries using a needs-based and equity-driven approach, ensuring the greatest possible impact of GCEF in each country.

Total funds raised in 2025 amounted to CHF 51,345. This represents an increase compared to the previous year, largely driven by the fact that an ICN Congress was held in 2025, which traditionally has a positive impact on GCEF fundraising outcomes. However, growing needs and an increasingly challenging fundraising environment highlight the importance of strengthening and diversifying fundraising efforts. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the programme remains a key priority to safeguard continued support for beneficiaries in the years ahead.

More than 80% of the funds raised were allocated to school fees and educational supplies, directly addressing the primary needs of beneficiaries.

Less than 20% of funds were used to cover administration and management costs incurred by the NNAs, supporting effective programme implementation, coordination, and oversight.

Funds were transferred to NNAs based on detailed requests and disbursed three times a year to align with the costs required for each academic term, ensuring efficient and timely support.

In 2025, an average investment of approximately CHF 1,300 was required to fund one year of education for each student across four countries.

To ensure the sustainability of the project and account for any unforeseen expenses or cost fluctuations, we set our call for donations at CHF 1,300 or USD 1,500 per student annually. This approach provides flexibility to maintain consistent support and address unexpected financial needs.

Figure 1. Allocation of funds in 2025 (in USD)

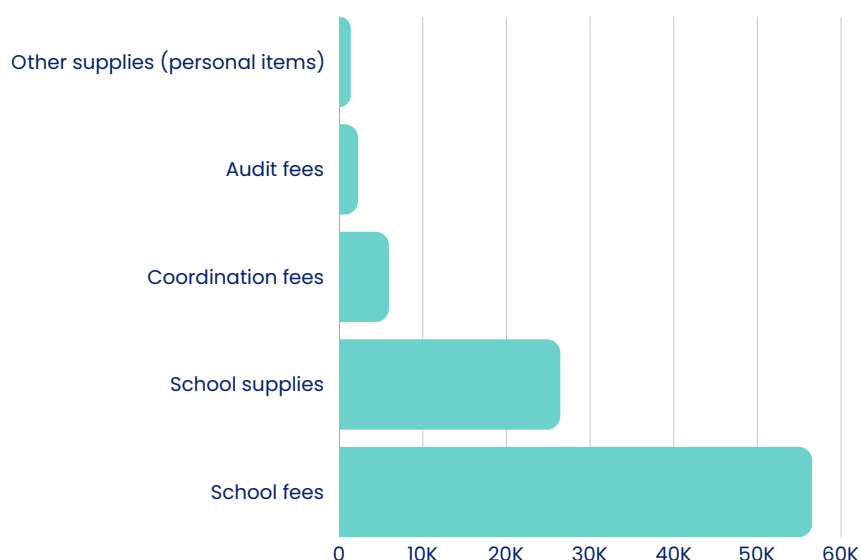
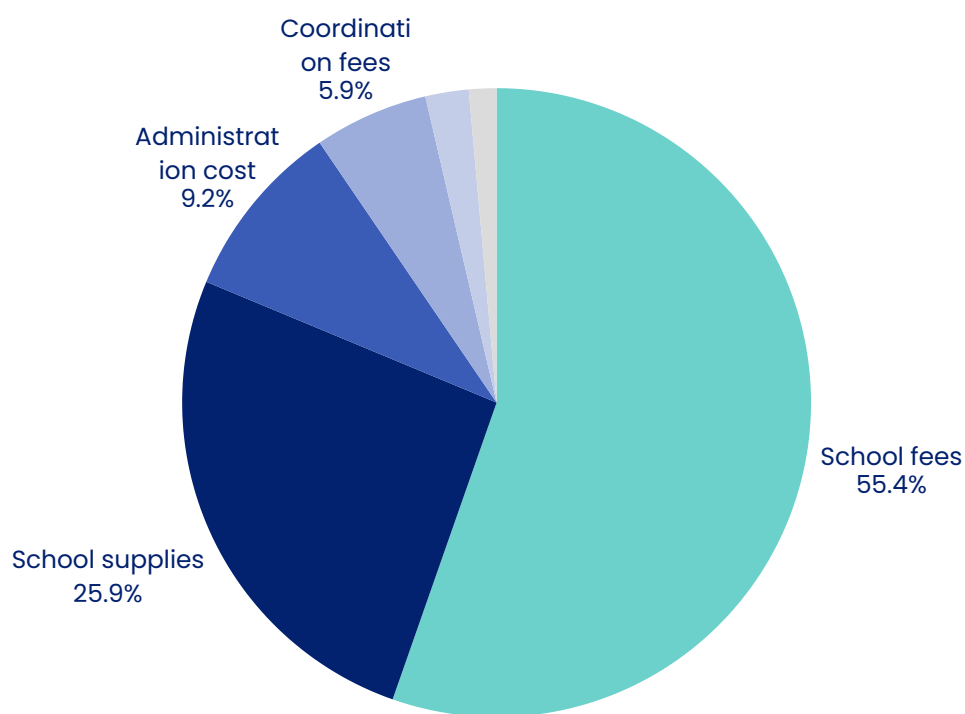


Figure 2. Allocation of funds in 2025 (%)



While previous reviews identified non-tuition costs, including supplies, boarding requirements, transport, and personal items, as a significant driver of overall programme expenditure, this trend was substantially mitigated during the reporting period. As reflected in the data, more efficient cost management and allocation practices reduced the relative burden of these expenses while maintaining the quality and effectiveness of support provided to beneficiaries.

The reviews also confirmed that audits are regularly conducted and that financial oversight systems are functioning effectively across participating countries.

Looking ahead: the future of GCEF

As GCEF enters its third decade of operation, **the programme remains committed to ensuring that no girl's education ends because of financial hardship.**

Priorities for the coming years include:

- Strengthening governance and accountability systems
- Formalizing beneficiary and school selection procedures
- Increasing local fundraising capacity and diversifying funding streams
- Expanding structured mentorship programmes
- Enhancing psychosocial support
- Strengthening alumni engagement
- Exploring pathways for tertiary education and vocational training
- Improving monitoring, reporting, and programme impact measurement.

The reviews conducted in 2025 demonstrate that through education, mentorship, and opportunity, the programme continues to restore hope and create lasting change for vulnerable girls.



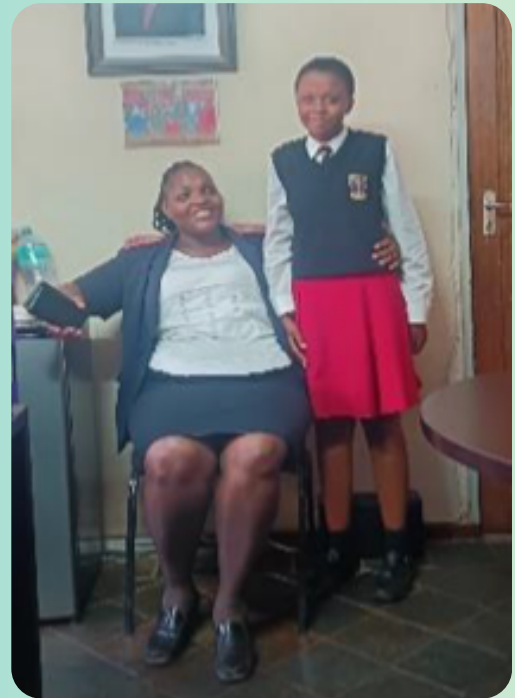
Your support
changes lives.
DONATE TODAY

Annex 1. Country overview

Eswatini



Swaziland Nursing Association (SWADNU) acting President Mrs. Nokuthula Dlamini at the entrance of the Ujingo High school: "We use public schools, they are good, clean and affordable".



Coordinator Tiny Dlamini with a GCEF beneficiary at the Nazareth High School.

GCEF has operated in Eswatini for approximately 20 years and has supported around 90 girls since inception. The programme is highly valued by beneficiaries and guardians, who consistently cited improvements in academic achievement, emotional wellbeing, and protection from early marriage and other risks. The programme benefits from strong local leadership and close relationships between coordinators, girls, and families. Future priorities include strengthening sustainability planning and succession planning for programme leadership.

Kenya

Since 2006, GCEF Kenya has supported 134 beneficiaries and produced 117 graduates. The programme works across multiple counties and benefits from strong volunteer engagement through the National Nurses Association of Kenya (NNAK). Beneficiaries highlighted the importance of educational support, mentorship, and regular follow-up visits. Future priorities include strengthening documentation, procurement systems, and local fundraising capacity.



Coordinator Tiny Dlamini with a GCEF beneficiary at the Nazareth High School.

Uganda

GCEF Uganda has supported 176 beneficiaries since 2006. The programme is embedded within UNMU governance structures and combines financial support, mentorship, and academic monitoring. Reviews identified opportunities to strengthen sustainability planning, clarify roles and responsibilities, and develop pathways for girls transitioning beyond secondary school.

Zambia

The Zambia programme has supported more than 120 girls and achieved impressive educational outcomes, including progression to tertiary education and professional careers. Beneficiaries consistently highlighted the value of mentorship, psychosocial support, and educational assistance. Future priorities include strengthening fundraising, alumni engagement, and structured partnerships with corporate and community stakeholders.

Annex 2. Methodology of the GCEF review

The review applied a **mixed-methods approach** across all four countries, comprising:

- Consultative meetings with NNA leadership, GCEF coordinators, programme implementation teams, and other key stakeholders
- School visits to engage directly with beneficiaries, guardians, school administrators, and nurse volunteers
- Document review, including programme reports, budgets, financial statements, audit reports, beneficiary records, fee structures, and agreements between ICN and participating NNAs
- Key Informant Interviews with programme coordinators, NNA leaders, guardians, beneficiaries, and school officials
- Assessment of governance, operational systems, cost structures, procurement procedures, and sustainability mechanisms using a standardized review framework applied across all countries.

The review covered Eswatini, Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia between February and March 2026 and aimed to identify common strengths, challenges, good practices, and opportunities for strengthening programme effectiveness and sustainability.