



Adolescent Skills & Mindsets

Our strategy to set girls up for success in education and beyond

Completing secondary education is a game-changer for girls. But the odds are often stacked against them.

The evidence is clear: girls who make it through secondary education have smaller, wealthier, healthier families and pass on the value of education to the next generation. But restrictive norms – from expectations to marry and become a caretaker to lack of safety and belonging in schools – make it hard for girls to persist in school through adolescence.

Girls need life skills and mindsets to beat those odds.

Skills and mindsets like self-regulation, agency, resilience, self- and social awareness, problem solving, critical thinking, and joy in learning help girls unlock the value of their education. These skills can help all students with academic performance, persistence in school, and mental health, but they're especially important for girls due to the extra barriers they face.

That's why Echidna supports the integration of life skills and mindsets into government school systems.

Research shows that effectively supporting these interconnected skills and mindsets is critical to help girls stay in school and learn, as well as to reshape gender norms and enable girls to take greater agency over their choices. But these skills are not yet embedded in what and how school systems teach their students. That's where we come in.

"Social and emotional skills have been shown to influence many important life outcomes...coupled with increasing awareness of their malleability, and their growing relevance for the future world, this has attracted renewed interest from policy makers and researchers." –OECD



The right skills & mindsets today can transform tomorrow.

Understand
which skills matter most for adolescent girls and define how to measure them.



Unpack
the links between these skills and academic as well as longer term life outcomes



Support
teachers in gaining these skills themselves and then teaching them to their students.

We have two primary goals in this area:

1 Fund research to explore the skills and mindsets that help girls most.

We support research that helps define and measure exactly what skills drive success for students, particularly girls. An important step to learning what skills matter is developing better and more standardized assessment tools for measuring impact.

Example:

We're helping define a taxonomy for social and emotional learning and life skills.

Many organizations focus on “life skills” for girls, but it’s not always clear exactly what they mean. We funded the [Explore SEL at Harvard](#) to gather and define key life skills frameworks used in lower-income countries and include them in a broader database of social and emotional learning frameworks. We hope Explore SEL is a first step to drive toward a shared understanding across the sector so we can systematically advance the evidence base.

2 Demonstrate how to teach these skills and mindsets in school systems.

We fund quality programs in or linked to government secondary schools, largely in East Africa and India, working with organizations who are committed to learning and iteration in program design.

Example:

Our grantees are proving skills and mindsets can be transformed—and transformative.

Grantees like CorStone, Educate!, and Room to Read have thoughtfully sequenced programs that teach secondary school students life skills like self awareness, problem solving, and resiliency. They have all conducted rigorous evaluations to demonstrate how their programs impact retention in school, learning, and life outcomes. Other grantees like Breakthrough and Study Hall Education Foundation in India are working with students to directly challenge gender stereotypes and norms.

As we better understand the skills and mindsets girls need, we’re taking our efforts even further.

We seek to support transformation in government systems. Most of our grantees work closely with the government to incorporate what they are learning into everyday practices in secondary school classrooms, into enhancements in teacher training, and/or adjustments to what is covered in national exams.

Let's discover which skills and mindsets matter most for girls.

We are seeking ways to build comparable evidence on life skills and mindsets across programs, to build open source assessment tools that can be used for this purpose, and to bring coherence to the ways organizations talk about and advocate for life skills and mindsets. We're most interested in learning more about programs that operate in India or East Africa, in secondary schools, with a strong gender focus.

If you would like to connect, reach out to us at echidna@echidnagiving.org.



Learn more about us at echidnagiving.org