

Level The Field Working Paper - No. 2

REVISITING THE FIVE DIMENSIONS OF OUT-OF- SCHOOL CHILDREN AND CONCRETE PATHWAYS FOR CHANGE

A work in progress aiming to stimulate dialogue and new ways of thinking around the tensions, debates and challenges facing girls' education.



The 5 Dimensions of Out-of-School Children - a legacy of the MDGs

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed upon by the United Nations and its member states in 2000, set global targets surrounding pressing human development issues. MDG 2 aimed to achieve universal primary education by 2015 and to support this aim, UNICEF and UNESCO launched the Global Initiative on Out-of-School (OOS) Children to help countries analyse their OOS populations and develop evidence-based strategies to reduce them.

This initiative developed a widely published framework¹ that distinguished two types of OOS children based on their exposure to education: 1) those who entered school and dropped out; and 2) those who did not enter school at all (figure 1). Based on this delineation, five dimensions were further developed across the three levels of education (figure 2).

Ten years on, this framework still provides a helpful lens with which to analyse OOS populations. This document aims to build on this framework by providing a deeper analysis of the types of children who are OOS, a revision to the dimensions of OOS children and concrete pathways for change.

FIGURE 1. CLASSIFICATION OF THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL POPULATION, BY SCHOOL EXPOSURE

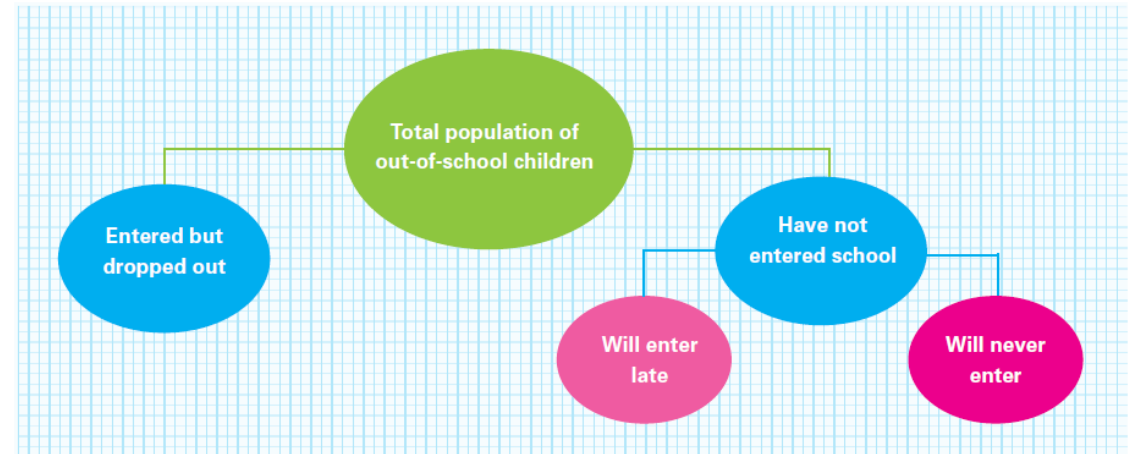
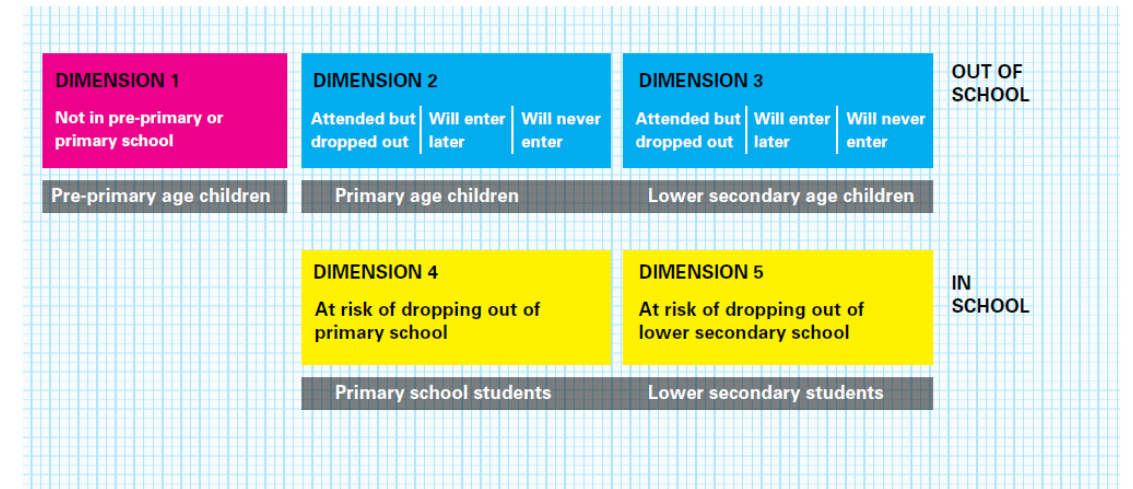


FIGURE 2. THE FIVE DIMENSIONS OF EXCLUSION



Revisiting the classification of out-of-school children

Figure 3 aims to build on the analysis of OOS populations by:

1. Adding a third category of children who have entered school but have not yet dropped out (blue level).
2. Adding further categorisation within these groups relating to why students drop out and for how long (pink level).
3. Revising the dimensions to focus less on the different levels of education and instead on implications for future solutions (grey level).

The following sections unpack these three revised dimensions and offer indicative theories of change that provide pathways for better futures for OOS children.

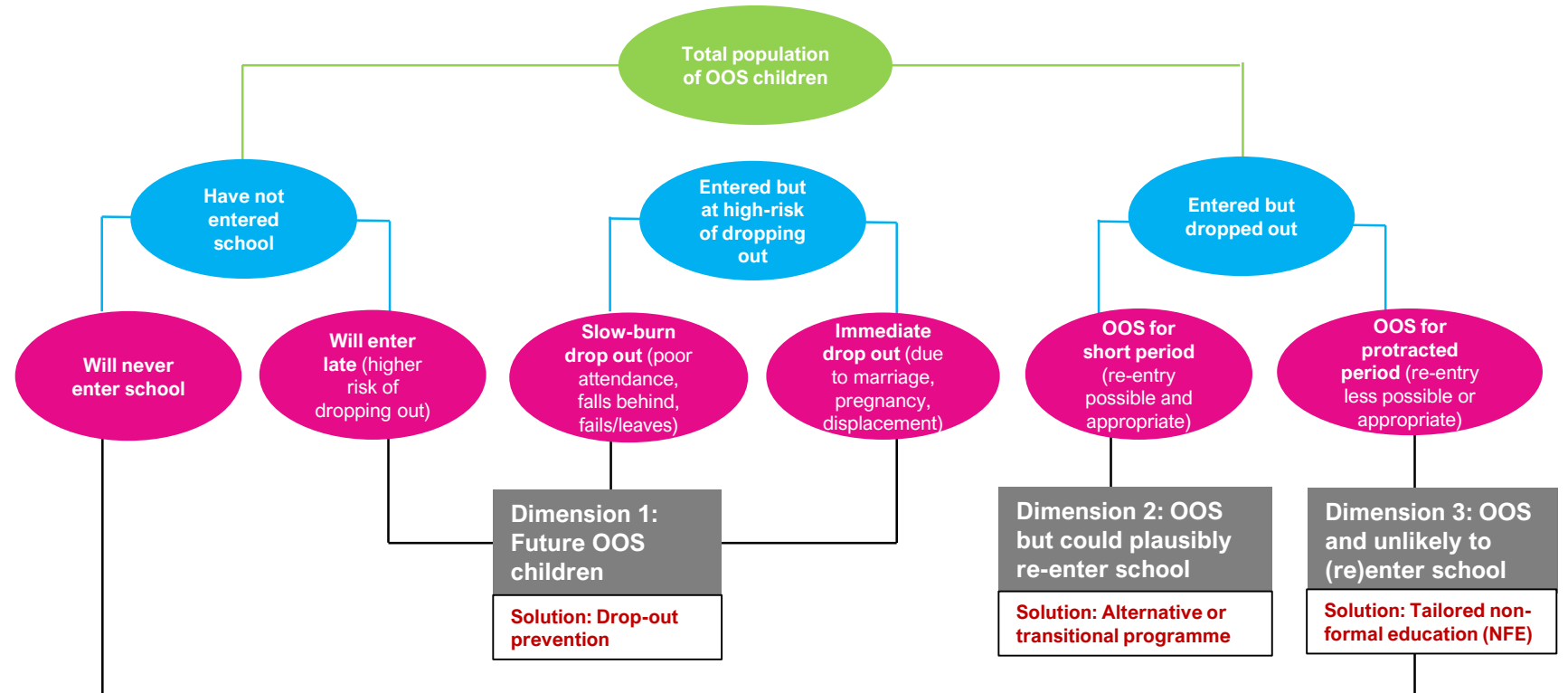


FIGURE 3. A REVISED FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING DIFFERENT TYPES OF OOS CHILDREN

Unpacking Dimension 1: Future out-of-school children

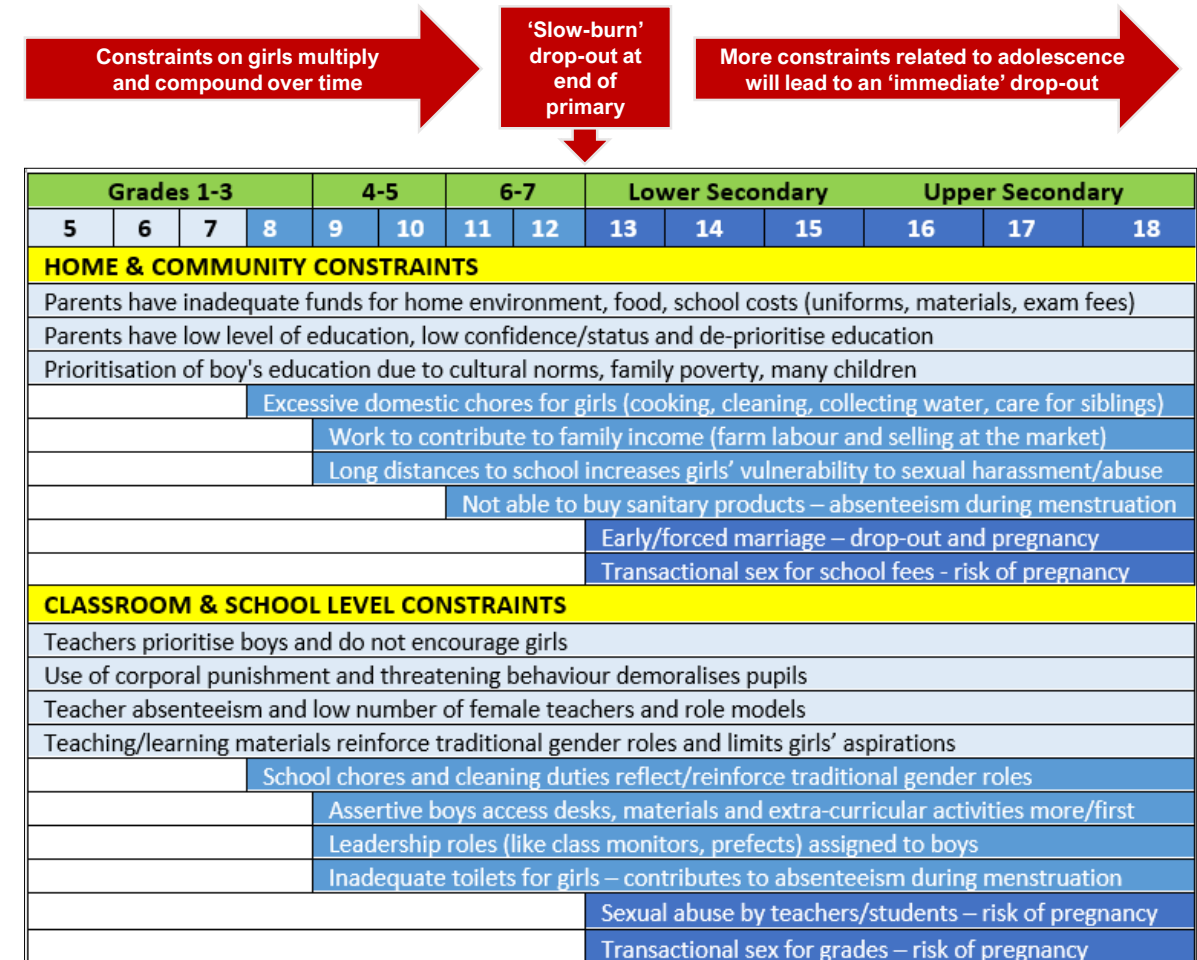
Dimension 1 entails vulnerable children who have entered school but who are at high-risk of dropping out. Globally, a large proportion of these children are girls.² Figure 4 illustrates the various constraints that vulnerable girls experience at the home, community and school levels and how these can lead to a 'slow-burn' drop-out over the course of a girl's first seven years of school.³ This process sees a girl:

1. Experiencing constraints which multiply and compound with age
2. Coming late to or missing class as a result of constraints, which leads to falling behind
3. Potentially having several stints of protracted absence, exacerbating being behind academically
4. Failing the primary leaving exam and/or quitting at the end of primary (if not earlier)

If a vulnerable girl is able to endure compounded constraints and progresses on to secondary, additional constraints related to adolescence can potentially lead to an 'immediate' drop-out. This includes:

1. Early/forced marriage (and then care for a baby)
2. Pregnancy and single parenthood (as a result of sexual predation, abuse or transaction, which can involve rape and subsequent pregnancy)
3. Focus on income generation to support a child
4. Repressive norms/laws (such as girls being excluded from secondary school, such as the case in Afghanistan)

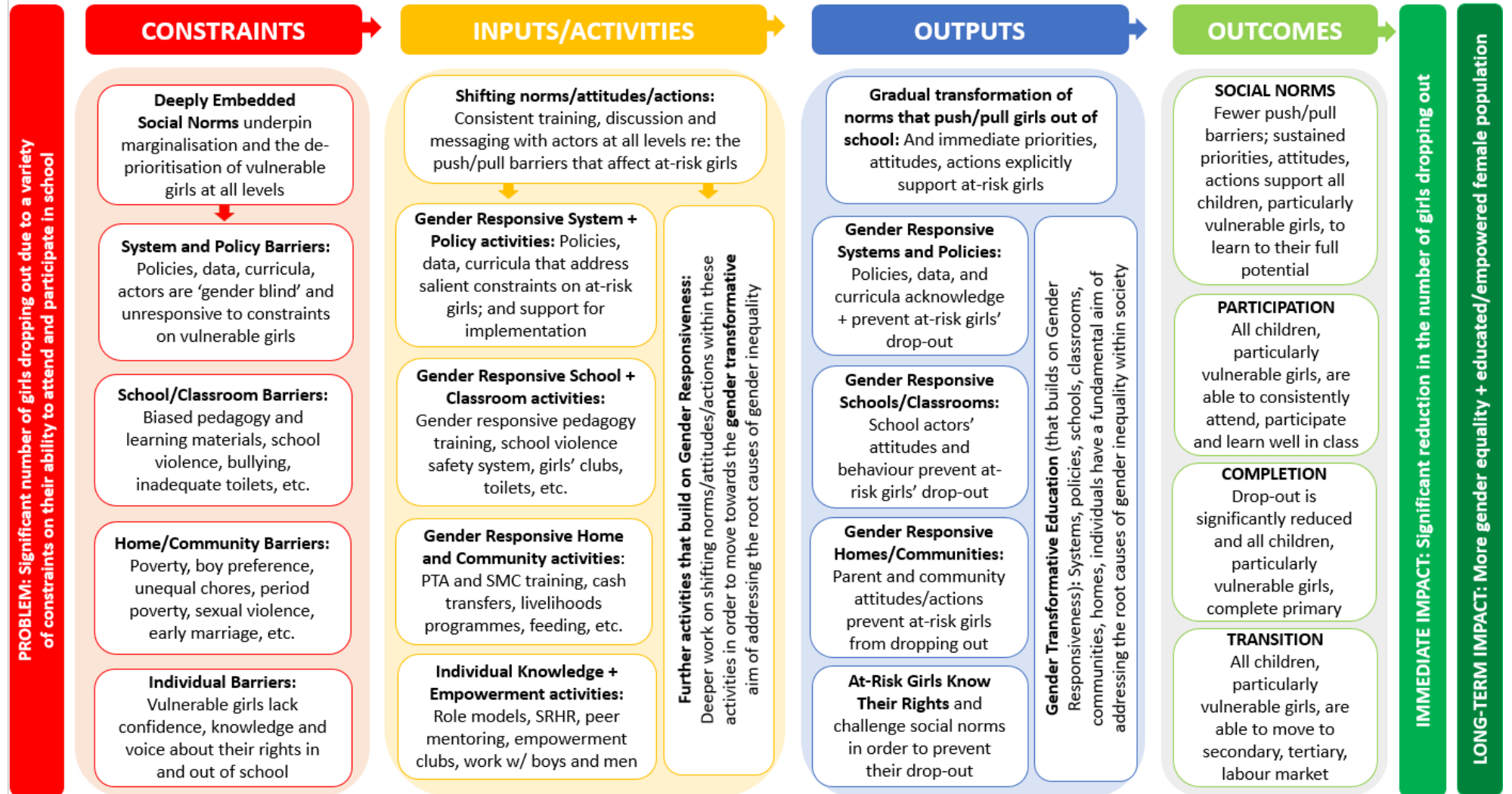
FIGURE 4. PROCESS BEHIND SLOW-BURN AND IMMEDIATE DROP-OUT FOR GIRLS



Way forward: How to prevent vulnerable girls from dropping out

This indicative Theory of Change (ToC) illustrates the inputs/activities that could prevent the slow-burn or immediate drop-out that results from constraints on vulnerable girls. The direct impact of such efforts would be a significant reduction in the number of girls dropping out and a reduction in future OOS populations.

This ToC also indicates the inputs needed to shift system actors towards gender responsiveness, in order to work towards the gender transformative aim of addressing the root causes of gender inequality.⁴



Unpacking Dimension 2: OOS girls who could plausibly re-enter school

Dimension 2 entails vulnerable girls who have dropped out (either slowly or immediately) and who have been out of school for one year or less. This group also includes children who are OOS because they have been internally displaced due to flooding, drought or other natural disaster. Depending on how far they have fallen behind prior to drop-out, these children will find it more easy to re-enter formal schooling than those who have been out of school for a protracted

period. In a seminal report, *Non-formal Education for Adolescents and Youth in Crisis and Conflict Contexts: a Proposed Taxonomy*,⁵ the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) has delineated two main types of non-formal programming that could support these types of OOS girls to re-enter formal school. These are outlined in the table below.

Type	Aim	Objectives	Requirements for success	Relationship with MoE	Examples
Transitional Programmes	To support learners to transition back into formal education, as well as other types of programming	To (re)gain the skills and competencies needed for formal education	Short-term, flexible scheduling, evening options	Alignment with MoE system and implemented by MoE actors, but not often prioritised	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Catch up classes Bridging classes to support language Learner Readiness
Alternative Education Programmes	To obtain a primary certificate in order to transition into secondary or training	To (re)gain the skills, competencies and certification needed for primary education	Compacted curriculum similar to formal school, recognised certification, flexible scheduling	As above	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Accelerated education programmes Alternative Basic Ed Speed schools Second Chance programmes

Unpacking Dimension 3: OOS girls who are unlikely to (re)enter school

Dimension 3 entails vulnerable girls who have dropped out (either slowly or immediately) and who have been out of school for 2+ years, leading to a significant degree of 'falling behind'. At best, these are adolescent girls who have had to remain OOS in order to work in the informal economy to support family and young children. At worst, these are girls who have never been enrolled in school at all. Due to their age and protracted period out of school, formal schooling is often not relevant or appropriate.

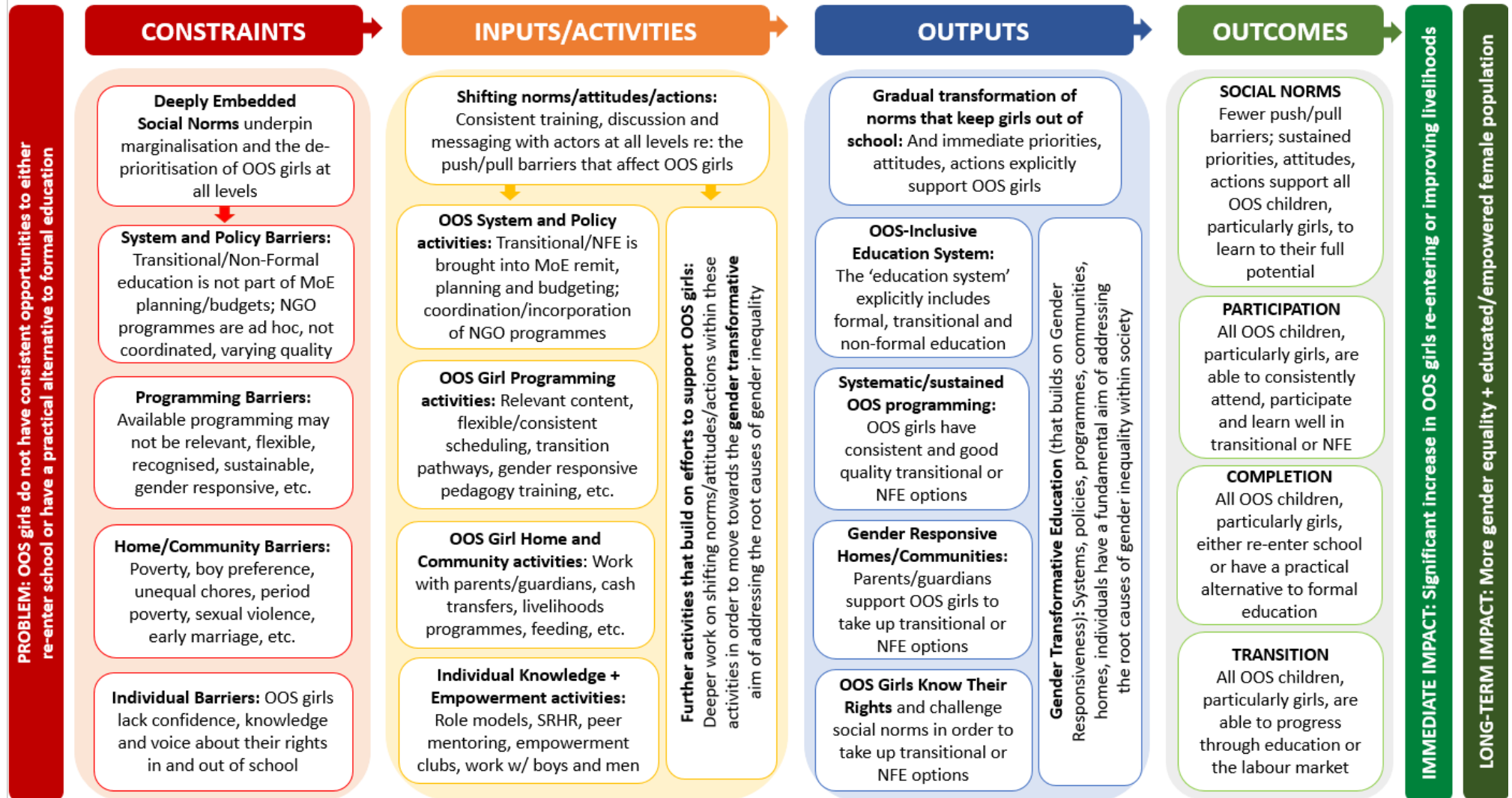
This dimension also include refugees who have crossed borders due to conflict, and whose host country has not made their inclusion into the national education system rapid or possible. INEE's taxonomy has noted that 'non-formal education' serves as an umbrella category of programming that supports all of these types of OOS girls and children in order to provide opportunities to support their quality of life and livelihoods. This is elaborated up on further in the table below.

Type	Aim	Objectives	Requirements for success	Relationship with MoE	Examples
Tailored non-formal education	To provide some from of education where no other learning opportunities are available, particularly for youth who have been OOS for protracted periods or children in humanitarian settings	To provide a safe and structured space to (re)gain the skills needed to improve quality of life and/or livelihoods	Short-term, flexible scheduling	Limited alignment with national education system. Often implemented by non-governmental actors and under the remit of non-education ministries.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. NGO project-based classes 2. Language classes 3. Content-specific classes

Way forward: Consistent and relevant non-formal programming for OOS girls

This indicative ToC illustrates the constraints that girls face when they are OOS for short or protracted periods, particularly at the system-level, where there is often a lack of remit, prioritisation and coordination for transitional, alternative or non-formal education programming.

If this system-level issue was addressed, the direct impact would be an increase in OOS girls transitioning back into education and/or into a better quality of life.



How the revised dimensions can support future analysis and planning

The aims behind revisiting the original 5 dimensions of OOS children were to: a) provide a deeper analysis of the types of children who are OOS; b) delineate dimensions via the amount of time they are out of school (i.e., about to be OOS, OOS for a short period, OOS for a protracted period); and c) provide concrete pathways for change based on these dimensions. These pathways, presented as theories of change, could be used in several ways:

- 1. To support ‘system strengthening’ programming to ensure that education systems prevent girls from dropping out rather than push them to drop out.** Dimension one’s ToC helps to identify the degree to which programming can work in the various areas/levels that need to be addressed (i.e., norm, system, school, home, individual). If such holistic programming is not possible, gaps can point to areas for coordination with other programmes or organisations.
- 2. To help think through what needs to be in place in order to achieve gender transformative education.** UNICEF’s ‘gender integration continuum’⁶ sets out the general process in which education systems evolve regarding gender equality: from being gender blind, to gender sensitive, to gender responsive, to finally gender transformative. Both ToCs make explicit the inputs that are needed to support norm/attitude/behavior shifts amongst education system actors to first support gender responsiveness, and then to

work towards the laudable yet difficult aim of addressing the root causes of gender inequality.

- 3. To support system-level changes that can reduce OOS populations.** If governments want to meaningfully reduce OOS populations, then transitional, alternative and non-formal education programming to support these OOS populations should be within the remit of Ministries of Education (as opposed to non-education ministries or deprioritised units within education ministries). This will ensure that support for re-entry will be part of systemic planning, budgeting, implementation and data collection. For those OOS girls and children who are unlikely to return to formal school, it will support better entry into labour markets and reduce the occurrence of parallel systems. This system-level change is a significant task, but it is one that can be done incrementally and through better coordination with non-governmental programming.

References:

1. UNICEF (2015) 'Global Out-of-School Children Initiative Operational Manual'. New York : UNICEF
2. Tao, S., Stoker, C., and Adapon, B. (2023) 'G7 Global Objectives Report 2023'. London: Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)
3. Tao, S. (2018) 'Girls' education is improving, but not for all girls – how can we accelerate change?' Nairobi: UNICEF Think Piece Series
4. Plan International, Transform Education, UNGEI and UNICEF (2021) 'Gender Transformative Education: Reimagining a more just and inclusive world'. New York: UNICEF
5. Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) (2020) 'Non-formal Education for Adolescents and Youth in Crisis and Conflict Contexts: a Proposed Taxonomy and Background Paper'. New York: INEE
6. Marcus, R., Samuels, F., Jalal, S., and Belachew, H. (2021) 'UNICEF Background Paper Series: Gender-Transformative Programming'. New York: UNICEF

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