



The Status of Tuseme in Mainstream Schools

GPE-KIX Tuseme: A voice for Internally Displaced and Refugee children project report

2025

Cite as: FAWE, HERS-EA, & ACER UK (2025). *The status of Tuseme in mainstream schools. GPE-KIX Tuseme: A voice for internally displaced and refugee children project report.* Forum for African Women Educationalists.

Disclaimer: *This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of IDRC or its Board of Governors.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Report Context and Aims

This report explores the key enabling and disabling factors of the Tuseme gender empowerment club in three East African countries, namely, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. Tuseme is a Kiswahili word meaning ‘let us speak out’ and constitutes an established school-based club across Sub-Saharan Africa, which has demonstrated its capacity to empower youth through the medium of theatre and arts. Using its 12-step approach, it amplifies the voices of young people and equips them with the skills they need to claim their educational and social rights.

This report forms part of the first phase of a three-year applied research project, which aims to generate evidence on whether and how the Tuseme club can be scaled into refugee and internally displaced communities in East Africa and beyond. As such, the research aimed to identify evidence-based insights from mainstream settings, where Tuseme is already having an impact, to adapt and scale the model into new communities.

The research explored the Tuseme in conjunction with two other initiatives: Gender Responsive Pedagogy and Centres of Excellence. Gender-responsive pedagogy is an educational approach rooted in human rights and aims to support the delivery of teaching and learning that is responsive to the needs of boys and girls, and Centres of Excellence is an intervention that looks at the school holistically, ensuring the necessary physical, social, and academic infrastructure is in place for boys and girls to succeed.

Methods

Research questions

1. What is the current status of the target innovations (Tuseme Clubs, Gender Responsive Pedagogy, and Centre of Excellence) in selected mainstream schools in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda?
2. What are the perceptions of Tuseme Clubs among stakeholders, including students (club members and non-members), teachers, school management, parents, and government officials, in the target schools?
3. What motivates students and teachers to participate in Tuseme Clubs?
4. What are the perceived benefits and impacts of Tuseme clubs on students’ self-esteem, leadership skills, social development, and academic engagement?

Approach

The research used a case study approach to explore enabling and disabling factors of Tuseme clubs in mainstream school settings in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda.

Sampling

12 schools were sampled across the target countries (4 per country) using purposive sampling. The key variables considered were the mix of the three innovations, type and size of school, gender balance of school and Tuseme clubs, reach of the innovations, and implementation experience of the innovations.

Data collection and analysis

The primary data collection method used was qualitative via semi-structured focus group discussions and key informant interviews. This data was analysed using thematic coding. A range of quantitative data was also collected. This was primarily administrative data from the schools, and descriptive statistics were used to explore it. Evidence from all data sources was triangulated at the case study level, country level, and regional level to identify actionable insights for adapting the Tuseme model.

Findings

This study identified a range of actionable learnings for establishing and maintaining gender empowerment clubs in the East African context. The key findings are shared below at the country and regional levels.

Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, the research revealed that the sustainability of Tuseme clubs was a significant challenge once FAWE's (delivery organisation) direct support came to an end. Continuity often depended on the presence of a dedicated teacher, and in cases where such leadership was lost, clubs became inactive. This was particularly evident at Nafyad Secondary School, where the club shut down after its teacher patron left. These findings directly respond to the central research question on sustainability and reflect literature emphasising the critical role of strong school leadership. They also confirm the assumption that individual empowerment must be reinforced by a robust structural framework if it is to be sustained.

Despite these challenges, the Tuseme model showed clear benefits and opportunities. Students reported enhanced self-efficacy, stronger communication skills, and greater confidence. Moreover, the use of drama and other participatory methods proved to be particularly effective in tackling sensitive issues, such as the demand for sanitary pads. This approach is consistent with wider empirical evidence on the success of school-based empowerment initiatives.

Kenya

In Kenya, the Tuseme model was widely recognised as an effective platform for empowering students, particularly girls, by giving them a voice and encouraging self-expression. Students reported that the club helped them feel free to share their problems, and activities, such as tailoring and computer training, were noted to support an increase in confidence in public speaking and

leadership. As such, student demand for the clubs was strong, and the inclusion of boys in discussions was seen as an effective way to foster mutual respect and gender equality.

However, the model faces challenges to its sustainability, particularly due to cultural, social and financial barriers. In some communities, resistance from parents was common, with fears that the club would negatively influence girls. Cultural and gender norms also discouraged open communication, especially between boys and girls, while the lack of female teachers in some schools limited trust and hindered discussions on sensitive topics. Furthermore, a heavy reliance was identified on FAWE's (delivery organisation) financial and logistical support. Teachers warned that if this support were withdrawn, many students would leave the clubs due to schools' limited resources. Therefore, stakeholders stressed the importance of a clear transition plan in the event of FAWE's withdrawal, to enable schools to move towards self-sustainability in the club.

Uganda

In Uganda, the research highlighted both enabling and disabling factors influencing the implementation of the Tuseme model. The clubs, supported by FAWE, were widely regarded as valuable by students, teachers, and parents. Parents expressed relief at their children's involvement, while students reported gaining practical skills, confidence, and a stronger sense of agency. Male students particularly benefited from developing public speaking skills and advocating for gender equality, which illustrates the inclusive nature of the programme and its potential to challenge restrictive gender norms. Furthermore, the clubs were found to have significant psychosocial impacts. Students reported improved social skills, emotional regulation, and resilience, which participants linked to the provision of safe spaces for students to practise new skills and behaviours.

Despite these successes, sustainability emerged as a major challenge across schools. Evidence from Namasagali and Balawoli demonstrated that clubs often declined or shut down once external funding or a key facilitator was lost. Teachers described this reliance on partners as a "death nail" to the clubs, emphasising that sustainability requires full integration into school policies and budgets. Without this institutional embedding, the model risks being viewed as a temporary project rather than a permanent feature of school life.

The research also revealed complexities in the application of Gender Responsive Pedagogy. While positive change was noted, such as increased female participation in leadership, some male students perceived that girls were prioritised, leading to feelings of imbalance. This points to the need for careful implementation of gender equality initiatives to ensure they foster inclusivity rather than new tensions. As such, Gender Responsive Pedagogy should be framed as a universal framework benefiting all genders equally.

Regional

The cross-country findings highlight clear areas of convergence, divergence, and complementarity. A key area of convergence across Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda was the strong positive impact of the Tuseme model on students. The clubs consistently enhanced agency, confidence, and self-efficacy. The use of participatory pedagogies such as drama and peer-led discussions supported

the development of safe environments for observational learning and behavioural practice. The most persistent challenge was sustainability. Across all contexts, reliance on external funding and individual facilitators meant clubs often declined once support was withdrawn, underscoring the need for stronger sustainability planning, potentially through further embedding the initiative into the institutional and financial frameworks. Support from dedicated teachers also emerged as central, aligning with findings from earlier FAWÉ evaluations.

Some areas of divergence were identified, which reflect differences in awareness, perception, and contextual challenges. In Kenya, parental awareness, and in some cases, resistance was more pronounced, while insights from Ethiopia suggest significant gaps in club awareness among parents and government officials, signalling the need for stronger mainstreaming strategies. Ethiopia also faced unique obstacles linked to regional security and restrictive national club policies, whereas Uganda's primary concerns centred on balancing parental expectations and academic pressures.

The complementary lessons drawn from each country offered valuable insights for adaptation. For instance, strong community support in parts of Kenya provides a replicable model for fostering local buy-in. Ethiopia's "Give Back" initiative also demonstrates how community service can promote cohesion and optimise resources. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of community ownership, facilitator capacity-building, and flexible, contextually relevant programming.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym/Abbreviation	Full Form
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
KIX	Knowledge and Innovation Exchange
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
HERS-EA	Higher Education Resource Services - East Africa
FAWE RS	Forum for African Women Educationalists, Regional Secretariat
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
GRP	Gender Responsive Pedagogy
CoE	Centre of Excellence
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
KII	Key Informant Interview
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
BOG	Board of Governors
DEO	District Education Officer
DCDO	District Community Development Officer
DCAO	Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
CFPU	Child and Family Protection Unit
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
DOS	Director of Studies
SWT	Senior Woman Teacher
SMT	Senior Male Teacher

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

This report presents findings from the first phase of a three-year research project titled “The Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE KIX) Tuseme: A voice for refugee and internally displaced children”. The project kicked off on April 1, 2024, with the overarching aim of improving the life chances of learners in refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP), especially girls. The project does this by adapting and generating evidence for the scaling of the Tuseme gender empowerment club from mainstream settings into refugee and IDP communities in Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia. Tuseme, a Swahili term meaning ‘let us speak out’, is a school-based empowerment club designed to amplify the voices of young people and equip them with the skills they need to claim their educational and social rights. As such, the project addresses the persistent gender gap and educational exclusion faced by girls and women within refugee and IDP communities in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. Such exclusion significantly limits their access to employment, economic opportunities, and broader societal engagement.

The overarching research question for the project is:

1. To what extent does the Tuseme model empower internally displaced and refugee children to identify and analyse the problems that hinder their academic and social development and advocate for change?

The secondary research questions are:

- i. What are the necessary conditions for Tuseme to be effective in promoting gender equality and girls' inclusion in education?
 - a. To what extent does Gender Responsive Pedagogy support the effectiveness of Tuseme?
 - b. To what extent do Centres of Excellence support the effectiveness of Tuseme?
 - c. Who are the key actors and structures to engage to ensure the effectiveness of Tuseme?
- ii. How does Tuseme need to be adapted to support learners from IDP and refugee communities?
 - a. Who are the key actors and structures to engage to ensure the effectiveness of Tuseme in IDP and refugee communities?
 - b. Which are the most promising advocacy and policies influencing approaches for the success of Tuseme?
 - c. Are there any limitations to the adoption of Tuseme in IDP and refugee settings?

Phase 1 of this research was specifically designed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Tuseme model and two associated initiatives, Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) and Centres of Excellence (CoE), as currently implemented in mainstream schools. The primary objective was to identify the key factors that contribute to and/ or hinder their success and sustainability. This foundational learning was significant in guiding the project’s subsequent phases of adaptation and scaling of the Tuseme model within refugee and IDP settings.

As such, the specific objectives of Phase 1 of this research were:

1. To evaluate the implementation of FAWE programmes (Tuseme model, GRP, and CoE) in the target mainstream schools, particularly their sustainability in the schools after FAWE left.
2. To draw lessons from the implementation, opportunities, and challenges, and to scale up the good practices in the refugee and IDP context.

This research project was commissioned by the Global Partnership for Education's Knowledge and Innovations Exchange fund (GPE KIX). GPE is the largest global fund solely dedicated to transforming education in lower-income countries, while KIX serves as the channel that supports countries to have and use the evidence and innovations they need to accelerate access to learning outcomes and gender equality through equitable, inclusive, and resilient education systems fit for the 21st century. This specific project aligns with the gender equality and social inclusion subtheme of KIX.

The project was operationalised by a consortium of three partners; ACER UK, part of the Australian Council for Educational Research group, developed the research framework, led on continuous refinement of research tools, and ensured adherence to agreed Quality Assurance standards for procedures and outcomes. Higher Education Resource Services-East Africa (HERS-EA), a Ugandan-registered educational non-governmental organisation (NGO) that trains women in leadership and management in educational institutions across East Africa, led the in-country research activities and the development of knowledge products. Forum for African Women Educationalists Regional Secretariat (FAWE RS), as the Principal Investigator, oversaw the overall implementation of project activities with support from FAWE Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda Country Chapters. FAWE is a pan-African NGO dedicated to promoting girls' and women's education in sub-Saharan Africa by actively improving access to education and completion of studies for girls and women to help them realise their full potential. All of the consortium partners have experience of embedding research into policy for governments, NGOs, civil society, advocacy groups and research institutions.

The project is designed with a mixed-methods approach for its scoping studies, data collection and analysis. It incorporates ethical research practices and inclusivity among research teams, and participant engagement as knowledge co-creators. The project aims to disseminate new knowledge through KIX hubs and relevant platforms. Expected outputs and outcomes include re-tooled trainers, a replicable and scalable Tuseme toolkit specifically for refugee camps and IDP hubs, peer-reviewed publications, and various knowledge products such as policy briefs, infographics and success stories. These products are anticipated to benefit the girls, trainers, and communities within and surrounding refugee camps, as well as researchers and policymakers, by providing new knowledge and sustainable skills disseminated through GPE/KIX hubs and other learning repositories.

1.1.1 Background on Tuseme Programme

The Tuseme youth empowerment project was initiated in 1996. It was pioneered by professors Amandina Lihamba and Penina Mlama from the Department of Fine and Performing Arts at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. Initially introduced in secondary schools, Tuseme was

adopted by FAWE as a tool to promote women's rights within Tanzania. The project was designed to empower schoolgirls by equipping them with essential skills necessary to identify, confront, and overcome various forms of gender inequality prevalent in their schools and broader communities. The foundational vision was to cultivate a new generation that championed gender equality. Over time, it became clear that achieving holistic gender transformation required the involvement of boys. Consequently, Tuseme expanded its reach to primary schools. This promotes empowerment and gender-equals attitudes from an earlier age for both girls and boys.

In 1999, the Ministry of Education and Culture officially endorsed the Tuseme model, which significantly accelerated its dissemination to schools across more than twenty countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Nations such as Kenya, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Malawi, Namibia, Senegal, and Gambia have since embraced the initiative, which has benefited over 80,000 students. Tuseme adopts a student-centred approach to addressing the structural roots of gender inequalities. Participants engage with societal norms, rules, and practical challenges that directly impact girls' attendance, performance in schools, and progression to higher education. The programme used club members' approach to identify and solve the above issues, and to understand gender constructs within their societies.

The methodological foundation of Tuseme is rooted in the Theatre for Development movement, which draws on existing knowledge of cultural artistic expression, particularly theatre, as a potential means of shaping awareness and inspiring collective action. Through locally crafted songs, drama, and creative arts, participants are encouraged to express themselves openly, build self-confidence, make informed decisions, and cultivate leadership skills. The use of these creative mediums provides a safe and supportive space for participants to rehearse and adopt new behaviours, and increases the likelihood of translating these positive behaviours into real-life scenarios.

While the specific implementation of Tuseme clubs may vary by country and individual school, a set of structured steps defines its methodology. The process begins with familiarisation, where students identify issues that hinder their academic or social development. This is followed by data analysis, where participants examine the root causes, effects, and potential solutions, while concurrently identifying the individuals and entities responsible. Next, these ideas are integrated into a theatrical performance, followed by a post-performance discussion to encourage reflection among participants and the audience. Finally, an action plan is developed to ensure the community effectively implements the decisions and solutions identified.

Through this structured and participatory approach, both girls and boys are empowered to directly address critical factors such as school dropouts, poor academic achievement, schoolgirl pregnancies, sexual harassment, and other gender-related challenges identified by their peers. The Tuseme project, with its unique blend of empowerment and artistic methodology, continues to inspire change in educational and community settings across Africa.

1.1.2 Background to Gender Responsive Pedagogy

The concept of GRP refers to teaching and learning processes specifically designed to address the unique needs and experiences of both girls and boys (UNESCO Bangkok, 2017). By adopting a

rights-based, holistic and participatory approach, GRP encourages all children to actively engage in their education. This involves closely examining every aspect of the learning environment, including instructional materials, teaching methodologies, classroom activities, interactions between students and teachers, and assessment strategies to ensure they are tailored to the unique requirements of both girls and boys.

Over the past 15 years, FAWE has strategically integrated GRP into its Gender Responsive Model (GRM) to enhance teaching quality across African schools. This initiative equips teachers, regardless of their gender, with the tools and understanding needed to promote equal participation and ensure fair treatment for all students within the classroom and school community (FAWE, 2022). While there has been progress in teaching quality, gender inequalities persist. Girls continue to face disproportionate challenges such as higher dropout rates, absenteeism, male-dominated classroom dynamics, and limited representation of female educators and leaders (FAWE, 2023). GRP builds on the ethics of care. It emphasises the role of teachers nurturing and supporting students as both learners and holistic individuals (Ongaga and Ombonga, 2012).

FAWE identifies several barriers to girls' education that GRP seeks to address. These include endemic poverty, harmful cultural practices like early marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), challenges related to sexual maturation management, the impact of HIV/AIDS, the prevalence of teenage pregnancy, and broader forms of gender-based disempowerment. Furthermore, male-dominated attitudes and values further complicate and impede the learning environment (FAWE, 2005; FAWE, 2022).

The impact of GRP is evidenced by its widespread implementation, with teacher training programmes and workshops having been introduced in over 30 countries across the continent (FAWE, 2023). A significant recent achievement highlighting GRP's national-level integration is its adoption into Burkina Faso's National Institute for the Training of Education Personnel (INFPE), marking its integration into teacher and early childhood educator training programmes at a national level (FAWE, 2023). This sustained commitment highlights GRP's potential in cultivating equitable and inclusive education systems throughout Africa.

1.1.3 Background to Centres of Excellence

A Centre of Excellence (CoE) represents a strategic educational intervention spearheaded by FAWE, designed to apply a gender-responsive approach to deliver high-quality education. Operating as a model school, CoEs aim to effectively dismantle and overcome barriers to girls' education within the school environment, its physical infrastructure, and the surrounding communities.

The CoE model primarily targets government schools situated in disadvantaged areas that exhibit pronounced gender inequalities. The initiative began in 1999, with its initial pilot in Rwanda, Kenya, and Tanzania. These pioneering communities were characterised by significant socio-economic challenges, including widespread poverty, low enrolment rates for girls beyond primary school, limited access to secondary education, early marriages involving school-age girls, and insufficient community support for girls' education. In the specific context of Rwanda, the

aftermath of the 1994 genocide also contributed to a high number of orphans, further complicating educational access, especially for girls.

A defining characteristic of FAWE's CoEs is their ambition to transform schools and their surrounding communities into academically, socially, and physically gender-responsive spaces. This transformation involves meeting the distinct needs of both boys and girls (FAWE, 2021). To achieve CoE status, schools are required to adopt gender-responsive practices in management systems, learning materials, classroom interactions, institutional policies, and academic delivery. This includes tailoring teaching methodologies, learning materials, classroom interactions, and overall academic content to encourage inclusivity and equity. Furthermore, the physical infrastructure of the schools, such as buildings, sanitation facilities, furniture, and equipment, must be designed to be gender-friendly, to ensure an environment that supports equitable participation and safety for all students.

Data from this study phase builds upon previous evaluations that have consistently indicated the positive impact of initiatives like Tuseme. For instance, qualitative data from prior studies highlighted the clubs' significant contributions in developing 'life skills', understood as adaptive and positive behaviours that enable individuals to effectively navigate the demands and challenges of everyday life (Mkumbo et al., 2015). This current research further explores these dynamics in the context of combined FAWE interventions.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This section delineates the key theoretical frameworks and synthesises relevant empirical literature that support this research. These frameworks provide a conceptual and analytical lens through which the implementation, perceived effectiveness, and potential adaptation of the Tuseme model, alongside GRP and CoE, are understood and interpreted. The theoretical foundation of this study is multi-layered, drawing upon Human Rights Theory, Self-efficacy and Human Motivation Theory, and Empowerment Theory. These frameworks collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which Tuseme upholds agency, promotes well-being, and facilitates transformative change, particularly for marginalised youth.

2.1.1 Human Rights Theory

The Human Rights Theory provides the normative foundation for Tuseme's focus on equity, dignity, and inclusion. This theory argues that all individuals are inherently entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms, irrespective of their status or background. Jack Donnelly (2013) emphasises the universality and inalienability of human rights, viewing them as inherent to human dignity and indispensable for enabling individuals to live lives characterised by agency, freedom, and self-worth. This theoretical lens is particularly pertinent for understanding the vulnerabilities and entitlements of marginalised groups, such as refugee and IDP children, who often face systemic denial of these rights.

The Tuseme model directly aligns with this framework by promoting children's fundamental right to education, participation, and self-expression. These are core tenets enshrined in international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). In fragile and displacement settings, Tuseme serves as a platform for asserting these rights to ensure that vulnerable youth are heard and equipped to shape their own futures. The theory guides the analysis by highlighting how the programme contributes to the realisation of these rights, even in challenging environments, and how their denial supports exclusion.

2.1.2 Self-efficacy and Human Motivation

The theory of Self-efficacy and Human Motivation, anchored in Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), highlights perceived capabilities of a learner as the key motivational driver for learning, performing at desired levels, and making progressive life choices. Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) illuminates the significance of observational learning, social interactions, and the interplay between an individual's behaviour, environment, and cognitive factors in shaping development and facilitating behaviour change. A core assumption within this project is that all children, including those in Refugee and IDP communities, possess the capacity to learn; however,

their progression is often significantly affected by adverse childhood experiences (Cantor et al, 2021).

The Tuseme model directly resonates with these principles by providing positive role models, encouraging peer engagement, and focusing on improving self-efficacy through structured skill-building activities. These mechanisms enable participants to build their own belief in their capabilities by vicariously learning, practising new behaviours in a safe environment and observing the successful outcomes of others. directly resonates with the principles of social cognitive theory, addresses adverse childhood experiences and aims to develop self-efficacy. This framework provides a multi-layered lens for understanding how students acquire and internalise new behaviours and attitudes through their active participation in the programme, and how Tuseme can specifically address the psychosocial impacts of adverse childhood experiences by cultivating a sense of mastery and control.

2.1.3 Empowerment Theory

Empowerment Theory provides a complementary and critical framework, explaining the significance of empowering individuals and groups in improving their performance and overall well-being. The concept of empowerment is central to the design and objectives of the Tuseme initiative. Empowerment theory suggests that individuals gain a greater sense of control over their lives through a multi-dimensional process bordering psychological empowerment, organisational empowerment, and community empowerment. FAWE defines empowerment as the act of “giving voice to the voiceless and strength to the powerless” (FAWE, 2005, p.3). Similarly, a study on Tuseme’s role in girls' empowerment describes it as a process through which marginalised groups, including the poor, minorities, girls, and women, recognise their subordination and develop the knowledge and skills needed to overcome it (Ongaga and Ombonga, 2012). Empowered individuals are capable of envisioning their desired futures and taking proactive control of their lives to achieve their aspirations. However, the capacity to make and implement decisions extends beyond mere individual agency; it necessitates a supportive structural framework that enables women and girls to lead their own development effectively. Tuseme's primary aim at the individual level is to amplify students’ agency and provide them with a stronger voice within their educational and social environments, thereby operationalising the tenets of Empowerment Theory.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

This section synthesises empirical studies critical to understanding the design, implementation, and outcomes of adolescent empowerment programmes, gender-transformative educational interventions, and programming within displacement-affected settings. This review lays the groundwork for comparing existing evidence with the empirical findings of Phase 1, thereby highlighting the study’s added value and informing its conclusions.

2.2.1 School-Based Empowerment Programmes for Adolescents

A growing body of empirical research substantiates the effectiveness of school-based empowerment interventions in promoting adolescents’ psychosocial well-being, self-efficacy, and leadership competencies. For instance, Rachmad (2022) documents significant positive

correlations between participation in structured empowerment activities and enhanced student agency, improved interpersonal communication, and the development of assertive leadership traits. These programmes frequently utilise participatory pedagogies, including role-play, drama, and peer-led discussions, which encourage experiential learning and internalisation of key competencies. Central to these interventions is the concept of youth-led agency, an approach aligned with Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy where students are not merely recipients of knowledge but active co-constructors of their social realities. These findings reinforce the theoretical foundation of the Tuseme model, which positions learners, particularly girls, as central actors in diagnosing and addressing the challenges they face within school and community settings. Previous studies, such as Mkumbo et al. (2015), specifically examining Tuseme, have highlighted its positive contributions to developing "life skills," understood as adaptive and positive behaviours essential for navigating everyday challenges.

2.2.2 Gender Equality Interventions in Educational Contexts

Substantial empirical literature has also emerged around gender-responsive education initiatives that seek to dismantle structural barriers to girls' education and encourage equitable learning environments. Evaluations of interventions such as girls' clubs, mentorship schemes, and gender-sensitive curriculum reforms have demonstrated improved educational outcomes, reductions in school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), and positive shifts in gender attitudes among students and teachers (FAWE, 2005; FAWE, 2022). These programmes address educational access, agency, voice, and participation by typically adopting a holistic approach to gender equality. For example, mentorship programmes have been found to significantly increase girls' retention and transition rates by building self-confidence and providing aspirational role models. The Tuseme framework effectively integrates these best practices into its participatory theatre and advocacy methodology; it strengthens girls' voices and agency in both academic and social domains. The effectiveness of GRP in creating inclusive learning environments is further supported by studies demonstrating its role in addressing issues like higher dropout rates for girls, absenteeism, and male-dominated classroom dynamics (FAWE, 2023; UNESCO Bangkok, 2017).

2.2.3 Empowerment Programming in Displacement-Affected and Humanitarian Settings

Despite the growing interest in adolescent empowerment within displacement contexts, empirical studies specifically examining models like Tuseme in humanitarian settings remain limited. Nevertheless, cross-sectoral research on education in emergencies, psychosocial support interventions, and adolescent development in fragile settings generates significant knowledge. Reports by UNHCR (2018) and related scholarship emphasise the necessity of culturally relevant, trauma-informed, and gender-sensitive programming that responds to the layered vulnerabilities faced by displaced adolescents. These studies highlight the importance of protective learning environments and programming that integrates mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) principles. In line with this, the successful adaptation of the Tuseme model for refugee and IDP communities must be guided by a contextualised understanding of trauma, resilience, and culturally embedded forms of communication and empowerment, such as storytelling and community theatre. This literature review highlights a critical gap that this Phase 1 research aims

to bridge by drawing lessons from mainstream contexts for potential application in displacement settings.

2.2.4 Evaluations of the Tuseme Programme

Several implementation studies and formative evaluations have been conducted to assess the effectiveness, scalability, and contextual adaptability of the Tuseme model in diverse African contexts. FAWE (2005, 2022) documents longitudinal outcomes associated with Tuseme in multiple countries, revealing sustained improvements in girls' self-expression, school participation, and leadership engagement. These evaluations apply a range of methodological approaches from qualitative case studies and participatory action research to quasi-experimental designs that enable triangulation of data and a better understanding of programme outcomes. Key findings highlight that the programme's success hinges on strong school leadership support, robust community buy-in, and continuous capacity-building of facilitators. However, existing literature indicates remaining gaps in understanding the long-term impacts of Tuseme and the intersectionality of gender with other social markers such as disability, ethnicity, and displacement status. This current research phase, therefore, builds on these prior evaluations by directly addressing this gap through the investigation of the transferability and adaptation of Tuseme to refugee and IDP contexts.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

The data collected and analysis of Phase 1 were guided by the following primary and secondary research questions:

Primary Research Questions

1. What is the current status of the target innovations (Tuseme Clubs, GRP, and CoE) in selected mainstream schools in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda?
2. What are the perceptions of Tuseme Clubs among stakeholders, including students (club members and non-members), teachers, school management, parents, and government officials, in the target schools?
3. What motivates students and teachers to participate in Tuseme Clubs?
4. What are the perceived benefits and impacts of Tuseme clubs on students' self-esteem, leadership skills, social development, and academic engagement?

Secondary Research Questions

- i. What types of activities were undertaken by Tuseme Clubs in the selected schools, and how were these activities organised and sustained?
- ii. What were the major challenges encountered in establishing, implementing, and sustaining Tuseme Clubs in these mainstream settings?
- iii. What opportunities and good practices were identified in the implementation of Tuseme Clubs that could be leveraged for adaptation and scaling in refugee and IDP contexts?
- iv. What lessons can be learned from the successes and challenges of Tuseme implementation in mainstream schools that are relevant to its potential application and adaptation within displacement settings?

3.2 Research Design

Phase 1 of the project focused on examining the effectiveness and impact of Tuseme across various existing settings. This involved assessing different combinations of three innovative models: Tuseme alone; Tuseme combined with Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP); and Tuseme, GRP, and Centres of Excellence (CoE), with the understanding that a CoE cannot exist without GRP. A case study approach was adopted, enabling a detailed comparison of these three deployment types both within individual countries and across the three focus countries. The approach facilitated the study of participants' involvement in Tuseme innovation in depth and in a natural setting.

To achieve this, the project identified suitable settings for the study in the three countries through a careful sampling process. It also included an extensive review of literature and key documents to gain deeper insights into the educational and gender-related challenges faced by refugee and

internally displaced populations. A stakeholder mapping exercise was conducted to identify key actors and structures that needed to be engaged to enhance the effectiveness of Tuseme. Additionally, the project incorporated a mixed-method stakeholder consultation to gather a diverse range of perspectives and insights.

The research was guided by the project’s **Theory of Change (ToC)**, which visually demonstrated how the innovative models, stakeholder collaboration, capacity building, and curriculum adaptation combined to create a cascading effect of change, thereby enabling the project to meet its objectives. Empowered students and transformed educators were envisioned to drive the shift toward gender equality and social inclusion, ultimately leading to improved educational quality and broader societal transformation.

Sampling

In Phase 1, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to deliberately select schools that offered a range of characteristics relevant to understanding the features of the Tuseme, CoE and GRP models, which lead to their impact. A list of schools was generated based on the presence of FAWE initiatives, and 14 schools (4 per country) were sampled, using the criteria in Table 1 below, in addition to selecting schools with a diverse mixture of innovation types. The approach ensured a representative range of school environments and innovation contexts, facilitating a deeper exploration of the programme’s effectiveness. The selected sample of Phase 1 schools can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 1: Phase 1 Sampling Criteria

Sampling Element	Characteristics
Sampling Approach	Purposive sampling to select schools representing diverse contexts
Key Variables	Type and size of school, size of innovation, gender balance, age of innovation
Population	Mainstream schools in 3 countries (n=12)
Access Criteria	Permission from school leadership and relevant authorities
School Types and Size	Primary day school, primary boarding school, secondary day school, secondary boarding school, small, medium, large
Innovation Reach	Small, medium, and large innovations
Gender Balance	Predominantly male, predominantly female, balanced
Implementation Experience	Newly formed, moderately established, long-standing

Table 2: Phase 1 Schools sampled in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda

Country	Study Site	Characteristics of School Population
Ethiopia	Addis Ababa Millennium Secondary School in Addis Ababa	A large secondary school situated in the capital city.
Ethiopia	Nafiyad Secondary School in Adama, Oromia Region	A multi-campus private school with a significant student enrollment.
Ethiopia	Tabor Secondary School in Hawassa, Sidama Region:	A large government secondary school operating in shifts.
Ethiopia	Bahir Dar Academy in Bahir Dar, Amhara Region	A private school catering to students from kindergarten to grade 12.
Kenya	Wasamo Girls Secondary School in Homa Bay County	Representing a girls' secondary boarding school in a specific regional context.
Kenya	St. Veronica Chebukaka Mixed Secondary School in Trans Nzoia County	A co-educational secondary school with a mixed student population.
Kenya	Masaku Primary School for the Physically Disabled in Machakos County	Masaku Primary School for the Physically Disabled in Machakos County: A specialised primary school focusing on the educational needs of students with physical disabilities.
Kenya	County Council Secondary School in Garissa County	Representing a secondary school in a more remote geographical location.
Uganda	Bukomero Secondary School in Kiboga District	A government-aided secondary school in a specific district.
Uganda	St. James Kagulu Senior Secondary School in Buyende District	A partnership secondary school with both day and boarding sections.
Uganda	Balawoli Secondary School in Kamuli District	A government-aided secondary school in a particular district.
Uganda	Namasagali Secondary School in Kamuli District	Another secondary school within the same district, allowing for potential comparisons.

Participants

A range of individuals and groups with an interest (stakeholders) in each school were sampled. They included girls and boys (both active and inactive in Tuseme), teaching staff, senior school leadership teams, parent-teacher associations, community groups, government officials, and parents. Stakeholder mapping using a power/interest matrix guided this engagement.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered from stakeholders through focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), and quantitative surveys. All primary data were collated, coded, and analysed using Dedoose. To ensure the robustness of findings, the research teams practised double processing when coding data, meaning two researchers independently coded the data and then cross-referenced their codes. This reduced researcher biases. The data were first analysed at the school level, then national level, noting any similarities and differences in experience by context, and then again at the regional level.

Data collection was conducted within a defined period across the three participating countries. In both Ethiopia and Kenya, fieldwork was carried out concurrently from 13 to 31 January 2025. In Uganda, data collection occurred slightly later, from 10 to 28 February 2025, due to the academic calendar; schools were closed for holidays in January, making February the most appropriate time to access learners and other school stakeholders.

3.2 Ethical Considerations

The research adheres to the highest ethical standards, having gone through rigorous approval processes in countries where the project is operating, as well as by ACER's independently regulated ethics board. The in-country Institutional Review Boards or ethics committees include: the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences (EAS) and the Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission (ESTC); the National Research Fund (NRF) in Kenya; and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST).

3.3 Limitations of the Study

This Phase 1 research, while yielding important findings, has certain limitations. The primary reliance on qualitative data provides a rich contextual understanding, but it does not allow for broad statistical generalisation of the findings to all mainstream schools in the three countries. In addition, the purposive selection of study sites, although designed to capture diversity, means that the findings may not be fully representative of all mainstream schools in Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia.

Data collected through interviews and focus group discussions may also be affected by recall bias, as participants were required to reflect on past experiences. Furthermore, there is the possibility that some participants provided responses they considered socially acceptable or desirable rather than entirely candid accounts.

The timeframe and resources available for Phase 1 inevitably limited both the scope and the depth of data collection. Finally, although researchers made every effort to conduct interviews and discussions in the most accessible languages, some nuances or perspectives may have been lost due to language differences.

IV. FINDINGS

The findings are organised by country to provide a clear understanding of the context-specific experiences with the Tuseme programme in Ethiopia (4.1), Kenya (4.2), and Uganda (4.3). Within each country, and case study, the findings have been categorised into six major themes of 1) Tuseme club awareness, participation, and impact 2) Academic and socio-cultural challenges 3) School environment, infrastructure, and wellbeing 4) Community and parental engagement and 5) Sustainability, scalability, and good practices, followed by recommendations for model adaptation and strengthening, CoE and GRP.

The initial themes that emerged from the data were 1) Demographic and background characteristics, 2) Tuseme club awareness, participation, and impact, 3) Academic and learning challenges 4) Social and cultural barriers 5) School environment and infrastructure 6) Psychosocial wellbeing and support systems 7) Community and parental engagement 8) Sustainability, scalability, and good practices and 9) Existing educational interventions and gaps. These themes were merged as follows: *Demographic & background characteristics information* was integrated into the general case study context. *Tuseme club awareness, participation, and impact were merged with community and parental engagement* to form a theme on 1. Tuseme club awareness, participation, and impact; *Academic and learning challenges* were merged with existing *educational interventions* and gaps, and *social and cultural barriers* to create a theme on 2. Academic and socio-cultural challenges, while the *school environment and infrastructure were merged with psychosocial wellbeing and support Systems* to form a theme on 3. School environment, infrastructure, and well-being. The additional themes were 4) Community and parental engagement and 5) Sustainability, scalability, and good practices.

4.1 Ethiopia: Findings

4.1.1 Country Context

Figure 1: Map of Ethiopia showing the location of the four schools



The study was conducted across four mainstream primary and secondary schools in Ethiopia, through 35 focus group discussions (FGDs), small group interviews and three Key Informant interviews (KII). These schools are Millennium Secondary School in Addis Ababa, Nafiyad Secondary School in Adama, Tabor Secondary School in Hawassa, and Bahir Dar Academy in Bahir Dar (figure 1).

Table 3 below summarises the data collected in Ethiopia by participants' category, school, and gender. The data shows participation trends across four locations, highlighting a total of 221 individuals with a slight male predominance. Girls in clubs had the highest participation in Bahir Dar, while overall teacher representation was balanced across locations. However, there were significant disparities in PTA and government roles, especially in Bahir Dar, which lacked female representation in government. Millennium School stands out with strong engagement across various categories, particularly in parental involvement. To enhance community engagement, there is a need to encourage female participation in government and PTAs, support mixed clubs, and develop strategies to boost parental involvement, especially in areas that have lower participation rates.

Table 3: Ethiopia Study Participants by category, school, and gender

Participant category	Millenium		Nafyad		Tabor		Bahir Dar		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Student (girls in clubs)	8		8		8		10		34
Students (boys in clubs)		8		8		8		8	32
Students (mixed, not in clubs)	6	2	4	4	6	2	5	3	32
Government official	1	5	3	5	0	1	1		16
Parasocial Workers			10	6					16
FAWE Trainers			2	1	8	12			23
Teacher	4	4	2	6	4	4	4	4	32
Parent	2	2	4	3	2	4	0	1	18
PTA	3	3	2	4	4	2	0	0	18
Total	24	24	35	37	32	33	20	16	221

4.1.2 Innovations in Ethiopia

4.1.1.1 Tuseme. Tuseme clubs have been implemented by FAWE across Ethiopian secondary schools as structured platforms for student leadership and gender advocacy. In the four case studies, the clubs exhibited varying levels of activity and impact. At Millennium Secondary School, the club was active with 16 members (8 girls, 8 boys), engaging students in leadership and confidence-building activities. Nafyad Secondary

School initially had 16 members (8 girls, 8 boys), but the club ceased after the departure of the key mentor, showing the vulnerability of innovation when dependent on individual teachers. Tabor Secondary School maintained active participation with 16 members (8 girls, 8 boys), fostering student involvement despite regional poverty. Bahir Dar Academy had the largest female representation in its Tuseme club, with 18 members (10 girls, 8 boys), using creative approaches such as drama to address gender issues. These patterns indicate that Tuseme clubs function as a replicable innovation for student empowerment, but their success is closely tied to leadership continuity and institutional support.

4.1.1.2 Gender Responsive Pedagogy. Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) was applied to different extents across the schools. Millennium Secondary School demonstrated the strongest implementation, with 138 teachers trained in GRP since 2016 and active application in classrooms. Nafyad Secondary School and Tabor Secondary School had partial GRP adoption; teachers were trained, but the lack of institutional support and resource constraints limited consistent application. Bahir Dar Academy showed emerging GRP adoption, where training positively influenced teacher attitudes and student participation, yet full integration into everyday practice was constrained by high student numbers and limited follow-up. These examples show that GRP enhances the impact of Tuseme clubs and represents an innovative pedagogical approach, though sustainability and consistency remain challenges.

4.1.1.3 Centres of Excellence. None of the four schools has formally or intentionally established a Centre of Excellence (CoE) as part of their institutional framework, but several exhibited developing CoE characteristics, as broadly addressed in each case study analysis below. Millennium Secondary School and Tabor Secondary School demonstrated strong student engagement and PTA support, yet were limited by financial constraints and reliance on external support. Nafyad Secondary School showed potential with high student participation, but could not sustain the CoE model due to the loss of key personnel and lack of institutional structures. Bahir Dar Academy exhibited high female participation in Tuseme, dedicated resources for club activities, and innovative student-led solutions, though external challenges such as security concerns, constrained continuity. These findings suggest that CoE innovations in Ethiopia rely on institutionalisation, resource allocation, and leadership stability.

4.1.1.4 Sustainability and Local Innovation. The sustainability of innovations is closely linked to local context, institutional support, and resource availability. Schools with active Tuseme clubs and GRP-trained teachers, like Millennium and Bahir Dar, maintained programme continuity and demonstrated context-specific strategies, such as drama to promote gender awareness. In contrast, Nafyad and Tabor experienced disruptions due to teacher turnover, reliance on short-term NGO support, or socio-economic constraints. These cases illustrate that successful local innovations require formal structures, succession planning, and adaptive strategies to maintain impact over time.

4.1.3 Case Study 1: Millennium Secondary School in Addis Ababa

General case study context

Table 4: Millennium Secondary School Profile

Category	Details
School Name	Millennium Secondary School
School Location	Kolfe-Keranyo Sub-city, Addis Ababa
Location Type	Urban
School Level	Upper Secondary
School Type	Public Day School
Enrolment Figures (Total 3,089)	Girls (1,731); Boys (1,358)
Number of Teachers	183
Tuseme Club Status	Active
Tuseme Club Enrolment Figures (16)	Girls (8); Boys (8)
Centre of Excellence Status	Not Established (shows emerging characteristics of a CoE)
Gender Responsive Pedagogy Status	Active since 2016
Number of Teachers Trained in GRP	138

Millennium School is based in Addis Ababa, and basic summary information is in Table 4. The school was renamed in 2008 after being established 50 years prior, and is located in the Kolfe-Keranyo sub-city of Addis Ababa. It serves approximately 3,089 students, with a significant female enrollment of 1,731 (56%). The school provides its educational services through 62 classrooms, three laboratories, and a library. A notable aspect of the school is its structured extracurricular programme, comprising eight clusters and nearly 21 clubs designed to cater to a wide array of student interests and skill development. These clubs range from Volunteerism and the Red Cross to language-focused groups like Arts and Mini Media (which includes a gender club associated with Tuseme), and even initiatives promoting behaviour development like the Anti-Corruption Club. A total of 54 stakeholders participated in the study, comprising 26 females and 28 males. The student group included 8 girls and 8 boys who were active in Tuseme clubs. The teaching staff represented an even gender split, with four female and four male teachers participating. The PTA was represented by three women and three men, while government official participation was notable, with one female and seven male officials involved. Furthermore, there were six female and two male students from outside the clubs, and six parents (four women and two men). The high number of government officials at this school likely reflects its proximity to national-level institutions and decision-makers in the capital.

Figure 2: Focus Group Discussion in Millennium Secondary School, Addis Ababa



i) Tuseme

Theme 1) Tuseme Club Awareness, Participation, and Impact.

Awareness of the Tuseme club varied among different school community members. While long-term teachers and students were knowledgeable about the club, some newer staff and parents had limited awareness. There was also a general confusion between the Tuseme club and the FAWE scholarship. However, stakeholders who were familiar with the club recognised its positive impact on students.

Voice from a para-social worker: "What I know about Tuseme is that it is a club established by FAWE and works on gender issues."

Voice from a government official: "I'm the coordinator of the school club structure in the sub-city, and the Tuseme club operates under the gender club in those 2 schools...it is through such a structure that we also reach the club and collaborate with it."

These reflections indicate that while awareness was uneven, the institutional embedding of Tuseme within existing club structures allowed for collaboration and continuity, even where knowledge about its origins was limited. Recruitment into the Tuseme club was primarily teacher-led and focused on academically strong and active students. For many, it was an opportunity to build

confidence and enhance their educational journey. Students and teachers reported that participating in the club led to positive behavioural changes and improved academic performance.

Voice from a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) member: "We have observed that students involved in clubs, including Tuseme, perform better academically and show improved critical thinking compared to those not involved. Some students are even conducting research, which highlights the positive contributions of these clubs."

Voice from a government official: "The other thing is that if female students score higher ranks in the class, they are provided with scholarship opportunities. This is one of the initiatives of the education policy in mainstreaming gender issues. There are a lot of female students who benefited from this scholarship programme and are sent to different countries like Turkey for further education."

These voices confirm that club participation was seen as reinforcing academic achievement and linking students to broader opportunities such as scholarships. This suggests that Tuseme is not only about gender empowerment but also about enhancing overall academic capital.

Voice from a government official: "One of the benefits of the clubs is that they enable the students to enhance their knowledge and skills they acquired through the theoretical sessions in practical sessions... Clubs in the school fill such a void."

Here, the club was recognised as bridging the gap between classroom learning and practical life skills. This emphasises its role as a complementary learning space that builds capacities beyond academics. Generally, awareness of Tuseme was high among long-term students, teachers, and para-social workers. However, new staff and some management had limited knowledge. Confusion existed between Tuseme and the FAWE scholarship. Parental awareness of Tuseme was limited compared to the FAWE scholarship.

Recruitment into Tuseme clubs was primarily teacher-led, targeting academically strong and active students. Initial leadership often came from grade 12 students. Feelings generated by teacher-led recruitment of participants were not prodded at this stage, but they require further investigation. Many girls in Tuseme also participated in the media club, using it as a platform for advocacy. Students reported numerous benefits, including girls engaging in open discussions with boys on sensitive topics like menstruation, fostering understanding and empathy. It was reported that boys developed greater awareness of supporting female students and respecting girls' rights. Club activities enhanced students' understanding of their school environment. Students also reported increased joint group activities and assertiveness.

Voice from a student: "We learned a lot through Tuseme, but most importantly, we participated in an exercise where we counted all the classrooms, chairs, tables, and other school properties... we became much more aware of our school environment."

Voice from a student: "After becoming a member of the Tuseme club, she has become more interactive and assertive."

Theme 2) Academic and Socio-Cultural Challenges.

The club facilitates a practical role in addressing student welfare and disciplinary issues.

Voice from a PTA member: "As a parent, I know when the club was established and how Tuseme operates. For instance, it helps protect female students from harassment. If a male student takes a female student's ID card, we track down the student and bring him to a disciplinary process involving parental consultation. There have also been cases where male students took girls' lunch boxes and ate their meals. In such cases, we investigate the student's family background, and if they lack access to food at home, we refer them to government feeding programmes. Additionally, we address the needs of female students by providing essential items like sanitary pads. For students who are financially struggling, we organise fundraising programmes during holidays to support them and ensure they continue their education."

This perspective illustrates the practical role of school clubs in promoting accountability and community-based interventions. It highlights how the PTA collaborates with schools to discipline and address underlying socio-economic challenges, to ensure that female students remain supported and protected in their education journey.

Voice from a government official: "The community might be resistant due to their circumstances, so before planning to engage with them, we must study their culture and understand how to communicate with them effectively. They might not be receptive initially because they are out of their comfort zone. We need to approach them in a way that respects their culture and lifestyle."

Here, the emphasis shifts to the importance of cultural sensitivity and tailored engagement strategies. The PTA member stressed that community buy-in cannot be assumed, and sustainable solutions depend on respecting and adapting to existing cultural contexts. A government official in Addis Ababa highlighted several significant challenges facing students, particularly girls, that are beyond the scope of school clubs alone:

Voice from a government official: "We can talk about the challenges that we experience as a city administration, and we cannot confidently talk about the challenges experienced by regions. Therefore, in our city, one challenge is the human trafficking issue. It is very challenging and most of the students in the school desire to migrate to aboard countries given the economic challenges that most people experience here. As a result, a lot of students have a link with the irregular or regular

migration agents. There are some students that we know who are arrested in Libya on their way to Italy, the UK, etc."

This highlights the wider structural and systemic vulnerabilities beyond school-level interventions. Economic hardship drives students, especially girls, towards risky migration, leaving them vulnerable to trafficking networks.

Voice from a government official: *"Therefore, there is a widespread irregular migration of agents who operate illegally and mislead a lot of our female students in this city. This needs to be dealt with. The second issue is that there are a lot of female students who are frustrated with the economic capacity of their families and go into early marriage, thinking that marriage is their way of escaping life hardship. In this regard, there are illegal agents and brokers who facilitate such issues and connect young female students with wealthy/rich adult males. This is another challenge in which sometimes these agents/brokers facilitate young female students to leave their education and work in hotels and tourism services as waiters and soon. This is also something that has a connection with human trafficking as well."*

The official linked early marriage and exploitative labour practices directly with trafficking risks, showing how economic vulnerability is often manipulated by intermediaries who profit from young women's desperation.

Voice from a government official: *"To add on this... the other challenge is an issue of drug and illicit substance use inside the school compound as well as outside the school compound. We have seen some students, including female students, who skip school and go to areas that are prohibited for students in the city. Some female students fall into the traps of males that are outside of the school community and leading to engagement in prohibited activities outside of the school compound... In addition, in the past, sexual harassment of female students used to happen with force, but now that has disappeared, as much work has been done on that. However, now its form has changed, and female students fail to report sexual harassment through persuasion by adults in the city. Some female students lack the appropriate awareness on this issue, and they go to an environment that exposes them to such victimisation."*

This testimony underlines the changing forms of gender-based risks. While physical harassment has decreased, subtler forms of coercion, persuasion, and peer influence expose girls to exploitation, signalling the need for continuous awareness and preventative strategies. A para-social worker also identified a number of significant challenges facing students. These issues were often beyond the scope of school clubs alone and required broader community and policy interventions.

Voice from a para-social worker: *"Our female students are in their adolescent age, which makes them very vulnerable to sexual violence. In case it helps you with your study, let me share with you one experience we encountered in the past. There was a 15-year-old grade 9 female student in 2014 who used to come to the school with*

different hairstyles that did not suit students and used to act very inappropriately. Then, because of this, many of her teachers used to send her out of the class a lot."

This example reveals how adolescent girls face double vulnerability: both to external threats like violence and to internal school discipline that may misinterpret their behaviour, rather than providing psychosocial support.

Voice from a government official: *"The other challenge that you might encounter can be strong socio-cultural resistances in which there might be a negative social attitude towards female education in those areas."*

Resistance at the community level highlights the persistence of negative cultural perceptions of female education. This suggests that clubs like Tuseme must work in tandem with community sensitisation to shift attitudes. Overall, these observations reinforce the argument that without meeting students' basic needs such as food, housing, and school materials, educational interventions cannot be fully effective. It also reflects the frustration communities feel when the perceived external image of prosperity does not match lived realities.

Theme 3) School Environment, Infrastructure, and Wellbeing.

The Tuseme club plays a significant role in promoting the psychosocial well-being of students within the school environment. Beyond academic support, it functions as a safe and structured space, supported by available school facilities, where students, especially girls, can address personal challenges and build resilience to navigate complex social environments. The voices of various stakeholders show this dual function of empowerment and protection, linked closely to the school setting that provides the necessary infrastructure for the club to operate effectively. Government officials and parents viewed the Tuseme club as a vital tool for personal development. They recognised that the club's activities directly promoted self-confidence and assertiveness in female students, skills that are essential for their academic and personal success.

Voice from a government official: *"This club will help girls develop self-confidence and say no to any persuasion to distract them from their education."*

This perspective highlights the club's role in equipping girls with the agency to resist negative external pressures. Similarly, parents see the club as a way to instil strength and courage in their daughters, challenging traditional gender roles.

Voice from a PTA member: *"I want my daughter not to feel less significant because she is a female, and I encourage her to be a courageous woman."*

This shows that the club's positive impact resonates with families, who see it as a platform for their children to thrive and defy limiting societal expectations. While the club empowers students, the voices of para-social workers reveal the challenging realities they face, including vulnerability to violence and trauma. These professionals must deal with sensitive issues that students may be

hesitant to report, making the club's role in creating a space for open communication even more critical.

Voice from a para-social worker: "There are a lot of school girls that I know raped by outsiders or even by close relatives, and encountered a lot of physical violence too. Sometimes, when we try to speak out about those girls' problems, they even refuse us to do so and say they do not want us to talk about the violence they experienced at all. But we try to encourage them to speak out about their experiences and seek help for it. Therefore, there are a lot of challenges we see."

The combination of these perspectives shows that the Tuseme club's contribution to student wellbeing is both proactive and responsive. It builds foundational skills like self-confidence and self-esteem while utilising the school's infrastructure to provide a safe and accessible space for support. Furthermore, it sensitises male students and promotes a more equitable school community.

Voice from a government official: "Therefore, this club will help those girls develop self-confidence and self-esteem as well as speak out about their issues. Similarly, this club can also make males in those areas become aware of the rights and gender issues of female students, which will also contribute to women's empowerment in those areas."

This final voice encapsulates the full scope of the club's impact, showing that its benefits extend beyond individual girls to include sensitising male students and promoting a more equitable school community.

Theme 4) Community and Parental Engagement.

Parental engagement with Tuseme was a mixed picture. While some parents were supportive of their children's participation in extracurricular activities, many were not fully aware of the Tuseme club specifically.

***Voice from a para-social worker:** "When we established the club and tried to give training to the students, their parents were suspicious of it and wouldn't let them go to the training."*

This suggests a lack of trust that can initially hinder the effectiveness of the programme, particularly when parents are not adequately informed. A key concern for parents was student safety, especially for young girls participating in after-school activities.

***Voice from a PTA member:** "I support the establishment of clubs at the school, but at the same time, I fear for the safety of my child as she is a young girl vulnerable to any danger."*

The tension between supporting extracurricular opportunities and fearing for safety demonstrates the fragile balance between empowerment and protection.

***Voice from a para-social worker:** "Parents need to be counselled and be aware of the club so that they can let their children join it without parents having any fear or concern for their children and about the club."*

***Voice from a PTA member:** "PTAs have close connections with families and students, making it easier to build trust. The first step should be raising awareness among PTAs so they can effectively convince the communities they live in... PTAs can help identify students who need to join the club. Collaborating with PTAs is crucial for the club's success."*

These insights stress that sustainable engagement requires structured awareness-raising and strong PTA involvement. The PTA should be positioned as a bridge-builder, able to mediate between schools and communities. Community and parental engagement at Millennium Secondary School presented a mixed picture. On the one hand, parents seemed to be generally supportive of their children's involvement in extracurricular activities, with one parent noting that their child kept them informed about their participation. The input confirms that parents are generally supportive of their children's involvement in school clubs, provided there is open communication.

***Voice from a parent:** "When she is engaged in extracurricular activities, that will make her come home late. When she wants to participate in events at her school or even wants to engage in tutorial classes or any other activities in her school, she comes to me and informs me about it."*

This voice illustrates a positive level of communication between the student and parent, where the student seeks permission and provides information about late activities. It shows a baseline of

parental approval for extracurricular involvement. However, a critical challenge highlighted is student safety, especially regarding after-school activities, necessitating clear protocols.

Voice from a parent: “*If I promote my child to engage in club activities, I also need a responsible person who will follow up on whether my child made it back home or not after staying late at school.*”

This voice points to a valid and serious safety concern surrounding students, particularly girls, travelling home after late club meetings. It implies a need for the school to establish a clear duty of care and communication mechanism to reassure parents and ensure students' safe return. This challenge is further validated by the reference to past cases of rape of girls on their way home.

Theme 5) Sustainability, Scalability, and Good Practices.

The sustainability of the Tuseme club was a significant concern. There was a lack of a clear handover strategy from FAWE, frequent reshuffling of school management, and a lack of a dedicated budget and space for the club.

Voice from a PTA member: “*Local NGOs tend to stay in schools for a short period, and when they leave, the programmes they initiated often fail due to a lack of continuity...Even if NGO programmes phase out, the school can sustain them by utilising the infrastructure and fixed assets left behind, such as library buildings and books.*”

This view illustrates how reliance on external NGOs weakens continuity. However, the emphasis on using existing infrastructure offers a pathway for sustainability if ownership is institutionalised.

Voice from a government official: “*This club needs to become independent and implemented in all public and private schools of the city with its own structure to foresee the intended goal and achievement of the club... With such a procedure, we have submitted a request to the Ministry of Education to recognise this club, and we are waiting for responses.*”

This reflects an official recognition that institutionalising Tuseme within education policy is key to ensuring its survival beyond donor cycles.

Voice from a para-social worker: “*I recommend preparing a flier [notes] conveying the purpose and objective of the club and distributing it in the school compound as well as conveying those messages in the school mini-media for the wider school community.*”

Practical suggestions like awareness materials and school-based communication campaigns highlight cost-effective ways to scale visibility and participation. The lack of a clear handover strategy from FAWE upon project closure hindered ownership and sustainability. The initial reliance on graduating grade 12 students for leadership created continuity challenges. Once the students graduated and left the school, there were no leaders in the lower grades to provide

continuity in the Tuseme club leadership. A rotational student leadership strategy would address this challenge. Despite the positive outcomes of sustaining Tuseme clubs, their integration into the gender club in Ethiopia resulted in a lack of dedicated budget and monitoring for the clubs. Frequent reshuffling of school management and the lack of dedicated space and resources further impede the sustainability of the club. The presence of clubs with similar goals (like media clubs supporting Tuseme promotion) played a positive role in supporting the clubs' existence. Also, the low teacher turnover rate, with many FAWE-trained staff remaining, offers an opportunity for revitalisation of Tuseme clubs.

Recommendations for Model Adaptation and Strengthening

Parents recommended that safety measures and supervision be strengthened to ensure the protection of young female students participating in clubs. They also proposed expanding the role of school clubs to address broader community needs, such as training Red Cross members to support HIV patients and provide sanitary services. These suggestions point to a desire for more holistic engagement of students through extracurricular programmes that not only promote gender empowerment but also contribute to community welfare.

Several factors supported the adaptation and implementation of the Tuseme model. High female enrollment created a strong base for gender-focused initiatives, while teacher-led recruitment ensured the involvement of motivated students. The existence of complementary clubs such as drama and media provided opportunities for synergy, particularly in advocacy and awareness-raising activities. A stable teaching staff, including FAWE-trained members, offered continuity and institutional memory, while the presence of structured extracurricular programmes and general parental support provided a strong framework for Tuseme's operations and sustainability.

Despite these strengths, several challenges constrained the effective functioning of Tuseme. Limited knowledge of the model among new staff and management, as well as confusion with the FAWE scholarship programme, reduced institutional focus and commitment. Cultural barriers, gender stereotypes, and taboos surrounding menstruation hindered open dialogue on sensitive topics, while academic pressures affected students' participation. Operational limitations, including the lack of dedicated space and resources, weak leadership succession due to reliance on graduating students, and the absence of a clear FAWE handover strategy, further undermined consistency. Additionally, limited parental awareness, concerns about student safety during after-school activities, and narrowly defined club mandates restricted the broader impact of Tuseme within schools and communities.

ii) Centre of Excellence

Millennium Secondary School exhibited several characteristics that aligned with CoE principles. The school's robust extracurricular programme, including the Tuseme Club, demonstrated a commitment to holistic student development beyond academics. High female enrollment (56%) provided a strong base for gender-focused initiatives, while Tuseme's documented success in enhancing girls' confidence, leadership skills, and academic performance illustrated the programme's effectiveness. Collaboration between Tuseme and other clubs, such as the media club, also highlighted an integrated approach to student empowerment, which is a hallmark of a

CoE, and the lack of a dedicated budget and space for the club. Limited awareness of the club among new staff and some parents, coupled with confusion between Tuseme and the FAWE scholarship, suggested that its principles were not fully embedded in the school culture. These are operational and systemic.

Despite these positive indicators, the school cannot be considered a formal CoE due to several limitations. Key challenges included the Tuseme club's reliance on external organisations, such as FAWE, the absence of a clear handover strategy, frequent management reshuffling, and the lack of a dedicated budget and space for the club. Limited awareness of the club among new staff and some parents, coupled with the confusion between Tuseme and the FAWE scholarship, suggested that its principles were not fully ingrained in the school's culture. These operational and systemic factors indicate that, while Millennium Secondary School demonstrates promising CoE practices, it does not represent a formally established Centre of Excellence in Ethiopia.

iii) Gender-Responsive Pedagogy

The presence of GRP was indicated by the explicit alignment of the FAWE-supported Tuseme club with Ethiopia's national education policy on women's empowerment. The club actively promoted FAWE's GRP's core tenets, such as advancing girls' voices and leadership, as evidenced by students becoming more assertive and engaging in open discussions with boys on sensitive topics. The school's efforts to provide special tutorial classes for female students also showed a commitment to GRP by addressing FAWE's emphasis on addressing gender-specific academic needs. Furthermore, the retention of teachers trained by FAWE indicated that a knowledge base for GRP, rooted in the FAWE initiative, was maintained within the institution.

Despite these enabling factors, several issues hampered a consistent and comprehensive application of FAWE's GRP approach. A major issue was the limited understanding of Tuseme's pedagogical role, with many confusing it with a scholarship programme rather than recognising it as part of FAWE's gender-responsive strategy. This suggested that the principles of GRP were not deeply understood or integrated into the broader school culture. The school also faced external barriers such as human trafficking and early marriage, which extended beyond the reach of school-based interventions. Finally, the sustainability challenges within the Tuseme club, such as inadequate resources and the absence of a clear FAWE handover strategy, made the implementation of GRP principles inconsistent and vulnerable to disruption.

4.1.4 Case Study 2: Nafyad Secondary School in Adama, Oromia Region

General case study context

Table 5: Nafyad Secondary School Profile

Category	Details
School Name	Nafyad Secondary School
School Location	Adama, Oromia Region
Location Type	Urban
School Level	Upper Secondary
School Type	Private Multi-Campus School
Enrolment Figures (Total 8,000)	Girls (approx. 4,000); Boys (approx. 4,000)
Number of Teachers	Approximately 390 (60% of the total staff population of 650)
Tuseme Club Status	Inactive (ceased following the departure of a key teacher)
Tuseme Club Enrolment Figures	Girls (8); Boys (8) (students from grades 9–1)
Centre of Excellence Status	Not Established (showed potential but lacked institutional support and sustainability)
Gender Responsive Pedagogy Status	Partially active; implementation inconsistent
Number of Teachers Trained in GRP	Not specified (some teachers trained initially, but with limited knowledge transfer)

Nafyad School, founded in 2000 as a primary institution, has experienced substantial growth over the years. The introduction of the high school division 17 years ago marked a significant expansion in its educational scope. Currently, the school operates five campuses strategically located across the Oromia region, including the vibrant city of Adama, and has a total enrollment of approximately 8,000 students. Nafyad School serves a diverse community. The school employs around 650 staff members, of whom 60% are teaching personnel. The Tuseme club at Nafyad school evolved from an existing Girls' Club, and comprises students from Grades 9, 10, and 11. Membership entry points varied, with some students joining in Grade 11. A key teacher initially led the club, as one student recalls: *“Our first mentor was Teacher X, our Oromifa teacher in grades 9 and 10.”* However, the club’s activities ceased following the departure of this teacher, illustrating the dependence of the programme’s continuity on individual leadership rather than institutional structures

i) *Tuseme*

Theme 1) Tuseme Club Awareness, Participation, and Impact.

Participation in the Tuseme club was widespread and included both male and female students who were encouraged to join by their teachers. Members felt they were selected for their active participation and perceived brightness. Their involvement in the club was driven by both personal growth and a sense of collective purpose.

***Voice from a female member:** "Our Afan Oromo teacher encouraged us to join the Tuseme Club when we were in ninth grade."*

***Voice from a male member:** "I joined the club because I was inspired by the idea of empowering women."*

The club's activities were diverse, ranging from public speaking and drama to tangible, community-focused projects. Female students highlighted the development of their communication skills and self-confidence.

***Voice from a female member:** "We have reported significant improvements in our communication skills and persuasive abilities because we participated in Tuseme."*

***Voice from a female member:** "The club has improved our self-confidence."*

***Voice from a female member:** "After taking the Tuseme training, we no longer fear asking for pads, even in front of boys."*

Male members demonstrated a commitment to advocacy and practical support. They actively participated in fundraising and community campaigns to address social challenges.

***Voice from a male member:** "... we conducted a campaign in the community; we advised them to send women to school and not to harm women."*

***Voice from a male member:** "We were fundraising from the school, buying pads, and providing them for women."*

The voices of both male and female members paint a picture of a vibrant and highly active club. The female students' testimonials focus on the personal and psychological impact of the club, such as gaining self-confidence and overcoming taboos. In contrast, the male students' voices highlight a commitment to proactive advocacy and a clear understanding of their role in supporting gender

equality. The combination of these perspectives reveals a holistic approach to empowerment, where personal growth is complemented by collective action.

Theme 2) Academic and Social Cultural Challenges.

Students from both genders recognised significant barriers that girls face, both academically and socio-culturally. Female members highlighted the challenges of basic access to education, while male members acknowledged the broader social issues affecting girls at home.

***Voice from a female member:** “How can a girl bring solutions when she is not allowed to attend school? How can her friends support her? How can her family support her?”*

***Voice from a male member:** "Since women have many challenges at home, they feel less pressured. But if we do not do our homework, we may face consequences. In this school, gender equality does exist."*

These voices highlight a critical distinction between the perceived equality within the school environment and the external challenges students face. While male students feel that gender equality is a reality inside the school, they are aware that girls encounter systemic barriers outside of it. This illustrates the need for Tuseme to be both a school-based club and a programme that engages with and raises awareness of the broader community context.

Theme 3) School Environment, Infrastructure, and Wellbeing.

The Tuseme club played a significant role in improving the psychosocial well-being of students by providing a supportive environment. Students learned to provide peer support and address sensitive issues like menstruation.

***Voice from a female member:** “To discuss with boys, we should first talk separately, especially about issues like menstruation. Honestly, when we first notice menstruation, we talk to our mothers, not our fathers.”*

The male students also voiced a desire for more consistent support to address challenges. They noted that the lack of resources and continuity was a major hindrance to providing sustained help.

***Voice from a male member:** "I think there is no consistency; we only provide support once or twice. We need to provide continuous support."*

***Voice from a male member:** "We buy the pads using funds raised from all students, so in light of the current economic conditions, it is difficult to ask students to contribute much. This is one of the challenges."*

The students' voices demonstrate that Tuseme was successful in creating a space where topics like menstruation could be addressed, even if initial discussions needed to be gender-segregated. However, the club's ability to provide consistent support was limited by financial constraints and

the lack of a stable leadership structure. This highlights the fragility of student-led initiatives when not backed by sustained institutional and economic support.

Theme 4) Community and Parental Engagement.

Community and parental support were recognised by students as essential for the club's success. Parents' willingness to allow their children to participate in extracurricular activities was a crucial enabling factor.

***Voice from a female member:** “When students participate in clubs, their families need to know and support them... if the family opposes the idea... You won’t be able to change your family, let alone the community.”*

***Voice from a parent:** “When she is engaged in extracurricular activities that will make her come home late, want to participate in events at her school... she comes to me and informs me about it.”*

The voices from both a student and a parent reveal that the success of the Tuseme club is fundamentally tied to the level of support and engagement from the home. The female member’s voice emphasises a critical point: family is the primary foundation for a student's personal development and ability to contribute to their community. Her perspective underscores that without a family's support, a student is disempowered from the start, making any school-based club's efforts less effective. The parents’ voice, in turn, provides an example of this crucial support in action. It demonstrates a relationship built on trust and open communication, where a child feels comfortable informing their parent about their school activities. This parental involvement is not just passive permission; it is an active encouragement that enables the student to fully participate and benefit from extracurricular programmes like Tuseme.

***Voice from a female member:** “We also participated in Sedekiyas, where we visited elderly and vulnerable community members to provide support. It made us feel that the club was contributing beyond the school.”*

This practice of “giving back” through Sedekiyas strengthened student ownership, community engagement, and social responsibility, and was recognised by students as one of the most rewarding aspects of their club experience.

Theme 5) Sustainability, Scalability, and Good Practices.

The voices of both male and female students converged on one critical point: the club's sustainability was entirely dependent on its key leader. The students' commitment and passion could not overcome the organisational vacuum left by a teacher's departure.

***Voice from a male member:** “In grades 9 and 10, the club was very active, but after our teacher left the school, no one was here to fill the gap and lead us. That was the reason for the club's dissolution.”*

***Voice from a male member:** “We do not lack inspiration; rather, we need a person who can lead us.”*

Male members, however, expressed a clear vision for scalability and believed the club could have a significant impact if expanded to rural areas, a testament to its perceived value.

***Voice from a male member:** “This club is very good, especially in reducing the impact on women. We see different things in rural areas, so if it expands in rural areas, it will be good and add some things.”*

The Nafyad case study presents a powerful lesson in sustainability. Despite high student motivation and impactful activities, the club was a single point of failure due to its reliance on one individual. The student voices offer a direct, actionable recommendation for future programmes: institutionalise the club's leadership structure to ensure it can be passed on to new teachers and remain active despite staff turnover. The students' recognition of the club's potential for expansion into rural areas also underscores the model's relevance beyond urban settings.

Recommendations for Model Adaptation and Strengthening

The Tuseme club at Nafyad Secondary School demonstrated significant potential but was hindered by a reliance on key individuals. The case study indicated that student motivation remained high, but the club's activities ceased after a pivotal teacher departed. To ensure future sustainability, a clear handover strategy for leadership was needed. A model that incorporated a rotational leadership structure among students and a designated succession plan for faculty advisors would have mitigated the impact of a single teacher's departure. The club's practice of "giving back" to the community through initiatives like "Sedekiyas" was a valuable and tangible outcome that could be adapted as a core element of the programme to enhance community support and student ownership. Additionally, given the economic challenges mentioned by students, securing a consistent funding source, rather than relying on inconsistent student fundraising efforts, was critical for providing resources such as sanitary pads.

ii) Centre of Excellence (CoE)

Nafyad Secondary School did not have a formally established Centre of Excellence (CoE); however, several elements reflected emerging CoE characteristics. The school provided a strong foundation with its large student population and a pre-existing Girls' Club, which Tuseme evolved

from. Both male and female students participated actively, and their clear understanding of the club's purpose in promoting gender equality was a significant indicator of its success. The development of key skills like communication, self-confidence, and advocacy among students also showed that the club was a high-impact programme. Students' interest in expanding the club's activities to rural schools further indicated a growing sense of ownership and recognition of its potential for wider impact.

However, the school's ability to be a CoE was fundamentally undermined by its lack of institutional support. The departure of the key teacher led to the club's dissolution, highlighting a single point of failure in the model. This reliance on individual leadership rather than institutional structures limited the programme's sustainability. Without a formal structure, a dedicated budget, or a clear succession plan, the school could not sustain the programme. This demonstrated that while the club had the potential for excellence, it lacked the systemic support needed to be a true, lasting CoE. In summary, while Nafyad Secondary School displayed early signs of a Centre of Excellence in practice, these remained informal and largely dependent on personal initiative rather than established institutional mechanisms.

iii) GRP (Gender-Responsive Pedagogy)

There was evidence of Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) principles being applied at Nafyad Secondary School, but its implementation was inconsistent. The school's efforts aligned with GRP in several ways. Tuseme's activities, such as holding separate discussions on sensitive topics like menstruation before bringing boys into the conversation, demonstrated a nuanced and gender-aware approach to learning. The club also provided a practical platform for applying GRP principles by empowering girls to speak out and take on leadership roles. The initial GRP training provided to some teachers and the supportive policy framework of the newly approved education roadmap also served as key enablers.

However, a lack of institutional support and follow-up greatly hindered the full and consistent application of GRP. The case study noted a significant gap in the dissemination of GRP knowledge from the trained teachers to their colleagues. The existence of non-gender-sensitive textbooks and broader societal norms also created an environment that worked against GRP principles. Ultimately, the cessation of the Tuseme club's activities meant that a crucial platform for the practical application of GRP was lost, making its long-term impact on the school culture uncertain.

4.1.5 Case Study 3: Tabor Secondary School in Hawassa, Sidama Region

General case study context:

Table 6: Tabor Secondary School Profile

Category	Details
School Name	Tabor Secondary School
School Location	Hawassa City, Sidama Region
Location Type	Urban

School Level	Upper Secondary
School Type	Public Day School
Enrolment Figures (Total 5,676)	Girls (2,751); Boys (2,924)
Number of Teachers	227 (Male: 153; Female: 74)
Tuseme Club Status	Active
Tuseme Club Enrolment Figures (16)	Girls (8); Boys (8)
Centre of Excellence Status	Not established (strong community and PTA support, but limited by poverty and lack of sustained funding)
Gender Responsive Pedagogy Status	Limited implementation (awareness present but not systematically applied across teaching practices)
Number of Teachers Trained in GRP	Not specified

Tabor Secondary School is located in Hawassa, the capital of Sidama Region in southern Ethiopia. The school serves a densely populated urban area marked by high levels of poverty, which deeply influences both student experiences and institutional capacity. As noted by a key informant, “*the majority of the population lives in poverty,*” a reality that shapes many of the challenges faced by both learners and educators in this setting. Despite these constraints, Tabor Secondary School remains one of the most prominent public secondary schools in the region, offering general secondary education under the Ethiopian Ministry of Education.

The school population includes a significant number of students from low-income households, many of whom contend with social and economic obstacles that impact their educational engagement and outcomes, particularly girls. In response to these challenges, the school has partnered with FAWE to implement the Tuseme Club initiative, aimed at amplifying student voices and addressing gender-based barriers in education. Through this platform, students, especially girls, are encouraged to identify and express the issues they face, build confidence, and participate actively in finding solutions.

Figure 3: Focus Group Discussion with Tuseme Club Members at Tabor Secondary School



Tabor Secondary School, situated in Hawassa City within the Sidama zone and Tabor Sub-City, serves a diverse student body of about 5,676 students, operating in two shifts to accommodate both male and female students. The student demographics reveal a relatively balanced population with 2,924 male students (approximately 51.5%) and 2,751 female students (approximately 48.5%), indicating healthy gender representation despite a slight majority of males. Conversely, the teaching staff consists of 227 teachers, with a significant majority being male at 153 (approximately 67.3%) compared to 74 female teachers (approximately 32.7%). This disparity in the gender representation of teachers may impact the school environment and the role models available to students. Overall, while student enrolment is balanced, the skewed gender ratio among teachers highlights a need for addressing this imbalance to enhance the educational experience and promote gender equality within the school. A key informant highlighted the critical demographic factor: *"If you look at this region, Sidama, the majority of the population lives in poverty."* This widespread poverty significantly impacts the students' lives and educational opportunities.

i) *Tuseme*

Theme 1) Tuseme Club Awareness, Participation, and Impact.

The Tuseme club at Tabor School has recently seen new members join, driven by a desire to protect and empower women. This purpose is clearly articulated by the students themselves.

***Voice from a non-club member:** "We joined the club recently, maybe 5 or 6 months ago. I chose the Gender Club to protect women from violence and to report any harm done to them so that I can see them become successful."*

***Voice from a non-club member:** "I am a member of the Gender Club. I joined the club because I was also a member of a similar club in elementary school...I want to empower women so they can continue their studies."*

The club's work is widely known in the school, and even non-members recognise its positive effects on female students, including providing tangible support.

***Voice from a non-club member:** "It works to ensure females do not feel inferior and also provides pads."*

***Voice from a non-club member:** "I think it works to minimise harm to females."*

The club's work is also connected to broader positive changes in the school environment, as observed by a non-member.

***Voice from a non-club member:** "I have not participated in any clubs, but I want to say something about the changes in our school. Previously, students came late, and many missed classes. But now, there is a great change."*

The school administration and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) also acknowledge the awareness of the FAWE programme and its impact.

***Voice from a PTA member:** "I have only been at this school for one year, but I am familiar with the FAWE programme from my previous school... The entire school community is aware of this programme."*

The voices from both new club members and non-members at Tabor School demonstrate a strong and positive awareness of the Tuseme club's mission and impact. The students' motivations for joining are deeply rooted in a desire to protect and empower women, suggesting a growing gender awareness among the student body. The recognition of the club's provision of pads and its role in minimising harm to females shows that its work is tangible and valued by the wider school community. The perceived link between club activities and broader school-wide improvements,

such as punctuality and class attendance, highlights the potential of such clubs to create a more disciplined and productive learning environment.

Theme 2) Academic and Socio-Cultural Challenges.

Students and parents at Tabor identified both academic and socio-cultural barriers to education. The PTA noted a prevailing social norm: "There is more reliance on men than women (in participating in multiple community and social activities)," indicating a potential cultural barrier that FAWE's work aims to address. Students also acknowledged both the benefits and the cultural challenges of mixed-gender discussions and collaboration.

***Voice from a non-club member:** "If we talk as brothers and sisters, we can understand each other's problems. But some people take it negatively, like assuming intimacy when males and females have conversations."*

***Voice from a non-club member:** "It is better if we work together. Even now, males are better. When a woman sees her menses, they try to give her their clothes, but the girls laugh. Even if he is male, he can have a sister, so he will take care of her. I think it will be better if we work together."*

FAWE's direct support, including "tutorial sessions" provided to students, suggests that a segment of the student population, likely those from the impoverished majority, faces academic challenges requiring targeted interventions. The PTA also highlighted their role in supporting its children's academic success.

***Voice from a PTA member:** "One way we help our children is that we reduce the household (domestic) workloads at home and encourage them to spend most of their time studying for their education."*

***Voice from a PTA member:** "I provide all necessary reference books to my child at home and encourage her to study more at home. Therefore, the club activities do not hinder their academic performance as we also make regular follow-up on them."*

The voices from Tabor expose a nuanced social landscape where academic and socio-cultural challenges are deeply intertwined. While there's a strong desire for mixed-gender collaboration, there are also deep-seated social norms and taboos that create barriers, as seen in the fear of "assuming intimacy." This highlights the need for the club to address these internal cultural barriers among students themselves. At the same time, parents are actively addressing academic challenges by managing domestic chores and providing resources. This underscores the importance of a

holistic approach that tackles both academic and social barriers to ensure students, particularly girls, can thrive.

Theme 3) School Environment, Infrastructure, and Wellbeing.

Students at Tabor directly link improvements in the school's physical environment to a better learning experience, especially for girls.

***Voice from a non-club member:** "There are very great changes in our school. The bathroom was not comfortable for them before, but now they have a separate one, and the environment has also been made comfortable for the learning process."*

The school also has a library that has benefited from external support, providing a central learning resource for students from a region where access to such resources might be limited due to poverty.

***Voice from a PTA member:** "I also know that there is a female library in this school, which was built by FAWE."*

Beyond physical infrastructure, the Tuseme club is seen as a vital support system that addresses the emotional and social burdens faced by students. The voices reveal that the club's impact goes beyond the school gates, reaching into students' homes and personal lives.

***Voice from a non-club member:** "What it does is try to help overburdened women... Our Amharic teacher even visited the house of a certain student who lives with her aunt. She was very tired at school and would sit alone in the corner. The club also helps orphaned children."*

***Voice from a non-club member:** "What I want to improve is not only in this school. Many women on the street have no one to help them... So, if we could understand and help them to have a place to live."*

This theme highlights a powerful connection between physical infrastructure and student well-being. The presence of comfortable, separate bathrooms is a crucial gender-responsive intervention that can directly impact girls' ability to attend school consistently. The FAWE-built library is a key enabling factor that provides a tangible, sustainable resource for learning, reinforcing the value of partnerships that leave behind fixed assets. The voices also reveal the Tuseme club as a robust and compassionate support system that addresses the emotional and social burdens of its members and even extends its empathy to the wider community.

Theme 4) Community and Parental Engagement.

PTA members at Tabor School expressed a strong sense of ownership and responsibility for the school, positioning themselves as leaders and representatives of the community.

***Voice from a PTA member:** "In general, PTAs are the owners and leaders of the school. Since this is a public school, we serve as representatives of the community and*

are responsible for supporting the teaching and learning process, financial activities, and the overall success of the school. Therefore, PTAs have a mandate to support Tuseme."

Voice from a PTA member: *"Previously, there was a support programme called the school grant by the government, but the government has discontinued it... Currently, it is the community that is supporting the school."*

Individual parents also demonstrated active engagement in their children's education.

Voice from a PTA member: *"Well, if we get an invitation for any event in the school, I'll come to it... I come to the school to follow up on the academic performance of my daughter... my daughter participates in many club activities in the school, and when I get an invitation, I come and attend the events."*

The voices from the Tabor PTA underscore the critical role of the community in sustaining public education, especially in the context of limited government funding. The PTA's self-perception as "owners and leaders" of the school is a powerful enabling factor for programmes like Tuseme, as it creates a foundation of local ownership and support. The individual parent's testimony provides a concrete example of this ownership in practice, demonstrating a consistent and proactive approach to monitoring and encouraging their child's academic and extracurricular life.

Theme 5) Sustainability, Scalability, and Good Practices.

A significant dis-enabling factor is the widespread poverty in the region, which profoundly affects students' lives and educational opportunities.

Voice from a key informant: *"If you look at this region, Sidama, the majority of the population lives in poverty."*

A key concern raised by the PTA is the short-term nature of NGO programmes and the resulting lack of continuity.

Voice from a PTA member: *"Local NGOs tend to stay in schools for a short period, and when they leave, the programmes they initiated often fail due to a lack of continuity."*

However, they also identified a potential solution: utilising the physical assets left behind by NGOs.

Voice from a PTA member: *"Even if NGO programmes phase out, the school can sustain them by utilising the infrastructure and fixed assets left behind, such as library buildings and books."*

This aligns with several enabling factors. According to school records and project documentation during data collection, Fawe provides financial assistance in sister projects to Tuseme, tutorial

sessions, and reference books to these students, especially female students, which directly aids their academic performance. A key positive for the school's infrastructure is a library built by FAWE, which is well-established, as documented evidence indicates that FAWE supported the construction of a library, serving as a crucial learning resource that can be sustained. Students also shared their own vision for scalability, extending the club's impact beyond the school.

***Voice from a non-club member:** "What I want to improve is not only in this school. Many women on the street have no one to help them... So, if we could understand and help them to have a place to live."*

The Tabor case study presents a clear lesson in sustainability. The school and community are highly motivated and have demonstrated an ability to fill financial gaps left by the government. However, their reliance on short-term NGO projects presents a significant challenge. The PTA's insight on leveraging fixed assets like libraries and books offers a crucial recommendation for future interventions: prioritise the creation of sustainable physical infrastructure and assets that can be used by the school long after the programme ends. The students' voices, in turn, provide a compelling vision for the scalability of the Tuseme model, suggesting that the compassion and skills developed within the club can be leveraged to address broader community challenges, such as homelessness and violence against women.

Recommendations for Model Adaptation and Strengthening

The Tuseme club at Tabor Secondary School demonstrated significant potential, largely due to strong community and parental engagement. To ensure the sustainability of the programme, future initiatives should have leveraged this local ownership. The PTA's self-perception as "owners and leaders of the school" was a powerful asset that could have been formalised through a structured partnership with the school and any supporting organisations. Instead of relying solely on short-term NGO funding, the model could have focused on creating sustainable, fixed assets. The FAWE-built library was an excellent example of this practice. Future programmes should have prioritised tangible infrastructure and resources that could remain functional long after external funding ended, ensuring continuity and local control. Additionally, given the school's reliance on collecting money from students, a long-term strategy for financial support was needed to avoid placing a burden on families already impacted by poverty.

ii) Centre of Excellence (CoE)

Even though there is no formal establishment of a Centre of Excellence (CoE) at Tabor Secondary School, several practices reflect emerging CoE characteristics, driven by a strong foundation of community and student support. The school's balanced student enrollment and the PTA's active role as "owners and leaders" provided an excellent environment for a CoE model. The Tuseme club was widely known and valued by both members and non-members, who recognised its tangible impact on empowering girls and improving the school environment. The students'

compassion extended beyond the school, showing a desire to help women in the wider community, which demonstrated a key characteristic of a CoE: a ripple effect of positive change.

However, the school's ability to translate these practices into a formal and sustainable CoE was constrained by external and systemic factors. The widespread poverty in the region and the discontinuation of government grants made the school financially vulnerable. The reliance on short-term NGO projects for support was also a significant dis-enabler, as these programmes often lacked continuity. These challenges highlighted that even with strong local commitment, a school's ability to serve as a sustainable CoE could be limited without consistent financial and institutional support.

iii) GRP (Gender-Responsive Pedagogy)

There was limited explicit evidence of Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) principles being systematically applied at Tabor Secondary School. While FAWE's targeted support for female students and its focus on addressing harassment demonstrated an awareness of gender-based disparities, these efforts were largely programmatic rather than pedagogical. The case study did not provide evidence of teachers integrating GRP principles, such as gender-sensitive lesson planning, equitable participation strategies, or classroom management approaches that challenge stereotypes in their teaching practice. This suggests that gender equality initiatives at the school were mainly extracurricular, centred around the Tuseme club, rather than embedded across the curriculum. Furthermore, prevailing community norms that positioned men as the primary actors in public life constrained broader gender transformation within the school. This gap underscores the need for capacity building among teachers and school leaders to translate FAWE's GRP framework from an awareness-level intervention into an institutionalised, classroom-based practice.

4.1.6 Case study 4: Bahir Dar Academy in Bahir Dar, Amhara Regional

General case study context

Table 7: Bahir Dar Academy Profile

Category	Details
School Name	Bahir Dar Academy
School Location	Bahir Dar City, Amhara Region
Location Type	Urban
School Level	Upper Secondary (part of a KG–Grade 12 institution)
School Type	Private School
Enrolment Figures (Total 5,000)	Girls (not specified); Boys (not specified)
Number of Teachers	210 (approximately 70% female)
Tuseme Club Status	Active
Tuseme Club Enrolment Figures (18)	Girls (10); Boys (8)
Centre of Excellence Status	Not established (strong student participation and institutional support, but constrained by security issues and limited follow-up)
Gender Responsive Pedagogy Status	Emerging (positive teacher attitude shifts post-training, but limited systemic integration)
Number of Teachers Trained in GRP	Not specified (training provided but limited follow-up)

The Tuseme club at Bahir Dar Academy has a membership of approximately 70 female students, reflecting active participation and strong engagement from its target demographic. The club collaborates closely with the school's gender club, indicating a coordinated and structured approach to addressing gender-related issues within the school community. Bahir Dar Academy, established in 2002 in Bahir Dar city, Amhara region, initially enrolled approximately 60 students and employed 10 faculty members. Over the years, the school experienced substantial growth and expansion, and now it operates across two campuses: one in Bahir Dar City and another in Abbaymado.

Bahir Dar Academy is a private, co-educational institution, designed to provide quality education to both male and female learners. The secondary school has one science laboratory and one library, each serving as main facilities that support the school's academic programmes. Currently, the school serves around an estimated 5,000 students, spanning from Kindergarten (KG 1) through to Grade 12. The workforce includes 350 staff members, including teaching, administrative, and support personnel such as security staff, with 210 of them being teachers. Of these, 210 are teachers, with about 70% being female, which demonstrates a strong representation of women in the school's teaching workforce.

Figure 4: Focus Group Discussion with Tuseme Club Members, Bahir Dar



At Bahir Dar School, a total of 36 participants were engaged, comprising 20 females and 16 males. The Tuseme club had the highest number of girls among all participating schools, with 10 female members and 8 male members. The teaching staff included 4 women and 4 men, reflecting gender balance. Government officials included a woman and 2 men. Among students not in clubs, 5 were female, and 3 were male. However, there were no PTA members represented in the data, and only one male parent participated in the study. The limited participation of parents and PTA members at Bahir Dar Academy may reflect contextual challenges related to timing or mobilisation, although the high number of girls involved in Tuseme activities underscores strong student-level engagement and ownership.

i) *Tuseme*

Theme 1) Tuseme Club Awareness, Participation, and Impact

The Tuseme Club's purpose and positive effects are recognised by government officials, highlighting the initiative's reach beyond the school community.

***Voice from a government official:** "Regarding Tuseme, even though I have not received specific training on it, I know it is helpful to students... The record was about a student from Adama who succeeded despite all the difficulties she faced."*

A FAWE trainer confirmed that Tuseme training led to the establishment of a club and produced a significant change in students' behaviour.

***Voice from a FAWE trainer:** "The goals of Tuseme were excellent; before its implementation, students were silent about their issues, but afterwards, they became bold in speaking up and suggesting solutions. This change manifested in various ways, whether related to peer pressure, social issues, or academic challenges—even problems within the school."*

Boys from the club also felt the impact, noting that the programme helped them challenge stereotypes.

***Voice from a boy club member:** "In this area, it is commonly believed that women should be housewives... Tuseme helped us challenge this stereotype. We have seen changes in our perspectives, realising that when given opportunities, women can perform just as well as men."*

Another boy member highlighted the development of specific skills.

***Voice from a boy club member:** "I have learned to be bold and to speak confidently. Tuseme helped me build self-confidence... Tuseme improved my communication skills and allowed me to express my ideas freely."*

Tuseme's impact is further demonstrated by the students' use of drama to highlight school-related issues.

***Voice from a boy club member:** "We highlighted the problems visible in our school through drama. These issues were not noticeable to our teachers and school administrators, but by presenting them through drama, we made them easy to understand."*

***Voice from a boy club member:** "The issue we addressed was that if a problem occurred within the school compound, students were not allowed to leave to find a solution. For instance, if a girl needed a sanitary pad due to menstruation, she wasn't*

permitted to go outside to buy one. This was a major issue, so we presented it to the school community through drama."

This case study demonstrates that the Tuseme model is known and valued by key government stakeholders, which is a significant enabling factor for its sustainability. The most profound impact highlighted is the shift from student passivity to student empowerment and voice, which is a core objective of the Tuseme initiative. The fact that students became "bold in speaking up" on a range of issues from peer pressure to academic challenges shows the effectiveness of the club in building confidence and agency. The inclusion of boys' voices is a critical finding, as it shows that the programme can successfully challenge gender stereotypes among male students and encourage them to become advocates. The use of drama to communicate sensitive issues is a powerful and effective practice for raising awareness and creating change within the school community.

Theme 2) Academic and Socio-Cultural Challenges

Students face deep-seated socio-cultural challenges, including economic hardship and security risks. A government official highlighted the gender-specific vulnerability to crime.

***Voice from a government official:** "Another issue is that female students require training to help them avoid engaging in activities that could harm them. Some students are involved in unpleasant activities to earn income... females are particularly vulnerable because they cannot go outside due to the risk of being raped or kidnapped."*

The official also noted the profound psychological toll of political instability on students.

***Voice from a government official:** "There was a female student who committed suicide because her area was a war zone. She endured for a year, but when fighting continued, and her friends joined the university, she could not bear it anymore."*

The FAWE trainer also noted that conflicts caused school closures, forcing students to prioritise academics over club activities.

***Voice from a FAWE trainer:** "First, due to conflicts in the area, the club activities were very passive at our school. When school resumed after closures because of the conflict, students focused on catching up with their education."*

The school administration anticipates additional challenges in scaling to IDP and refugee communities, where community norms may resist female empowerment.

***Voice from a school administration:** "One challenge you will face is that in refugee and IDP communities, women coming forward and speaking out is not usually supported, and that can be one resistance you might encounter."*

This case study reveals a stark reality: Tuseme must operate within a complex environment marked by poverty and insecurity. The voices from government officials and trainers paint a picture of

female students facing serious risks to their physical safety and mental health. This underscores the need for Tuseme to provide trauma-informed support and practical life skills that address the immediate dangers students face. The competition between academic catch-up and club activities also highlights the need for flexibility in the programme's design.

Theme 3) School Environment, Infrastructure, and Wellbeing.

The government recognises the importance of creating a conducive learning environment, especially for female students.

***Voice from a government official:** "Efforts are being made to create a comfortable learning environment for female students."*

Psychosocial support was a critical need, particularly for students from displaced communities.

***Voice from a government official:** "Many displaced individuals experience psychological trauma and grief, so this initiative can provide much-needed support."*

The FAWE trainer also highlighted the need for practical, context-appropriate solutions to hygiene.

***Voice from a government official:** "After providing training related to hygiene, if purchasing menstrual products is difficult for them, you should demonstrate how they can make reusable pads. It may not be feasible for them to buy such products regularly, so training them on how to make and properly dispose of pads after use would be beneficial."*

This theme shows the need for interventions that go beyond traditional classroom activities. The focus on a "comfortable learning environment" and psychosocial support for students dealing with trauma is crucial. The recommendation to teach students how to make reusable pads is an example of an adaptive, sustainable solution that addresses a specific need in a resource-limited context.

Theme 4) Community and Parental Engagement.

A government official highlighted the regional government's efforts to increase community participation and female enrollment.

***Voice from a government official:** "In Bahir Dar, where we are based, one of our key initiatives is increasing female student participation. This includes advocacy efforts within the community to encourage female enrollment in schools."*

Parental support is also a key enabling factor. Parents demonstrated a clear understanding of the club's purpose and its positive effects on their children's self-confidence.

***Voice from a parent:** "Tuseme focuses on students' rights, particularly for girls, encouraging them to be active in their education and social responsibilities... It*

provides a platform where girls are encouraged to freely express their thoughts and concerns."

The parents' trust in their children's involvement is also a strong indicator of support.

Voice from a parent: *"I trust my child's decision and believe she wouldn't join a club unless it benefited her education."*

The government's direct involvement in community advocacy for female enrollment is a significant enabling factor. The active support and trust from parents further enable the programme by creating a supportive environment at home, which reinforces the lessons learned at school. The school administration also noted the importance of engaging the community to support students' initiatives.

Theme 5) Sustainability, Scalability, and Good Practices.

The government has clear policies and structures for school clubs, which provide a framework for Tuseme's operation.

Voice from a government official: *"The education sector has a clear policy and guidelines... The establishment of a club depends on the context of the school... Schools must prioritise and establish clubs that will be effective for their specific environment."*

The school administration affirmed its support for the club.

Voice from a school administration: *"The club jointly works with the gender club, and our school promotes gender issues, and we actively support the club in our school. When they ask for a meeting hall, we provide it..."*

The school also provides practical support, like materials for drama and IT equipment, as mentioned by a boy club member.

Voice from a boy club member: *"Whenever there is a programme, our school and teachers provide the necessary materials, such as gowns for drama, IT equipment, and other essentials."*

A good practice identified is the presence of other programmes, like the "Pink Club," which provide valuable support.

Voice from a government official: *"One example is the Pink Club... It offers life skills training and provides tutoring sessions once a week for students from grades 2 to 10."*

The programme selects academically strong students from low-income backgrounds and supports them."

The government's structured approach to club establishment and funding provides a solid foundation for the sustainability of initiatives like Tuseme. The school's active support through resource provision is a key enabler. The existence of a similar programme like the "Pink Club" demonstrates that a replicable model for supporting low-income students already exists and could be leveraged for future collaborations.

Recommendations for Model Adaptation and Strengthening

To strengthen the Tuseme model at Bahir Dar Academy, it was crucial to address the gap in awareness and understanding among parents and key government officials. Although the case study highlighted strong parental and government support for female education and participation, there remained some gaps in deeper engagement and consistent involvement in club-specific activities. Future efforts should include a structured outreach plan to broaden and sustain the participation of parents and government bodies, ensuring they fully understand and remain engaged with the club's objectives and purpose. This would help strengthen coordination and ensure long-term sustainability. Another key recommendation was to adapt the model to the local context by translating and revising materials into the Amharic and Oromo languages, making them culturally and linguistically relevant. Addressing the high leadership turnover due to student graduations was also a priority. The club would have benefited from a formal mentorship and succession plan, where older members were responsible for training and passing on leadership roles to younger students.

ii) Centre of Excellence (CoE)

While Bahir Dar Academy had not formally implemented a Centre of Excellence (CoE) model, several observable practices and characteristics reflected CoE principles in development. The school demonstrated key indicators of emerging CoE, including a large, active student body with high female participation in the Tuseme club, and strong institutional support from the school administration. The school provided crucial resources like meeting halls and materials for club activities, showing a commitment to promoting gender issues. The students' use of drama to highlight sensitive issues, like the need for sanitary pads, was a powerful, context-specific example of how the club could drive positive change. This ability to use creative, student-led solutions suggested a compelling model with potential for future CoE alignment.

However, the school's efforts were impacted by significant dis-enabling factors. Widespread security concerns in the region limited extracurricular activities and posed a threat to student safety. Additionally, the limited time for club activities due to school closures and crowded timetables, along with inconsistent follow-up from FAWE, hindered the programme's continuity. These contextual constraints demonstrate that while the school exhibited emerging CoE characteristics, it had not yet reached the stage of institutionalising them into a formal, sustainable framework.

iii) Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP)

The case study indicated that Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) was in an initial, but not fully integrated, stage at Bahir Dar Academy. GRP training had a notable impact, successfully shifting teachers' attitudes and encouraging them to integrate principles into their lesson planning and classroom management. This demonstrated a willingness to learn and adapt. The fact that students became "bold in speaking up and suggesting solutions" after the training was a direct result of a GRP-informed approach. Despite these positive shifts, significant challenges remained. The full integration of GRP into daily practice was hampered by a lack of consistent follow-up training and support. The rapid increase in student enrollment and crowded classrooms also made it difficult for teachers to apply these principles effectively. The case study also highlighted a lack of comprehension of GRP principles among some teachers, which showed that the knowledge had not been fully disseminated. This indicated that while the potential for GRP existed, the necessary systemic support and resources were not in place to make it a school-wide, sustained practice.

4.1.7 Discussion of Ethiopia findings, including implications for adapting the Tuseme model in IDP and Refugee Settings

The case studies from Ethiopia reveal a diverse educational landscape influenced by the specific context of each school, public versus private, urban versus regional, and different educational structures. These findings align with the theoretical frameworks of Empowerment Theory (Rachmad, 2022) and Self-efficacy and Human Motivation (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020), which emphasise that individual agency and motivation are significantly shaped by environmental and structural factors. The observed differences in school environments, from the well-resourced private Bahir Dar Academy to the poverty-stricken Tabor Secondary School, highlight the need for a highly adaptable Tuseme model. These findings directly address the primary research question about the current status of Tuseme clubs and their sustainability post-FAWE intervention.

Key Findings and Lessons Learned

The research found that the sustainability of Tuseme clubs was a major challenge across all schools once FAWE's direct support ended. This lack of continuity, often triggered by the departure of a key teacher, was particularly evident at Nafiyad Secondary School, where the club ceased to be active after its leader left. This finding directly answers the primary research question regarding sustainability and aligns with the literature review on the importance of strong school leadership (FAWE, 2005). The findings also confirm a key assumption of the theoretical framework: that empowered individuals must be supported by a strong structural framework to sustain their development (Rachmad, 2022).

However, the Tuseme model demonstrated significant benefits and opportunities. Students who participated in the clubs reported enhanced self-efficacy, improved communication skills, and increased confidence, as seen in the examples from Bahir Dar Academy and Nafiyad Secondary School. This directly supports the tenets of Self-efficacy and Human Motivation theory and answers the primary research question about the perceived benefits of the clubs. The practice of using drama and other participatory pedagogies to address sensitive issues, such as the need for sanitary pads at Bahir Dar Academy, was a highly effective activity type that aligns with empirical literature on school-based empowerment programmes (Rachmad, 2022).

Recommendations for Adaptation in Refugee and IDP Settings

Based on the findings, several lessons can be applied to adapting the Tuseme model for IDP and refugee settings, which directly address the research's main goal.

1. Linguistic and cultural adaptation: Field notes, particularly from Bahir Dar, highlighted the need for comprehensive, linguistically appropriate materials in Amharic and Oromo. In IDP and refugee contexts, where there is a high degree of linguistic and cultural diversity, the model must be adapted to be culturally relevant and sensitive to unique community norms. This is a crucial lesson learned from the challenges in mainstream schools and is supported by literature

emphasising the need for culturally relevant programming in humanitarian settings (UNHCR, 2018).

2. Flexible and accessible scheduling: The shift system at Tabor and the security concerns at Bahir Dar highlighted the need for flexible scheduling and activity formats. In displacement settings, which are often characterised by crowded timetables and safety risks, the Tuseme model must be adaptable. This finding is a key lesson from mainstream challenges and a good practice to leverage for IDP and refugee contexts.

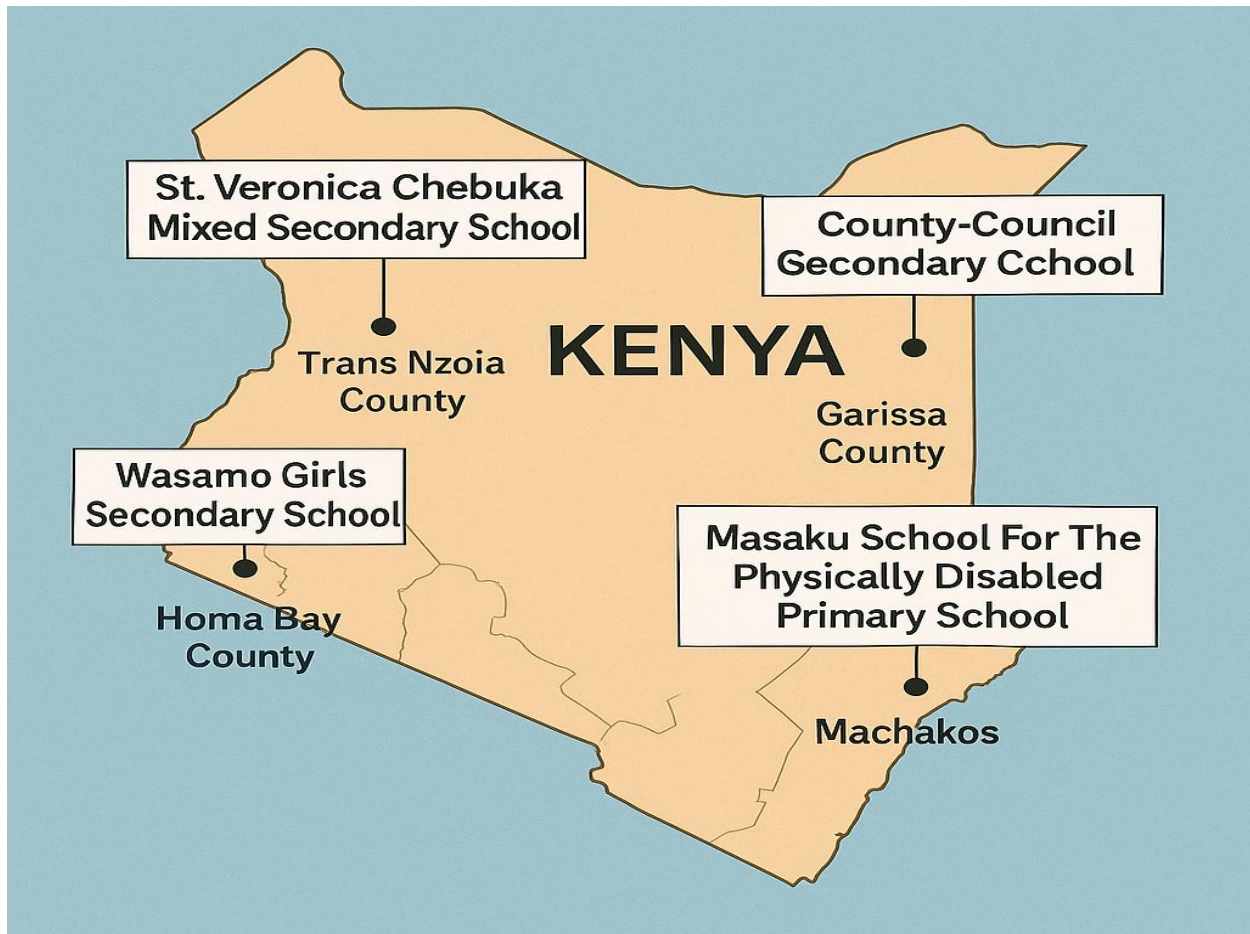
3. Holistic stakeholder engagement: The research identified a significant gap in awareness among parents and government officials. To address this, a comprehensive strategy is needed to bridge this knowledge gap and secure broad support. In refugee and IDP settings, this is even more paramount due to the complex governance structures and the need for community buy-in to overcome potential socio-cultural barriers, such as resistance to female empowerment. The success of the PTA at Tabor and the parental engagement at Bahir Dar demonstrated that when stakeholders feel a sense of ownership, sustainability is enhanced. This directly addresses the secondary research questions on challenges and opportunities.

4. Addressing systemic challenges: The case studies revealed that Tuseme clubs, while impactful, could not operate in a vacuum. They were affected by external challenges like poverty (Tabor), security threats (Bahir Dar), and leadership turnover (Nafyad). This indicates that for the model to be effective in IDP and refugee settings, it must be integrated with broader psychosocial support and life skills training to address the trauma and vulnerabilities of displaced adolescents. The lack of established Centres of Excellence (CoEs) in Ethiopia further emphasises the need for a self-sustaining model that can thrive with limited external resources, a key lesson for its application in humanitarian settings.

4.2 Kenya: Findings

4.2.1 Country Context

Figure 5: Map of Kenya showing the Location of Schools



The Kenya component of the study was conducted across four geographically and culturally diverse schools representing different regions of the country (Figure 5). These included Wasamo Girls' Secondary School in Homa Bay County, St. Veronica Chebukaka Mixed Secondary School in Trans Nzoia County, the Masaku School for the Physically Disabled in Machakos County, and County Council Secondary School in Garissa County. Together, these schools offered a broad spectrum of learning environments, ranging from girls-only and mixed institutions to a school catering to learners with physical disabilities.

A total of 236 participants took part in the Kenya study, comprising students, teachers, parents, school administrators, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and Board of Governors (BOG) members, government officials, and para-social workers. This diverse group provided a wide range of perspectives, enabling the study to explore the implementation of the Tuseme model within

varied educational and socio-cultural contexts. The following sections present the key findings emerging from each of the four case study settings.

Table 8: Kenya Study Participants by category, school, and gender

Participant category	Wasomo Girls		St. Veronica mixed Chebukaka		Masaku School for the Physically Disabled		County - Council Masalani		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Student (girls in clubs)	8	0	8	0	8	0	8	0	32
Teacher	4	4	5	3	6	2	0	8	32
PTA	4	4	0	0	0	0	3	5	16
BOG	3	5	2	6	3	5	1	7	32
Government official	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	4
Students (boys in clubs)	0	0	0	8	0	8	0	8	24
Students (mixed, not in clubs)	8	0	4	4	4	4	4	4	32
Parent	3	5	3	5	3	5	3	5	32
Para-social	4	4	3	5	5	3	2	6	32
Total	34	23	25	33	29	27	21	44	236
PTA - Parent Teacher Association; BOG-Board of Governors									

4.2.2 Innovation context in Kenya

4.2.2.1 Tuseme. The Tuseme model has been implemented across diverse secondary schools in Kenya, including Wasamo Girls Secondary School, St. Veronica Chebukaka Mixed Secondary School, Masaku School for the Physically Disabled, and County Council Secondary School Masalani. In each context, the model functions as a girls' empowerment and life skills club, promoting student leadership, confidence-building, and engagement with gender-related challenges such as early marriage and teenage pregnancy. Club enrolment varied by school, with Wasamo and Masalani each having 8 female and 8 male students, St. Veronica Chebukaka engaging 8 female and 8 male students, and Masaku Primary focusing on girls while recommending mixed-gender activities. Teachers, parents, and para-social workers were actively involved, providing mentorship, guidance, and community linkages. The model's activities, which include practical skills training, psychosocial support, and community sensitisation, reflect a consistent approach to student empowerment across differing school types and locations, from remote island boarding schools to mixed rural and special needs institutions.

4.2.2.2 Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP). Across all four schools, the Tuseme model served as a practical mechanism for implementing Gender Responsive Pedagogy, though with varying degrees of formalisation. At Wasamo Girls, the club provided safe spaces for girls, including young mothers, to regain confidence and engage in educational and personal development, reflecting strong gender-responsive practices in a girls-only environment. St. Veronica Chebukaka demonstrated GRP in a co-educational context, promoting mixed-gender interaction, empowering girls to speak publicly, and engaging parents and the wider community in discussions of gender equality. In Masaku School for the Physically Disabled, while GRP was not formally structured, girls' calls for inclusive mixed-gender participation and life skills development highlighted implicit adoption of GRP principles. Masalani faced more structural challenges, including the absence of female teachers and restrictive cultural norms, limiting the full implementation of GRP; however, the Tuseme objectives continued to prioritise girls' empowerment, peer support, and gender equity in a highly constrained setting. Across these contexts, GRP was most effective when schools combined the club activities with supportive teacher involvement, community engagement, and parental sensitisation.

4.2.2.3 Centres of Excellence (CoE). Each school has made strides toward implementing CoE principles, such as promoting high academic standards, supporting student empowerment through Tuseme clubs, and engaging communities in education initiatives. Wasamo Girls achieved notable academic improvement and significant growth in enrolment. St. Veronica Chebukaka successfully integrated the Tuseme Club into school culture to enhance academic performance and reduce dropout rates. Masaku Primary demonstrated strong student collaboration and holistic support for learners with disabilities. Masalani showed high levels of parental support and student engagement despite infrastructural constraints. However, several barriers continue to limit the full realisation of CoE objectives. These include limited resources, dependence on external funding, inadequate infrastructure, and gaps in strategic planning for sustainability. While the CoE model has been formally introduced by FAWE, ongoing investment in

infrastructure, teacher capacity, and resource management is required for the schools to fully function as Centres of Excellence.

4.2.2.4 Sustainability and Local Innovation. The Tuseme model in Kenya reflects both adaptive local innovation and emerging sustainability practices. Schools adapted club activities to their specific contexts, including tailoring skill development to student interests, such as farming, tailoring, ICT, and life skills, and adjusting participation to mixed-gender and special needs learners. Challenges such as limited computers, inadequate transport for inter-school activities, insufficient teaching resources, and reliance on external funding highlighted the need for locally driven solutions. Recommendations across schools included improving logistics for field trips, diversifying club activities, training teachers in gender-responsive methods, and engaging parents to reinforce programme principles at home. The model's sustainability is anchored in active student participation, community engagement, and adaptable programming that reflects local realities while maintaining a consistent focus on gender equity, empowerment, and inclusive education.

4.2.3 Case Study 1: Wasamo Girls Secondary School

General case study context

Table 9: Wasamo Girls Secondary School Profile

Category	Details
School Name	Wasamo Girls Secondary School
School Location	Mfangano Island, Homa Bay County, Kenya
Location Type	Remote / Rural
School Level	Upper Secondary (Girls' Boarding School)
School Type	Public School
Enrolment Figures	2022: 37 students; 2024: 120 students
Number of Teachers	Not specified
Tuseme Club Status	Active
Tuseme Club Enrolment Figures	Girls: 8; Boys: 0
Centre of Excellence Status	Developing (demonstrates potential through academic improvement and girls' empowerment initiatives, but infrastructure and social challenges limit full operationalisation)
Gender Responsive Pedagogy Status	Emerging (Tuseme Club and school practices provide safe spaces and support for girls, including young mothers; social norms and resource constraints limit full implementation)
Number of Teachers Trained in GRP	Not specified (gender-responsive practices observed through Tuseme Club and teacher support, but formal training details not provided)

Wasamo Girls' Secondary School is the only girls' boarding school serving on Mfangano Island, a remote and isolated region in Homa Bay County, Kenya. The institution faces significant challenges, particularly the pervasive issue of youth pregnancy. The school was founded to address the pressing need for quality education for young women in the community. Wasamo Girls' Secondary School is committed to breaking the cycle of poverty, illiteracy, and gender disparities that have long affected the region. In Mfangano Island, where adolescent pregnancies and early marriages have become alarmingly common, the school plays a great role in changing narratives and opening doors to a brighter future. The school provides a safe and supportive environment for all our students, including young mothers who have chosen to return to education. It actively works to combat the normalisation of adolescent pregnancies and early marriages, which have historically hindered girls' educational and personal development in its community. Despite numerous challenges, including limited infrastructure and resources, the school grew from 37 students in June 2022 to 120 students in 2024.

Figure 6: Research Assistants - Lilian Odundo and Shem Osomo conducting Focus Group Discussions with Girls from Wasamo Secondary School, Homabay, Kenya



The Tuseme club or similar girls' empowerment initiatives at the school directly involved 8 female students. The perspectives of educators were captured through 4 female teachers and 4 male teachers. Insights from the community were gathered from 4 female PTA members and 4 male PTA members. The governance level was represented by 3 female BOG members and 5 male BOG members. The research included 1 male government official associated with the school. To understand the broader student body, 8 female students who were not specifically members of clubs (part of a mixed-gender group) also participated. Parental perspectives were obtained from 3 female parents and 5 male parents. The support network was represented by 4 female and 4 male para-social workers.

i) Tuseme

Theme 1) Tuseme Club Awareness, Participation, and Impact.

The Tuseme Club at Wasamo Girls' School has 50 official members, but its reach is far wider. The school operates on the principle that the club's empowerment lessons should be shared with every student. This philosophy has led to a significant and noticeable impact on students' personal growth, academic performance, and overall behaviour.

***Voice from a Tuseme Club student leader:** "We really thank FAWE for the wonderful programme they brought to us. We really appreciate them, and since the introduction of the Tuseme Club here at Wasamo, the performance of the students has improved significantly."*

***Voice from a student leader:** "What motivated me to join Tuseme was hearing what the Tuseme members said during their club activities. I noticed that everyone in the club was*

given a chance to speak, and everyone's response was accepted. I felt I wanted to join the club to improve my creativity and confidence."

Voice from a student: *"Before I became a Tuseme member, I was afraid to speak in front of people, but now I can stand before people and talk confidently."*

The club's clear impact on academics and personal development has made it a highly sought-after initiative. It offers a safe space where students can practice freedom of expression and build the confidence to speak up and address their problems, which directly contributes to a better learning environment and better academic outcomes.

Theme 2) Academic and Socio-Cultural Challenges.

While the Tuseme Club is seen as a solution, it operates within a context of persistent academic and socio-cultural challenges. These issues range from a lack of proper sexual health education to deeply ingrained societal norms that affect girls' education and well-being.

Voice from a para-social worker: *"There is a challenge with the girls. And the girls usually shy off in terms of accessing sexually productive health services, including information. So, they rely on myths from their peers to become the facts about sexually productive health. And this one has really affected them."*

Voice from a para-social worker: *"And then in terms of fear of the unknown and stigma... they fear discussing [things] with the male healthcare providers."*

Voice from a student leader: *"What I would like to see changed is the rule that Tuseme membership should not exceed 50 members... many students... admire our club and are very willing to join. Unfortunately, they can't because of this limitation."*

The club directly confronts these issues by providing a safe, all-female space where girls can receive accurate information and overcome the stigma and fear associated with sensitive health topics. However, the limited membership and the need to rely on peer mentorship highlight a gap in formal support, indicating that the club, while effective, cannot solve these systemic problems on its own.

Theme 3) School Environment, Infrastructure, and Wellbeing.

The school environment and its infrastructure present significant barriers that impact the Tuseme Club's activities and the students' overall well-being. These challenges include a lack of essential resources, a proper meeting space, and reliable utilities.

***Voice from a Tuseme Club student leader:** "In our school, we experience frequent blackouts. This often interrupts our computer training or other activities... the lack of power hinders us from using the new computers."*

***Voice from a club member:** "Sometimes there is drought here, and when we plant our crops, we need to irrigate them. But getting water is a challenge."*

***Voice from a student:** "You know, we usually have our meetings under that big tree. But some students who are not Tuseme members pass by and talk, which distracts the members. This happens because we don't have a proper meeting place. "*

The lack of a dedicated space for meetings and the unreliable infrastructure, such as frequent power outages, directly hinder the club's ability to conduct its programmes effectively. Similarly, the lack of water presents a major obstacle to income-generating activities like farming, which are crucial for the club's self-sustainability. Addressing these infrastructural barriers is essential for the club's success and for ensuring the overall well-being of its members.

Theme 4) Community and Parental Engagement.

The Tuseme Club's influence extends beyond the school, fostering a positive relationship with the broader community. The club's tangible successes in reducing social issues and promoting student achievement have earned the appreciation and support of parents and community members.

***Voice from a student (non-Tuseme member):** "My parents saw Tuseme as a good group because, since Tuseme came to Wasamo, the number of early pregnancies has decreased, so they really appreciate Tuseme."*

***Voice from a student:** "We sell [sukuma wiki] to the school and even within the community."*

***Voice from a school management member:** "We have a club called Tuseme and mothers club, so the mothers are empowered by being trained on how to stitch reusable towels... to empower them economically."*

While direct parental involvement in club activities is not detailed, the voices indicate that the club's positive impact on students' lives is highly valued by parents. The club acts as a bridge to the community through its income-generating projects and its direct engagement with local mothers, which helps to build trust and strengthen the case for girls' education in a region that has faced high rates of early marriage and pregnancy.

Theme 5) Sustainability, Scalability, and Good Practices.

The Tuseme Club at Wasamo has established a strong foundation for sustainability and has clear ideas on how to expand its reach. The club's good practices, such as peer mentorship and income-generating activities, are key to its longevity.

Voice from a student leader: "What motivated me to join the Tuseme club was how those who came to introduce the Tuseme club in our school taught us. They made me feel comfortable, and they became my mentors."

Voice from a school management member: "Secondly, as management, we have provided time, we have ensured that we have days of Tuseme like on Mondays, the girls know that it is Tuseme activities... the girls were cultivating vegetables, irrigating and supplying the school."

Voice from a student: "Another request is that I would like FAWE members to also start the Tuseme programme in other schools. Sometimes, when we visit a neighbouring school and they see us in our T-shirts, they are curious and ask, 'Which club is this?'"

The club's self-financing model, supported by the school administration, demonstrates its potential for sustainability. Its success is attracting attention from other students and neighbouring schools, indicating a strong demand for its model. By engaging in income-generating activities and fostering a culture of peer mentorship, the Tuseme Club has established a robust framework that can be replicated and scaled to benefit more girls in the broader community.

Recommendations for Model Adaptation and Strengthening

Based on the direct feedback from students and school management, several key recommendations for adapting and strengthening the Tuseme model are apparent. To begin, addressing resource limitations is critical. It's recommended to provide key resources like a generator to combat the frequent blackouts that disrupt computer training and a dedicated overhead projector to allow more students to access digital lessons simultaneously, as there are only three computers for over 50 members. Improving the school environment is also essential, which includes investing in a proper, distraction-free meeting space for the Tuseme Club, as students currently meet under a tree. Furthermore, given the school's reliance on rainfall for its agricultural projects, securing water tanks or a reliable water-pumping system is a crucial need. For strengthening the programme itself, adapting the strict 50-member limit is a top recommendation to allow all interested students to participate. Finally, the club's income-generating activities could be formalised to ensure sustainability, building on the students' own initiative to purchase materials for making soap. These adaptations would significantly improve the club's operations and expand its reach within the school.

First, the strong institutional commitment from the school management is a key enabler, demonstrated by their provision of a dedicated time slot for Tuseme activities on Mondays. This commitment is complemented by the high motivation and awareness of the students themselves, many of whom are eager to join after observing the positive behaviour of club members and their academic success. The club's internal structure, which fosters a powerful system of peer support and mentorship, is another critical factor. Furthermore, the club's income-generating activities,

such as selling vegetables and soap, provide resources and practical skills that support its mission. The growing community support, evidenced by parents appreciating the club for its role in reducing early pregnancies, also creates a supportive environment. Finally, the "Safe Space" programme, which helps teen mothers return to school, is a strong example of the club's ability to provide tailored support and promote educational continuity.

Despite these strengths, the club faces significant dis-enabling factors. A primary challenge is the limited infrastructure and resources, including frequent power outages that disrupt computer labs, the lack of a proper meeting place, and a crucial lack of water for both farming and hygiene. Pervasive social issues in the community, such as early marriage and teenage pregnancy, continue to impact girls' educational trajectories. Additionally, girls face stigma and fear, which causes them to "shy off" from accessing sexual and reproductive health services. The strict membership limit of 50 students also restricts a large number of eager participants, and the club's reliance on potentially limited water resources for its agricultural projects makes it vulnerable to drought. These factors present ongoing challenges that require external support to overcome.

ii) Centres of Excellence

While the findings do not explicitly mention the school's aspirations to become a Centre of Excellence, its foundational work in a challenging context suggests it has the potential to do so. The school's demonstrated educational excellence is a strong enabling factor, as evidenced by its significant increase in mean academic scores from 4.0 to 5.08. This academic improvement, combined with the successful implementation of the Tuseme Club, highlights a successful initiative that empowers girls and produces tangible results. The school's commitment to addressing a critical educational need for girls in an underserved community, and its growth in enrollment despite challenges, could be seen as foundational steps towards achieving excellence. Conversely, several factors would likely hinder the school's ability to meet the criteria for becoming a Centre of Excellence without substantial external support. The most significant are the persistent infrastructural and resource limitations, including frequent power outages, a lack of a proper meeting space, and persistent water problems. The pervasive social issues in the community also present ongoing challenges to achieving optimal educational outcomes for all girls and would require extensive support to overcome for the school to reach its full potential.

iii) Gender Responsive Pedagogy

The Tuseme Club and the school's practices served as a practical example of Gender Responsive Pedagogy. The club functioned as a core mechanism for empowering girls and addressing gender disparities by creating a safe space for them to build confidence and tackle gender-specific challenges like teenage pregnancy. The school's commitment to supporting young mothers who returned to education was a strong indicator of its gender-responsive practices, as it provided a crucial second chance for girls whose education was interrupted by societal issues.

However, deeply entrenched social and cultural norms, which normalised early marriage and limited girls' opportunities, presented a significant barrier to fully implementing GRP. Resource limitations also hindered the adoption of more comprehensive gender-responsive teaching

methods. The stigma and fear girls felt in accessing sexual health services highlighted a critical gap in fully gender-responsive support.

4.2.4 Case Study 2: St. Veronica Chebukaka Mixed Secondary School

General Case Study Context

Table 10: St. Veronica Chebukaka Mixed Secondary School Profile

Category	Details
School Name	St. Veronica Chebukaka Mixed Secondary School
School Location	Trans-Nzoia West Sub-County, Trans Nzoia County, Kenya
Location Type	Rural / Peri-Urban (Day School)
School Level	Upper Secondary
School Type	Public School
Enrolment Figures	Over 1,000 students
Number of Teachers	Not specified
Tuseme Club Status	Active
Tuseme Club Enrolment Figures	Girls: 8; Boys: 8
Centre of Excellence Status	Developing (demonstrates potential through academic improvement and student empowerment, but constrained by dependency on external funding and lack of strategic planning for sustainability)
Gender Responsive Pedagogy Status	Emerging (club provides safe space for girls, promotes gender awareness, and engages parents/community; initial gender norms and social barriers limit full integration)
Number of Teachers Trained in GRP	Not specified (gender-responsive practices observed via Tuseme Club activities; no formal training details provided)

St. Veronica's Chebukaka is a day, sub-county-level secondary school located in Trans-Nzoia West Sub-County, Trans Nzoia County, Kenya. The school has a student population exceeding 1,000, drawing learners from both rural and peri-urban communities in the region. It operates under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and follows the national curriculum. The school serves a diverse student body, many of whom come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This socioeconomic context presents both challenges and opportunities for programming aimed at improving gender equality and inclusive education. The school has a reputation for discipline and academic commitment, though like many public institutions in the area, it grapples with infrastructural limitations and resource constraints. In recent years, the administration has shown interest in co-curricular and life skills development, creating a favourable environment for initiatives such as the Tuseme clubs, Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) training, and Centre of

Excellence (CoE) models. The school leadership and teaching staff have demonstrated varying degrees of awareness and engagement with gender-transformative education practices.

Figure 7: Dr Otwor Dennis, the Lead researcher (L), Shem Osomo, Research Assistant (R), conducting Focus Group Discussions with stakeholders at St. Veronica Chebukaka Mixed Secondary School



The participant demographic at St. Veronica Mixed Chebukaka Secondary School shows a more balanced gender representation across student groups. The research included 8 female students from girls' clubs and 8 male students from boys' clubs. The teaching staff comprised 5 female teachers and 3 male teachers. There were no PTA or BOG members directly participating in this research from this school, as per the provided data. The research also engaged 4 female students and 4 male students not in clubs (mixed group), along with 3 female parents and 5 male parents, and 3 female para-social workers and 5 male para-social workers. This mixed-gender participation allows for a comparative analysis of experiences within a co-educational setting.

i) Tuseme

Theme 1) Tuseme Club Awareness, Participation, and Impact.

The Tuseme Club at St. Veronica Chebukaka Secondary School has profoundly impacted the girls' character, confidence, and academic lives. The teachers noted that the club's establishment came at the right time, filling a critical need for guidance and support in a society with unique challenges. They have observed a marked improvement in students' self-esteem and their willingness to speak out, which has been crucial in resolving issues that might otherwise endanger them. The club's

activities, from guidance and counselling to practical skills training, are directly helping students shape their character and build a foundation for their future.

Voice from a teacher: "In my opinion, I would say the club came in handy at the right time because it is especially helping our girls. Considering the kind of society we have here, the girls are very unique in terms of basic needs. So, this club has been very helpful."

Voice from a teacher: "Additionally, the guidance and counselling sessions they have under the two patrons have really benefited the girls and even the boys in shaping their character, both in school and at home."

Voice from a teacher: "I think this group has introduced some facilities, like tailoring. So, our girls are acquiring skills that will help them earn a living."

Voice from a teacher: "You know, some of our learners entered with lower performance, and they are now improving in school."

The teachers' accounts provide a powerful testimony to the Tuseme Club's transformative effect. The club is not merely a school activity; it is a vital support system that addresses students' holistic well-being. The fact that facilitators have been involved for a significant duration suggests a level of dedication and consistency that is crucial for building trust and achieving tangible results, such as the observed improvements in students' academic performance and self-esteem. The club's success is a direct result of its ability to meet the students' fundamental social, emotional, and practical needs, making it an indispensable part of the school environment.

Theme 2) Academic and Socio-Cultural Challenges.

The teachers' voices shed light on the complex academic and socio-cultural challenges that permeate the students' lives, often stemming from severe poverty. While the Tuseme Club addresses these issues, it is not immune to their effects. The school and its students face significant financial hardship, which leads to problems like student absenteeism. The club must also tackle deeply personal issues such as early pregnancy, which can demoralise other students and undermine the role models the club is trying to create. The initial shyness and fear of speaking out among the girls, especially in front of boys, was a major challenge during the club's establishment, as was the occasional issue of students fabricating stories to get support.

Voice from a teacher: "The school is running purely by the mercy of God. If support is withdrawn, both the school and the students who have seen hope through FAWE will not be able to work as hard as expected."

Voice from a teacher: "We just spoke to them. We guided them because we are in a guidance and counselling office. We guided them not to abort, but encouraged them to talk

to others so they don't follow the same path and get pregnant. In case they have challenges, they should speak out instead of resorting to other ways that could lead them into trouble."

Voice from a teacher: *"The major challenge our patrons are facing is absenteeism. For example, you may find that when you need them, some of them are at home due to personal challenges. The patron faces many challenges with absenteeism or due to school fees."*

Voice from a teacher: *"I think one of the challenges I noticed was that most of the girls come from the local community, and many of them lack confidence. Whenever we tried to get them to share something, they were fearful and shy."*

Voice from a teacher: *"Another challenge that I have observed is that some of the girls pretend. They might come and talk about issues at home or other things, but when you follow up on the case, you find that the girl is just lying to get attention and support, which is not necessary."*

The voices reveal that the Tuseme Club operates in a context of profound adversity. Its efforts to empower girls are frequently challenged by deep-seated issues like poverty, lack of confidence, and social pressures that lead to problems like early pregnancy and absenteeism. This highlights the club's critical role as a frontline intervention. The fact that patrons are willing to address these issues head-on, even when faced with challenges like students not being fully truthful, demonstrates a high level of dedication. The club's existence is not just about enrichment; it's about survival for many of its members.

Theme 3) School Environment, Infrastructure, and Wellbeing.

While the school has tried to support the Tuseme Club, teachers highlighted significant gaps in resources and infrastructure that hinder its full potential. The provided space is small, there is no dedicated office for the patrons, and essential materials, such as books and magazines, are lacking. The school's financial struggles mean it cannot provide adequate support for students' basic needs,

like soap and food. These infrastructural limitations directly impact the club's ability to operate effectively and meet the needs of its members.

Voice from school management: "The school management has provided a room where all these activities take place."

Voice from school management: "I think they could expand the space for the Tuseme team. The room we've been given is somewhat small."

Voice from school management: "I think the major problem, as a guidance and counselling teacher, is that we don't have materials. For example, books and magazines."

Voice from school management: "For example, soap and food, because many of them lack these things."

Voice from school management: "I wanted to add something. I think your patrons are facing a challenge—they don't have an office. So, we need support from other organisations to help them get an office."

The teachers' accounts clearly illustrate a significant disconnect between the school's willingness and its capacity to support the Tuseme Club. While the school offers a room and some limited financial aid, the voices confirm that these resources are severely inadequate for the club's needs. The lack of a dedicated office for patrons, limited space, and a shortage of basic materials for students underscore that the club's continued growth and effectiveness are highly dependent on external infrastructural support. Without more robust resources, the club will struggle to sustain its impact, regardless of the dedication of the teachers and students.

Theme 4) Community and Parental Engagement.

The Tuseme Club serves as a crucial bridge between the school and the community. The teachers' excerpts demonstrate their active role in sensitising parents and the wider community about the club's mission. The matron's successful engagement with a parent shows the potential for positive collaboration. However, the teachers also recognised a major challenge: a lack of direct involvement from parents in the guidance and counselling process, which they believe is necessary

to address the root causes of the students' problems at home. They hope for a programme that would train parents on how to properly care for their children.

Voice from a matron: "Let me respond because I am the matron. They took it positively. First of all, I called the parents and talked to them. Then they allowed me to stay with the child."

Voice from a teacher: "We usually sensitise the community on the importance of taking care of these students, the importance of sending them to school, and how they can take care of them."

Voice from a teacher: "Then apart from that, for example, during Parents' Day at school, they sensitise parents by singing songs about girls."

Voice from a teacher: "I think it would also be wise to find a programme for the parents as well. They should be taught how to take care of a girl or boy child so that they are also on board."

The teachers' voices highlight a strong, proactive approach to community engagement, where the school acts as an agent of social change by sensitising parents and the community. The positive outcome of the matron's intervention with a parent demonstrates that this approach is effective when implemented. However, a significant gap remains. The teachers recognise that the club's work in school can be undone by challenges at home, underscoring the need for a more comprehensive strategy that includes direct parental training. This reveals a sophisticated understanding that true sustainability requires addressing the entire ecosystem, not just the students in the club.

Theme 5) Sustainability, Scalability, and Good Practices.

The Tuseme Club at Chebukaka Secondary School has established a strong foundation for sustainability, but its future remains precarious without continued external support. The teachers were clear that the club's existence is almost entirely dependent on FAWE's financial and logistical assistance, as the school itself cannot provide sufficient funds. They expressed a fear that a withdrawal of support would cause the club's membership to dwindle. To improve scalability, teachers recommended more frequent and specific training on topics like cybersecurity and diversifying the skills offered to include things like hairdressing and catering. They believe that if the programme expands, it needs to do so with "more resources" to avoid diluting the current support.

Voice from a teacher: "No, it won't be able to sustain it because most of the time, when we have events, we find that FAWE supports them—they eat well, and they can sign for

finances. The school cannot support them. So, if FAWE withdraws, most of the Tuseme Club members will leave."

Voice from a teacher: *"It won't be the end, but there will be a challenge."*

Voice from a teacher: *"Not yet. We haven't received enough training. I think they could provide more training, perhaps once per term."*

Voice from a teacher: *"Mostly on online issues... Cybersecurity. Cybersecurity... For example, videotaping and posting."*

Voice from a teacher: *"I think nothing should be removed, and we can just add. For example, the tailoring project has been introduced. We can add another one because some of these teen mothers may not have a passion for tailoring. Interests may vary. Some may like hairdressing, while others may be interested in catering. So, we can add more projects."*

Voice from a teacher: *"One challenge I see is that support for Tuseme could be reduced or completely withdrawn."*

Voice from a teacher: *"If you're expanding with more resources, there will be no problem. But if you're expanding with the same resources, sharing them means it will reduce here."*

The teachers' voices provide a sobering assessment of the Tuseme Club's long-term viability. They present a paradox: the club is successful and growing, but its very success is unsustainable without continued and, in some cases, increased external funding. The fear of a complete withdrawal of support is a recurring and significant concern. The recommendations for diversifying skills and providing cybersecurity training are not just wish-list items; they represent an adaptive strategy to ensure the programme remains relevant and impactful in a changing world. This underscores a clear finding: the Chebukaka model, in its current form, is a high-impact programme that is not yet ready for a fully self-sustaining future and requires strategic investment to build a more resilient framework.

Recommendations for Model Adaptation and Strengthening

The recommendations for adapting and strengthening the Tuseme model at St. Veronica Chebukaka Secondary School focus on ensuring a clear transition plan and promoting continuous improvement. A top recommendation is for FAWE to provide a clear timeframe for the withdrawal of external support. This would allow the school to prepare for future self-sustainability, rather than facing an abrupt end to the programme. The school administration and teachers expressed a strong desire for this defined period, emphasising the need for a collaborative "going up the way" approach.

The model should build on its existing success by becoming more inclusive. The school management and teachers are keen on including a wider range of students, particularly those who are not teen mothers, to expand the club's positive influence. To ensure the club remains relevant

and impactful, its practical skills training should be diversified. Teachers recommended adding new skills such as hairdressing, catering, and cybersecurity to the existing projects, like tailoring and farming. This adaptation would cater to varied student interests and better prepare them for future economic opportunities.

The club's heavy reliance on external funding poses a significant dis-enabling factor. To address this, the model should be strengthened by helping the school and club develop a more robust, self-sustaining financial framework. This could include formalising income-generating activities and providing training on financial management. The club's work in school can be undermined by challenges at home. Therefore, a crucial adaptation is to create a programme that trains parents on how to properly care for and support their children, ensuring the Tuseme principles are reinforced within the home environment.

ii) Centres of Excellence (CoE)

While the case study did not explicitly state that the school was a designated Centre of Excellence (CoE), the Tuseme Club's documented success suggests it had the potential to serve as a model for other institutions. The club's ability to boost academic performance and reduce dropout rates was a strong indicator of its potential as a CoE. The school's governance noted that the members "dramatically improved in academic performance," and that the club helped them overcome low self-esteem and a lack of confidence. This demonstrated that the programme achieved tangible, positive results. The Tuseme Club had become "a culture" within the school, which showed its deep integration and inherent sustainability. This level of institutional buy-in is a critical factor for any school aspiring to be a CoE. The school's leadership demonstrated a proactive approach to supporting the club and expressed a desire to build on the existing model through more research and inclusivity, which are key principles of continuous improvement and excellence.

The most significant dis-enabling factor was the club's financial dependency on external support. Teachers were concerned that the programme would not be able to sustain itself without FAWE's funding, which is a major barrier to long-term excellence. The lack of a clear timeframe for the withdrawal of external support prevented the school from adequately preparing for the programme's future. Without this strategic planning, the school's ability to become a fully self-sustaining CoE was significantly hindered.

iii) Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP)

The Tuseme Club at St. Veronica Chebukaka Secondary School actively implemented Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) by creating an environment where girls were empowered to overcome gender-related barriers. The club was a key mechanism for promoting GRP. It directly addressed gender-specific challenges by creating a safe and supportive space where girls could overcome their initial shyness and express themselves. As one teacher noted, "After empowering them, they interacted with others, and they began to speak out." This was a powerful example of how GRP principles were applied to help girls find their voice in a mixed-gender setting. The school extended GRP principles beyond the classroom by actively sensitising parents and the wider community on girls' issues. Teachers reported that the club performed songs about girls' rights and

challenges during Parents' Day and community events, which was a proactive way to challenge restrictive gender norms.

Despite the club's success, a significant initial barrier was the deep-seated social norm that prevented girls from speaking freely in front of boys. A teacher recalled,

"When we were establishing the Tuseme Club, we found that many of the girls were afraid to speak out. They couldn't talk in front of boys..."

This underscored the fact that deeply entrenched gender dynamics in the community created an initial hurdle for the club's gender-inclusive goals.

4.2.5 Case Study 3: Masaku Primary School

General case study context

Table 81: Masaku School for the Physically Disabled Profile

Category	Details
School Name	Masaku School for the Physically Disabled
School Location	Central-, Machakos County, Kenya
Location Type	Rural / Special Needs Institution
School Level	Primary (Kenya Certificate of Primary Education – KCPE)
School Type	Public, Government-Sponsored
Enrolment Figures	174 students
Number of Teachers	18 (6 male, 12 female)
Tuseme Club Status	Active
Tuseme Club Enrolment Figures	Not specified (focus on girls’ empowerment; mixed-gender activities recommended)
Centre of Excellence Status	Developing potential (strong foundation via student motivation and parental support, but constrained by limited resources, infrastructure, and inconsistent external support)
Gender Responsive Pedagogy Status	Emerging / Implicit (girls’ empowerment and mixed-gender activities reflect GRP principles, but the programme is not formally integrated into classroom pedagogy or teacher training)
Number of Teachers Trained in GRP	Not specified (programme functions as an empowerment space rather than a formal pedagogical intervention)

Masaku School for the Physically Disabled is a special public primary school located in Central, Machakos, Kenya. It is a government-sponsored institution under the management of the Ministry of Education through the District Education Board (DEB). The school offers the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), administered by the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC). Dedicated to the education and care of learners with physical disabilities, the school provides an inclusive environment tailored to their needs. It serves a wide catchment area, enrolling children from diverse backgrounds, many of whom face economic challenges. Beyond academics, Masaku prioritises rehabilitation, life skills, and psychosocial support, ensuring a holistic approach to

special needs education. As a special needs' institution, it continues to face challenges related to accessibility, specialised teaching resources, and limited trained personnel.

The participant demographic at Masaku School for the Physically Disabled included 8 female students from girls' clubs and 8 male students from boys' clubs, highlighting the inclusion of both genders in club activities within this specialised educational environment. The teaching staff comprised 6 female teachers and 2 male teachers. Similar to St. Veronica, there were no PTA or BOG members directly participating in this study. The research also included 4 female and 4 male students not in clubs, along with 3 female and 5 male parents, and 5 female and 3 male para-social workers. This diverse group allowed for an understanding of how disability intersects with gender and participation in extracurricular activities.

i) Tuseme

Theme 1) Tuseme Club Awareness, Participation, and Impact.

When we probed on awareness of the Tuseme Club, responses from teachers generated mixed views.

***Voice from a teacher:** "I'm new to this Tuseme programme, but when I came to the school, I saw computers that were brought by Tuseme", a teacher reiterated. The knowledge indicated that "Tuseme is like a programme, but not an organisation. What I understand about Tuseme is that it is a programme that wants to give the girl child a voice and help her stand for herself on issues that affect her. I would also like to know the level of empowerment that FAWE wants to give the girl child."*

Girls join Tuseme to help those in need, learn computer skills, gain educational knowledge, support one another, understand the club's purpose, and, significantly, to build confidence and the courage to speak out. The girls in the Tuseme Club gave mixed reasons for joining the club.

***Voice from a teacher:** "So that I could help girls in need..." "To learn how to use a computer." "I joined the Tuseme Club to know more about education and to support one another." "I joined because the teacher told us that it can build our confidence, and it has really helped me. Now I can speak out and defend myself when someone wrongs me instead of hiding in a corner."*

Additionally, the Tuseme Club helps girls discover talents, potentially leading to future opportunities.

***Voice from a student:** "Tuseme has helped me know my talent. Madam X, together with the FAWE coordinator for Machakos County, has helped us. They usually come and give us paints for those who know how to paint, and for those who can*

act, we do plays and skits. Those who can sing are also given a platform to sing. So Tuseme can open doors for someone."

Also, it empowers them to defend themselves, build courage, prevent early marriage and pregnancy, and foster peer support.

Voice from a student: *"Tuseme Club can help a girl defend herself from boys so she cannot be abused. It can also build her confidence and courage to speak out. Tuseme Club can prevent me from early marriage and also change my mindset. When you find a girl has a problem, you sit down, share, and come up with a solution. Tuseme Club can help you in the future to avoid early pregnancies and early marriages because when you join the club, you will learn more about how to avoid such things."*

Parents associate the participation of their children in Tuseme with increased responsibility and behavioural change.

Voice from a parent: *"I have noticed a change; my child is a boy, and when interacting with the rest at home, he is responsible. I can leave him with the rest of the kids the whole day, and I am satisfied he will protect them; he will give them food, and he will be responsible enough to even guide them."*

Voice from a parent: *"Since my child joined this club, I have seen a lot of change. Mine is a boy, and he likes staying with girls. I see them sing and read together, and he told me that they were taught how boys can take care of girls during menses instead of embarrassing them."*

Voice from a parent: *"Mine is a boy. Since he joined this club, he has stopped crying. Previously, he used to cry that he wanted to go home, but now he wants to stay in school, and he is happy."*

Voice from a parent: *"Mine is a girl, and when school closes, she is responsible. She is my firstborn, and she teaches her siblings and takes care of them, but previously, he was irresponsible, but now she is responsible she also teaches them."*

During an FGD with the PTA, members highlighted the club's role in empowering students to express themselves.

Voice from a PTA member: *"They perform plays, and these plays include teachings on how to help individuals speak up for themselves against the challenges they face as they grow up, especially regarding relationships between boys and girls. You know, there are challenges where someone can be lured into doing things that are not good. So, through these teachings, they learn how to talk or speak up*

for themselves. This helps them defend their decisions and also make informed choices.”

Voice from a PTA member: *“Tuseme Club, in the school, also holds meetings where they discuss how to take care of one another, especially for the girls, so they can learn about their rights from each other. I have also seen them plant trees in the school. If they take care of the trees, it shows that wherever they live, they should also take care of the environment.”*

Voice from a PTA member: *“I have witnessed the club reciting poems with powerful messages about empowering young children in education and teaching them to take care of their status.”*

The voices across teachers, girls, parents, and PTA members demonstrate that awareness of Tuseme is uneven, but its perceived impact is consistently positive. Teachers frame it as an empowerment initiative, students emphasise confidence and skills, while parents highlight behavioural transformation and responsibility. Notably, the inclusion of boys in parents’ testimonies signals that although Tuseme primarily targets girls, it indirectly shapes boys’ attitudes and gender relations. This suggests that Tuseme is not only a platform for voice and confidence but also a subtle driver of cultural change around gender roles and responsibilities.

Theme 2) Academic and Socio-cultural Challenges.

An array of challenges was identified by the participants in this study.

Voice from a Teacher: *“One of the challenges is that most of the girls don't go to school. Most of them sometimes have communities where the boys are empowered, but the girls are not, so if you go to a place like this and tell a girl to go to school, you can be attacked. Why? Because you have come to challenge their cultural norms and the status quo, they don't like their girls to interact with the boys, and you are coming to teach the girls to interact with the boys.”*

Learning computer skills is a key activity and motivator, but limited resources and scheduling conflicts pose challenges.

Voice from a student: *“To learn how to use a computer.” “Another challenge is that during computer lessons, sometimes we collide with other classes that also*

want to use the computers. And when there is training, people should be selected and taken to a place where there are no distractions."

Inadequate time allocated for club meetings was also identified which limits learning opportunities. The girls in Tuseme, one of them stated that;

Voice from a student: *"Inadequate time. We don't have enough time to learn."*

The girls advocate for mixed-gender Tuseme activities based on principles of gender equality and the belief that learning together fosters understanding and mutual respect, particularly regarding sensitive issues.

Voice from a student: *"We should be mixed because in the Tuseme club, there is no gender bias... if we learn together, we can know some of the challenges that both boys and girls go through." "We should learn together because when we are taught separately... we can help them understand..."*

The data show that structural and cultural barriers intersect to undermine learning. While access to technology is a strong pull factor, inadequate resources and scheduling conflicts limit sustained skills development. More critically, entrenched gender norms in some communities directly oppose girls' participation in education, framing Tuseme's empowerment agenda as a cultural threat. Thus, while Tuseme fosters enthusiasm for learning, it simultaneously exposes tensions between progressive educational goals and restrictive traditional norms.

Theme 3) School Environment, Infrastructure and Wellbeing.

Limited resources, including a small number of computers (mainly for committee members) and an inefficient internet, were identified, which hinder the club's activities. A girl member in the club opined that;

Voice from a teacher: *"Computers." (P) "They are only six, and it's only the committee members that have them." (P) "Internet, but the computers are okay... We have, but it's not efficient."*

Secondly, lack of funds and transportation restricts participation in inter-school camps, limiting interaction and learning opportunities.

Voice from a teacher: *"We usually select a camp to go to, but now there is a challenge in getting transportation and funds. We would like to have camps so that*

we can also interact with other schools. For example, Machakos Primary doesn't know if we have Tuseme, and we also don't know them."

Thirdly, the students noted a challenge of accessibility for members with disabilities. They need to be considered during camps, as one student club member reported.

Voice from a student: *"Also, if we have camps, it's a challenge for those who use wheelchairs."*

From the discussions we had with the stakeholders, they indicated that Tuseme has significantly contributed to building girls' confidence and empowering them to speak out and defend themselves.

Voice from a student: *"Now I can speak out and defend myself when someone wrongs me instead of hiding in a corner." "I learned to be courageous..."*

Additionally, the club fosters a supportive environment where members can share problems and work together to find solutions.

Voice from a student: *"When you find a girl has a problem, you sit down, share, and come up with a solution."*

The findings highlight a paradox: while Tuseme nurtures psychosocial well-being and peer solidarity, these gains are undermined by weak infrastructure and financial constraints. Limited ICT access and exclusion of students with disabilities reveal inequities within the programme, even as it seeks to promote inclusivity. The club is therefore both a protective space for confidence-building and a mirror reflecting the broader systemic challenges of underfunded school environments.

Theme 4) Community and Parental Engagement.

Parents are reported to be supportive of the girls' involvement in Tuseme, providing both encouragement and financial assistance for club activities. *"Yes."* (Response to parental support)

Voice from a student: *"Financially. For instance, as I said, when we visit other schools, our parents are informed of what we will need, like lunch, and our parents are usually willing to support us."*

Another student stated that;

Voice from a student: *"My parents encourage me to have courage and continue helping other people."*

Parental engagement emerges as a critical enabling factor for sustaining the Tuseme initiative. Financial support and encouragement validate the programme's relevance within families, while

moral reinforcement strengthens children's commitment. Importantly, the parents' willingness to invest signals a gradual shift from passive approval to active participation in their children's empowerment. However, the sustainability of this support may depend on balancing school demands with households' economic capacities.

Theme 5) Sustainability, Scalability, and Good Practices.

The club engages in diverse activities chosen collaboratively by members, including drama, visiting other schools, planting trees, and planning income-generating projects.

***Voice from a student:** "We normally sit together as Tuseme Club members and deliberate on what we can do, and we go with what the majority says." "We do drama." "We visit other schools and teach them what they don't know..."*

The student club member stated that some enjoyable activities they participate in include drama, acting, computer learning, and inter-school visits. The various stakeholders had several suggestions for improvement, focusing on increasing meeting time, regular trainers, inter-school camps, and trips.

***Voice from a student:** "If we could have more time during meetings."*

***Voice from a student:** "We can have a trainer who can come and train us twice per week."*

***Voice from a student:** "You should organise camps so that we can meet with other schools and exchange ideas."*

The stakeholders in the FGDs noted that FAWE has some educational interventions in their schools by providing learning resources like FAWE books and teacher guides.

***Voice from a student:** "We even have FAWE books that we use, and we also use teachers' guidelines."*

Notwithstanding the interventions, there were gaps identified by the stakeholders, including insufficient computers, inefficient internet, and a need for more consistent and timely training support.

***Voice from a student:** "They can add us tablets and more books." "The one that we have usually takes a very long time before coming."*

The collective decision-making and variety of activities reflect Tuseme's participatory ethos, which strengthens ownership and sustainability. However, scalability remains constrained by resource scarcity, inconsistent training, and limited inter-school collaboration. While FAWE's support provides a strong foundation, the identified gaps suggest the need for structured resource allocation and institutionalised training schedules.

Without such reinforcement, the club risks over-reliance on enthusiasm and volunteerism, which may limit its long-term impact.

Recommendations for Model Adaptation and Strengthening

To enhance and sustain the Tuseme model at Masaku Primary School, the findings point to several key adaptations. First and foremost, the school needs to address its significant resource and infrastructure limitations. This includes increasing the number of computers and tablets, as well as providing more efficient internet access to meet the high demand from students. It's also crucial to increase the time allocated for club meetings and ensure that training support from external partners is more consistent and reliable. The model should also be strengthened by improving logistical support for inter-school activities. The girls expressed a strong desire for these camps and trips, but they were hindered by a lack of transportation and accessibility for students with disabilities. Addressing these challenges through dedicated transport and inclusive planning would broaden opportunities for all students. Finally, the programme should be further reinforced with additional learning materials like more books and, potentially, a projector to enrich the learning experience. These changes would transform the club into a more effective and sustainable platform for empowerment.

ii) Centre of Excellence

The discussions with stakeholders at Masaku Primary School, while not explicitly referencing the term Centre of Excellence (CoE), resonated with its core aspirations. The girls' emphasis on the need for more computers, reliable internet, and consistent training highlighted the gap between their current environment and the ideal of a well-resourced, inclusive learning hub. Their desire for opportunities like inter-school exchanges and camps also mirrored the CoE vision of providing holistic development beyond the classroom. However, the school's current reality was a significant dis-enabling factor. It faced major challenges with limited resources, infrastructural gaps, and inconsistent support, which are major hurdles to achieving CoE status. The strong foundation laid by the Tuseme Club, however, anchored in motivation, student collaboration, and parental support, provided a potential starting point. With strategic investment in resources, training, and inclusive programming, the school could evolve into a model that embodies both excellence and gender responsiveness for students with special needs.

iii) Gender-Responsive Pedagogy

Although the girls did not explicitly reference gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP) in their testimonies, their voices suggest an implicit understanding of its principles. Their call for mixed-gender Tuseme activities reveals an appreciation of equality and the need for both boys and girls to learn together to foster mutual understanding. This position reflects the recognition that empowerment cannot occur in isolation but requires the involvement of both genders in shaping equitable learning spaces. In this sense, the club's mission to empower girls, while addressing

issues central to their lives such as early marriage, self-confidence, and peer support, resonates strongly with GRP goals.

However, the absence of explicit pedagogical framing in their accounts highlights a limitation in the current implementation. While the outcomes align with GRP principles, the programme’s activities do not appear to be formally anchored within a pedagogical framework that intentionally addresses classroom practice, curriculum delivery, or teacher training. This suggests that the club functions more as an empowerment space rather than as a pedagogical intervention, leaving a gap in integrating GRP into broader teaching and learning processes.

4.2.6 Case Study 4: County Council Secondary School Masalani

General case study context

Table 92: County Council Secondary School Masalani Profile

Category	Details
School Name	County Council Secondary School Masalani
School Location	Masalani Town, Ijara Constituency, Garissa County, Kenya
Location Type	Rural / Pastoralist Region
School Level	Upper Secondary
School Type	Public School
Enrolment Figures	Not specified (draws students from remote and underserved areas)
Number of Teachers	Not specified
Tuseme Club Status	Active
Tuseme Club Enrolment Figures	Girls: 8; Boys: 8
Centre of Excellence Status	Developing potential (strong student and parental engagement, but constrained by limited infrastructure, resources, and reliance on external funding)
Gender Responsive Pedagogy Status	Emerging / Implicit (programme aims to empower girls and promote gender equality, but cultural norms and the absence of female teachers limit full implementation)
Number of Teachers Trained in GRP	Not specified (no formal GRP training observed; gender-responsive practices inferred from Tuseme objectives)

County Council Secondary School is a public sub-county secondary school situated near Masalani Town in Ijara Constituency, Garissa County, Kenya. Located in a predominantly pastoralist region, the school serves as a key educational institution within the local community. The school is recognised within Kenya’s broader network of special and inclusive education institutions, though specific programmatic details are limited in available sources. It school operates under the Ministry of Education and caters to learners with diverse educational needs, including students with disabilities. As such, it is committed to advancing inclusive education through the provision of tailored academic and social support systems. County Council Secondary School draws students

from remote and underserved areas, where access to quality education, especially for children with disabilities, remains a challenge due to cultural, infrastructural, and economic barriers.

The participant demographic at County Council Secondary School, Masalani, shows a different trend in student club participation, with 8 female students from girls' clubs and an equal number of 8 male students from boys' clubs. The teaching staff involved included 0 female teachers and a significant number of 8 male teachers. The research also engaged 3 female PTA members and 5 male PTA members, 1 female BOG member and 7 male BOG members, 1 male government official, 4 female students and 4 male students not in clubs (mixed group), 3 female parents and 5 male parents, and 2 female para-social workers and 6 male para-social workers. This demographic suggests a context with few female teachers involved in the research and a higher representation of male students in clubs.

i) Tuseme

Theme 1) Tuseme Club Awareness, Participation, and Impact.

At County Council Secondary School Masalani, awareness of Tuseme varied, with some students and parents initially misunderstanding it as an external NGO rather than a school-based empowerment programme. Over time, however, it became clear that the club was valued as a platform where both boys and girls could freely voice their challenges and gain confidence. Students highlighted that Tuseme had given them the courage to speak publicly, seek help, and discuss sensitive issues that they would otherwise struggle to raise with teachers or parents. The programme was also linked to tangible social change, including a reduction in cases of teenage pregnancy and gender-based violence within the school community. Parents and teachers noted that the club fostered unity across communities and was particularly beneficial in shaping leadership skills and preparing students for future opportunities.

***Voice from a student:** "It helps us to be free and share our problems freely."*

***Voice from a PTA member:** "Tuseme Club is a nongovernmental organisation that supports the girl child."*

***Voice from a PTA member:** "Tuseme has really helped us because here we have different communities that border the Tana River, so we have gotten to know each other."*

***Voice from a parent:** "I'm new to this Tuseme programme, but when I came to the school, I saw computers that were brought by Tuseme. Tuseme is like a programme, but not an organisation. What I understand about Tuseme is that it is a programme that wants to give the girl child a voice and help her stand for herself on issues that*

affect her. I would also like to know the level of empowerment that FAWE wants to give the girl child.”

Participation in the Tuseme club was motivated by several other factors as well. In an FGD with boys, a participant noted that,

Voice from a student: *“I joined Tuseme so that I can get encouragement in some things that I cannot speak on. Maybe I have a problem at school, but I cannot go directly to my teacher, so I speak about it in Tuseme and get help.”*

Generally, many students noted that they joined the club to improve their confidence in speaking. This was again emphasised that,

Voice from a student: *“We joined because the teacher explained to us that it can help us speak out about our problems and get help and support.” “It has helped me to be able to speak in front of people. Before I joined this club, I was afraid to speak in front of people, but now I can.”*

Moreover, the issues supporting participation kept coming up, as indicated in these statements.

Voice from a student: *“It will help us by giving us the confidence we need when looking for jobs after school, and the courage to answer questions. In the future, it will help us in stopping early pregnancies by educating other boys out here in the community. It will help us improve our leadership skills and also educate the community.” “I joined Tuseme so that I can get encouragement in some things that I cannot speak on. Maybe I have a problem at school, but I cannot go directly to my teacher, so I speak about it in Tuseme and get help.”*

The impact of Tuseme on the psychological well-being was ably identified in one of the discussions that,

Voice from a student: *“In this school, we had many teenage pregnancies. But since the Tuseme club was introduced to the school, we have seen that it has reduced a lot. We also had many cases of gender-based violence, but since people have been educated, things are now better.”*

A teacher in the school further emphasised that the club has helped in building the confidence and self-esteem of the students.

Voice from a teacher: *“I think it has increased self-confidence and self-esteem among the students.”*

The evidence suggests that Tuseme has become an important avenue for student empowerment in Masalani, bridging cultural and social divides while also addressing issues of psychosocial well-being. While some confusion about its identity remains, the impact reported by students and teachers underscores its role in tackling critical social

challenges like early pregnancies and violence. Importantly, participation by both boys and girls has created space for broader gender dialogue, although the persistent absence of female teachers limits the extent to which girls can fully benefit from the safe spaces Tuseme seeks to foster.

Theme 2) Academic and Socio-Cultural Challenges.

Students at Masalani face considerable barriers to effective learning, including long distances to school, insecurity on the way, and a lack of transportation. The shortage of essential infrastructure, such as chairs, lockers, and especially computers, restricts access to quality education, with reports of ten students sharing one machine. Limited opportunities for enrichment, like attending set book performances or IT-based learning, further deepen inequalities compared to better-resourced schools. For girls, social and cultural norms pose additional obstacles, as many feel restricted in communicating with male teachers about sensitive issues due to religious expectations. The lack of female teachers, therefore, exacerbates the difficulty, leaving some students without trusted role models or channels for addressing personal challenges.

***Voice from a female student:** “Some of the girls come from far away, so when they are coming to school or going back, there are people who attack them along the way. They are forced to wait for the boys so they can walk home together.”*

This was reiterated in one of the FGDs which identified the challenge of distance.

***Voice from a female student:** “We have a problem in terms of transport. Students walk long distances to school, and we have remedials at 7 a.m. So, I was requesting if we could have a bus, like a school bus or van, to facilitate our movement.”*

Insufficient chairs and lockers were identified as other challenges related to the school infrastructure.

***Voice from a male student:** “Another challenge is that we have insufficient chairs and lockers, and we share them in a ratio of 1:4.”*

Also, it was mentioned that a lack of resources, such as a school bus, limits participation in academic enrichment activities. The Tuseme boys’ members stated that;

***Voice from a male student:** “For computer activities, there are schools that usually go for trips to read set books, but for us, we don’t have the capability of going on trips to Garissa because the school doesn’t have a bus. We have few computers; for example, a group of ten students uses one computer.”*

Strong cultural norms restrict girls' open communication in mixed-gender settings and with male teachers. This implies structured implementation of the Tuseme manual with a nuance of both

male and female participation, coupled with separate gender sessions. The girls in the Tuseme Club, during a discussion with them, disclosed that;

***Voice from a female student:** "We are not free to approach them and express ourselves."*

As another girl member rightly put it;

***Voice from a female student:** "There are things you can't even tell your father, but if we have a female teacher, there are things that, when you tell her, she will understand because she is also a woman."*

This is because their religion (Islam) does not allow them to approach a male teacher and tell them certain things.

***Voice from a female student:** "Not that they keep them to themselves, but their religion (Islam) does not allow them to approach a male teacher and tell them certain things"*

The girls in the discussion further added that;

***Voice from a female student:** "We are separated because we are shy to express ourselves where boys are."*

This was also ably expressed in one of the discussions with girls.

***Voice from a female student:** "Not that they keep them to themselves, but their religion (Islam) does not allow them to approach a male teacher and tell them certain things. But I am a Christian, so I can easily approach the male teachers and inform them, though I will not tell them who specifically has that problem, and he will help."*

The academic challenges at Masalani are layered, with infrastructural shortages overlapping with socio-cultural barriers. Distance and insecurity not only hinder attendance but also create risks that disproportionately affect girls. While Tuseme provides a mechanism for voicing these issues, the structural gaps in resources and personnel highlight the fragility of educational outcomes in this setting. The absence of female teachers stands out as both an academic and cultural barrier, showing that effective learning cannot be separated from the need for a more gender-sensitive staffing and resource allocation strategy.

Theme 3) School Environment, Infrastructure and Wellbeing.

The school environment at Masalani is marked by resource scarcity, with limited computers, unreliable internet connectivity, and inadequate toilet facilities. These constraints hinder both academic and extracurricular programmes, leaving students with fewer opportunities to explore technology or participate in enrichment activities. Despite these material shortcomings, Tuseme has significantly contributed to student well-being by building confidence, enhancing self-expression, and encouraging collective problem-solving. Students repeatedly noted that their courage to speak before others improved markedly after joining the club, highlighting the

psychological support and safe space it provides in an otherwise constrained environment. Teachers also affirmed that Tuseme has raised self-esteem and improved peer relations.

Voice from a male student: "We have a few computers; for example, a group of ten students uses one computer."

The Information Technology (IT) challenge was also brought up in one of the FGDs with PTA.

Voice from a PTA member: "We know we are living in the era of IT, and there is much we can learn through it. However, the network is an issue, depending on where you are. Sometimes you realise you want to visit certain sites, but because of internet connectivity, it becomes a challenge. You may also lack the necessary gadgets."

The impact of Tuseme on the psychological well-being of students has been several. In the FGD with girls in Tuseme, it was reported that,

Voice from a female student: "It has helped me because, before, I was afraid to speak in front of people, but now I dare to speak in front of people. It helps us a lot, and now I have the confidence to speak in front of people."

Speaking fluently and gaining confidence were almost reported in all the discussions across the different stakeholder groups. Tuseme provides a space for students to gain confidence and speak about their challenges due to the forums that they have as a platform for speaking out about issues they face, hence building their confidence. In the FGD with boys, a participant noted that,

Voice from a female student: "It has helped me to be able to speak in front of people. Before I joined this club, I was afraid to speak in front of people, but now I can."

The contradiction between a weak physical infrastructure and a strengthening psychosocial environment reflects the dual realities of Masalani. On the one hand, the lack of adequate facilities undermines the school's ability to deliver holistic education; on the other, Tuseme fills part of this gap by creating intangible but powerful changes in confidence, belonging, and student agency. However, such psychosocial gains cannot fully substitute for material deficits. For the environment to truly support wellbeing, investment in infrastructure must complement the empowerment already fostered through Tuseme.

Theme 4) Community and Parental Engagement.

Parental engagement with Tuseme in Masalani was generally positive, with parents not only aware of the club but also willing to provide financial contributions for activities such as buying books or supporting peers in need. Students noted that their parents encouraged them to participate and readily offered resources when asked, showing a degree of ownership that is critical for the sustainability of extracurricular programmes. The PTA also expressed interest in how the programme empowers girls, highlighting curiosity about its long-term impact. This support

suggests that despite economic constraints, parents see Tuseme as a valuable initiative aligned with both educational and community development goals.

Voice from a female student: “Here in Tuseme, when someone has a problem at home, we help them. For instance, we can contribute and buy them books or any other thing. So, our parents are supportive; when we tell them, they give us the money to contribute.”

Additionally, financial support was reported very strongly by the Tuseme girls' members.

Voice from a female student: “If we decide to make contributions, they won't have a problem giving us the money.”

The boys added that;

Voice from a female student: “So, our parents are supportive; when we tell them, they give us the money to contribute.”

Parental buy-in emerges as a strong enabling factor in Masalani, particularly in a context where schools face chronic shortages of resources. Their willingness to contribute demonstrates a recognition of the benefits Tuseme brings in fostering confidence, unity, and problem-solving among students. At the same time, the parental perspective shows that Tuseme is still somewhat misunderstood as an external project rather than a fully integrated school programme. Strengthening parent sensitisation and involving them in structured feedback loops could deepen their engagement and help address wider barriers such as cultural resistance to girls' open participation.

Theme 5) Sustainability, Scalability, and Good Practices.

For Tuseme to thrive in Masalani, stakeholders emphasised the importance of timely responsiveness to student needs, such as the long-requested deployment of a female teacher. Resource expansion was also a recurrent demand, with students proposing the introduction of sewing machines, seeds, detergents, and additional computers to diversify club activities and enhance relevance. Needs assessments were highlighted by parents as a critical step in ensuring that interventions address context-specific challenges, particularly in sensitive contexts like refugee communities. Students also saw potential in school trips and exchanges as ways to strengthen learning and visibility. However, concerns remain about sustainability due to reliance on external funding and the limited scope of current activities, which are perceived to focus too narrowly on IT.

Voice from a PTA member: “When you introduce it to their school, you should ensure that you respond to their needs promptly. For instance, here we requested a female teacher for a long time, and that should be improved.”

In many schools, similar clubs focusing on girls have failed because there are very few female teachers or, in some cases, no female teacher at all. Needs assessment was mentioned as one of

the strategies for sustainability and scalability in one of the FGDs with parents. This is important to ensure that the intervention addresses the specific needs of the programme beneficiaries. Complexities also exist among the refugee communities.

Voice from a parent: “I think that before you start the programme in those setups, like refugee camps, you should first do something like an assessment to know what challenges they are facing.” “Because you can go there and start distributing books, but they don’t have a challenge with books.

Voice from a parent: “They could be from a well-off family, and they ran away from their country because of security reasons. Their problem is not money but their security. So, when you go to these camps, it’s important to know what challenges the students there have first, and it will help you know how best to assist/support them based on their specific challenge. This will also help build their confidence and trust in the organisation.”

Tuseme (primarily IT-focused) is an existing intervention. A gap exists in the consistent provision of basic needs like reusable sanitary pads. As a Tuseme girl observed,

Voice from a female student: “Most of the time, our patrons volunteer to buy sanitary pads.”

The future of Tuseme in Masalani depends on addressing structural and cultural bottlenecks while scaling good practices such as parental support and student enthusiasm. The repeated call for female teachers demonstrates that sustainability cannot be divorced from gender-responsive staffing, while the push for more diverse resources reflects a desire to broaden the scope of empowerment beyond digital literacy. Needs-based planning emerges as a practical recommendation for both sustainability and scalability, ensuring that replication in other schools or contexts responds to real, rather than assumed, challenges. Without such adaptations, the programme risks plateauing in impact despite strong community goodwill.

Recommendations for Model Adaptation and Strengthening

A critical need identified by stakeholders at County Council Secondary School, Masalani, is the deployment of female teachers to facilitate communication and provide role models for girls. Expanding resources to support Tuseme activities is equally important. Students suggested access to sewing machines, seeds, detergents, and additional computers to diversify club activities beyond IT, enabling practical skills development and broader engagement. School trips were also recommended as a means to enhance learning and visibility of the programme, providing opportunities for students to share their experiences and deepen their understanding of Tuseme. These adaptations would not only strengthen the programme’s reach but also reinforce the practical and psychosocial benefits already observed among participants.

The enthusiasm of students to participate, coupled with strong parental support, forms a solid enabling environment for Tuseme. The programme’s potential to address critical social and cultural issues such as female genital mutilation and early marriage, while simultaneously

enhancing student confidence and psychosocial wellbeing, further underlines its value. At the same time, several factors limit its effectiveness. The absence of female teachers continues to restrict girls' ability to fully engage, while the scarcity of essential resources, including computers, toilets, and a school bus, constrains both academic and extracurricular activities. Cultural norms that inhibit girls' open expression in mixed-gender settings remain a persistent barrier, and the reliance on external funding creates uncertainty for long-term sustainability. Additionally, the current focus on IT limits the programme's scope, highlighting the need for diversification of activities to fully realise Tuseme's objectives.

ii) Centre of Excellence

Although the concept of a Centre of Excellence was not explicitly referenced in the FGDs, the expressed needs of the school reflect the characteristics of a well-resourced CoE. The current infrastructural and resource deficits, including limited computers, inadequate sanitation facilities, and insufficient learning materials, illustrate the gap between the school's present state and the CoE ideal. If County Council Secondary School were able to adopt CoE standards or benefit from such support, it could significantly alleviate resource constraints, strengthen learning outcomes, and enhance the sustainability of initiatives like Tuseme. At present, however, the limited infrastructure and resource scarcity inhibit the school's ability to function as a centre of excellence, underscoring the need for targeted investments in both physical and human resources.

iii) Gender-Responsive Pedagogy

Although the FGDs at Masalani did not explicitly mention GRP, the challenges faced by girls, including the absence of female teachers and restrictions imposed by cultural and religious norms, make clear the necessity of gender-responsive approaches. The overarching goal of Tuseme to empower girls and promote gender equality aligns directly with GRP principles, offering a framework to structure both activities and mentorship. However, implementing such an approach is constrained by the lack of female teachers and prevailing cultural norms, which limit girls' ability to express themselves openly, particularly in mixed-gender settings. Addressing these barriers is essential to ensure that Tuseme can effectively promote inclusive learning and equitable participation for all students.

4.2.7 Discussion of Kenyan findings, including implications for adapting the Tuseme model in IDP and Refugee Settings

This discussion provides a comprehensive analysis of the findings from four case studies in Kenya, focusing on the Tuseme model and its associated initiatives, Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) and Centres of Excellence (CoE). The research, guided by the objectives of Phase 1, aimed to evaluate the sustainability of these programmes in mainstream schools and draw lessons for their potential adaptation in refugee and IDP settings. The findings are contextualised within the study's theoretical frameworks of Human Rights Theory, Self-efficacy and Human Motivation Theory, and Empowerment Theory (Rachmad, 2022; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020; Donnelly, 2013). This analysis addresses the primary research questions regarding the status and sustainability of Tuseme

clubs post-FAWE intervention, stakeholder perceptions, and the perceived benefits of participation. It also answers secondary questions about challenges, opportunities, and lessons learned for scalability in displacement contexts.

Key Findings and Lessons Learned

The Tuseme model was consistently perceived as a critical platform for empowering students, particularly girls, by giving them a voice and fostering their self-expression. As noted by a Tuseme member from County Council Secondary School, the club helped them "be free and share our problems freely." This aligns with Empowerment Theory, which posits that individuals gain control over their lives by developing the knowledge and skills needed to overcome subordination (Ongaga and Ombonga, 2012). The programme's focus on structured skill-building activities, such as tailoring and computer training, resonated with Self-efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1986), as students reported improved confidence in public speaking and leadership, which are crucial for navigating future challenges. A student from County Council Secondary School noted, "It has helped me to be able to speak in front of people. Before I joined this club, I was afraid to speak in front of people, but now I can." This demonstrates how Tuseme directly addresses psychosocial well-being and cultivates a sense of mastery, which is especially important for children who have experienced adverse circumstances (Cantor et al., 2021).

Despite the model's success, its sustainability is challenged by significant social, cultural, and financial barriers. In conservative communities, Tuseme faced resistance from parents who feared the club would "mislead girls," as a Chebukaka parent acknowledged. Cultural norms were a persistent barrier to open communication, with a Tuseme member from the County Council admitting, "We are separated because we are shy to express ourselves where boys are." Furthermore, the absence of female teachers in some schools, like County Council Secondary, created a trust deficit, hindering girls from discussing sensitive issues. This aligns with Human Rights Theory (Donnelly, 2013), as these cultural barriers deny girls their fundamental rights to education and participation.

A key challenge to long-term sustainability is the heavy dependence on FAWE's financial and logistical support. Teachers at Chebukaka Mixed Secondary School warned that if FAWE "withdraws, most of the Tuseme Club members will leave. The school cannot support them," which directly addresses the first research question on sustainability post-FAWE intervention. This reliance, coupled with resource scarcity like insufficient computers and books, limits the clubs' activities and prevents schools from functioning as true Centres of Excellence (CoE). As a Masalani BOM member described, a CoE is "where you set up an institution and equip it so that learners can get all that they need."

The case studies revealed several opportunities and good practices that can be leveraged for adaptation. The high student interest in joining the club, even with limited slots, underscores a strong demand for empowerment programmes. The inclusion of boys, particularly in gender discussions, was identified as a good practice that fosters mutual respect and support. A Masaku Boys member emphasised, "More boys should be encouraged to join so they can learn how to support their sisters." The case studies also highlighted the value of diverse activities, with students suggesting projects like vocational training in hairdressing and catering, which builds on the

principles of Self-efficacy Theory by providing tangible skills. A key lesson is the importance of a clear transition plan, as stakeholders expressed a need for a defined timeframe for FAWE's withdrawal to prepare for self-sustainability. Finally, the use of participatory methods like drama, as noted by Mkumbo et al. (2015), effectively engages students and reinforces the Tuseme model's foundation in youth-led agency.

Recommendations for Adaptation in IDP and Refugee Settings

Drawing from these findings, the following evidence-based recommendations are crucial for adapting and scaling the Tuseme model in refugee and IDP settings, which often face heightened vulnerabilities and resource constraints.

1. Conduct Context-Specific Needs Assessments: Before implementation, a comprehensive needs assessment must be conducted to understand the unique challenges, cultural nuances, and existing resources in each displacement setting. As a Masaku PTA member noted, this will help ensure that the programme addresses "what challenges they are facing" rather than making assumptions.

2. Integrate a Community-Wide Sensitisation Component: To overcome social and cultural barriers, the adapted model must include a robust community sensitisation component. The programme should be marketed as a tool for empowerment that aligns with community values, not as an attack on tradition. Training for community leaders and parents, as suggested by a Chebukaka teacher, will be vital to gain their support and ensure sustainability.

3. Strengthen Financial and Resource Management: Given the limited resources in displacement settings, the Tuseme model must be revised to include strategies for self-sustainability. This includes training students and school staff on fundraising initiatives and formalising income-generating projects. As a Masaku PTA member suggested, budgets must be reviewed and additional sources of income explored.

4. Promote Inclusivity and Diverse Skill-Building: The adapted model should be inclusive of all genders and students with disabilities. It must be designed to accommodate a larger number of students to meet the high demand for participation. The curriculum should be expanded beyond IT to include a variety of vocational and life skills, such as tailoring and hairdressing, which directly contribute to the **self-efficacy** and agency of participants.

5. Develop a Phased Transition Plan: To ensure sustainability, the adapted model must include a clear, phased transition plan that gradually shifts responsibility to the school and community. This will prevent a sudden collapse of the programme after external support is withdrawn, which was a major concern for stakeholders across all case studies.

4.3 Uganda: Findings

4.3.1 Country Context

Figure 8: Map of Uganda showing the Location of the four Schools in Uganda



The Ugandan component of the study was conducted across four mainstream schools located in Kiboga, Buyende, and Kamuli districts. These included Bukomero Senior Secondary School in Kiboga District, St. James Kagulu Senior Secondary School in Buyende District, Balawoli Secondary School in Kamuli District, and Namasagali College in Kamuli District (Figure 8). Table 13 below summarises the data collected by participants' category, school, and gender. Insights from each case study setting will be presented in turn below. The schools were strategically selected to represent diverse educational settings and provide a balanced view of how the Tuseme model operates within different regional and socio-cultural contexts.

A total of 178 participants took part in the study, encompassing students (both in and outside Tuseme clubs), teachers, parents, members of school governance bodies, and government officials. This diverse participant pool allowed for a holistic understanding of the programme's

implementation and its effects on student empowerment, teacher engagement, and community involvement. The findings presented in the following sections draw on these multiple perspectives to highlight both the achievements and contextual challenges experienced across the four schools.

Table 103: Uganda Participants by Category, School, and Gender

Participant category	Bukomero		St. James		Balawoli		Namasagali		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Student (girls in clubs)	0	0	10		12		13		35
Teacher	2	2	2	4	4	6	2	8	30
PTA	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	5
BOG	1	2	0	5	1	3	1	4	17
Government official	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
Students (boys in clubs)		0		11		12		13	36
Students (mixed, not in clubs)	6	3	6	2	5	5	9	3	39
Parent	0	0	0	0	0	7	1	6	14
Total	10	8	19	24	22	33	26	36	178

4.3.2 Innovation Context in Uganda

FAWE’s initiatives in Uganda were designed to promote gender equality and student empowerment through three interlinked innovations: the Tuseme model, Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP), and the development of Centres of Excellence (CoE). Each of the four case study schools below illustrates both the opportunities and constraints shaping the implementation and sustainability of these innovations within the Ugandan secondary education system.

4.3.2.1 Tuseme. Across the four schools, Tuseme was the most visible innovation, particularly in its early years of FAWE support. It provided a structured platform for students, especially girls, to articulate their experiences and take initiative in addressing social and academic challenges. In Bukomero and Balawoli, the Tuseme club initially flourished as a space for confidence building, leadership, and community engagement. However, its sustainability depended heavily on external facilitation and school-level commitment. Where club leadership changed or FAWE’s direct involvement declined, as in Namasagali and St. James Kagulu, the club either weakened or ceased to exist. This indicates that while Tuseme successfully inspired student-led activism, its long-term

integration into school culture required institutional embedding through policies, timetabling, and mentorship by trained teachers.

4.3.2.2 Gender Responsive Pedagogy. Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) training represented FAWE’s effort to translate gender equity principles into everyday classroom practice. In Bukomero, GRP training led to observable improvements in girls’ participation and teacher awareness, though internalisation of its principles was uneven. Balawoli demonstrated informal adoption of GRP elements, such as mixed seating arrangements and collaborative learning, even when teachers and students were not familiar with the framework by name. In contrast, St. James Kagulu and Namasagali showed limited awareness of GRP, suggesting that institutional memory fades quickly when staff turnover is high or refresher training is absent. Overall, while GRP contributed to more inclusive classroom interactions, its sustained practice depended on continuous training, school leadership support, and monitoring mechanisms.

4.3.2.3 Centres of Excellence. The concept of the Centre of Excellence (CoE) emerged as a guiding aspiration across Ugandan schools, although with varying levels of realisation. Bukomero was the most deliberate example, with a structured vision supported by FAWE-U in 2009 that combined GRP, life skills, and HIV/AIDS education. Balawoli and St. James Kagulu expressed similar ambitions, often embedding the concept of “excellence” within their school visions and improvement plans. Yet, in practice, these remained symbolic rather than operational. Most schools lacked clarity about the CoE framework or benchmarks for achieving such status. This gap reflects a broader national challenge—how to institutionalise innovative gender and empowerment initiatives within government-aided schools that operate under resource constraints.

4.3.2.4 Sustainability and Local Innovation. A cross-case analysis reveals a pattern of partial institutionalisation. Where school administrations embraced FAWE’s initiatives and integrated them into broader strategic goals, as seen in Bukomero and Balawoli, innovations were more likely to persist. Conversely, schools that relied solely on external facilitation experienced regression once donor engagement ended. Nonetheless, Ugandan schools have demonstrated local innovation in sustaining gender and empowerment efforts through other clubs (e.g., Scripture Union, Writers’ Club, and Health Club), reflecting adaptive resilience. The continued aspiration to become Centres of Excellence, despite resource limitations, highlights the enduring relevance of FAWE’s model and its potential for replication through stronger national frameworks.

4.3.3 Case Study 1: Bukomero Secondary School

General case study context:

Table 114: Bukomero Secondary School Profile

Category	Details
School Name	Bukomero Secondary School
School Location	Bukomero Town Council, Kiboga District, Uganda
Location Type	Rural
School Level	Lower and Upper Secondary
School Type	Government-Aided Secondary School
Enrolment Figures	1,246 students
Number of Teachers	55
Tuseme Club Status	Previously Active – currently inactive but with potential for revival
Tuseme Club enrolment figures	No student club members recorded
Centre of Excellence Status	Aspirational – supported by FAWE-U since 2009; components included GRP, Tuseme youth empowerment, HIV/AIDS, and Life Skills Training
Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) Status	Active during FAWE intervention; training improved girls’ participation, but uptake among staff was uneven
Number of Teachers Trained in GRP	Not specified

Bukomero Secondary School is a government-aided institution in Bukomero Town Council, Kiboga District, Uganda, with a long history and a vision to be a "centre of excellence." It is registered by the Ministry of Education and Sports. The school was established in 1966 with the Church of Uganda as the foundation body. The school’s vision is *“To create a centre of excellence,”* and the mission is *“to produce students with knowledge, skills and values that would enable them to overcome everyday challenges”*. The student-led clubs running in the school include Scripture Union, *Nkobazambogo* (youth vigilantes), and Writer’s Club. It was one of the schools in Uganda supported by FAWE-U to establish Tuseme Clubs. With a current enrollment of 1246 registered students and 55 teachers, the school aims to produce well-rounded individuals. While *Tuseme* is no longer active, its past presence and potential revival are significant aspects of the school's history and future aspirations.

FAWE Uganda began to engage the school administration and management for the transformation of Bukomero Senior Secondary School into a Centre of Excellence (CoE) in February 2009. The intervention was positively received. After the vision workshop, as a way of showing their commitment, the parents came together and formed small committees by sub-county to mobilise funds at the community level to start the activities defined in the action plan for the school. The

CoE components consisted of Gender-Responsive Pedagogy training for teachers, Tuseme youth empowerment programme, HIV/AIDS programme, and Life skills training. Challenges experienced by the school include poverty and the school being located in a rural and nomadic community.

The Director of Studies has been at the school since 2010, giving him firsthand experience of Tuseme's active period. The Board and PTA Members comprised individuals in key leadership and oversight roles within the school community, including the PTA Chairperson, Board Vice-Chairperson, and other board members. The Senior Male Teacher (SMT) joined the school in 2020 after the cessation of Tuseme, offering knowledge based on colleagues' accounts. Lastly, a female teacher, referred to as Double K and single Z, joined the school after Tuseme had already been established and served more as an observer than an active participant.

i) Tuseme

Theme 1) Tuseme Club Awareness, Participation, and Impact.

Teachers present during its operation had "vivid memories of the activities of the club". The Director of Studies (DOS) noted that when he joined in 2010, "the vibe was so high". However, the school management learned about it

Voice from the school management: "From the information that I am hearing from colleagues who were there at that time".

A teacher who joined later was aware of "debating all the time". The DOS was "personally involved in helping learners gather information and writing articles". Tuseme was seen as:

Voice from the school management: "Empowering young people with confidence and self-discovery. Then confidence in public speaking developed skills of writing".

Students reportedly "became confident and fluent" in English (IDI 10), which potentially improved "performance". Board and PTA members noted their role in "supporting the girl child" by providing "scholastic materials" and contributing to the

Voice from a PTA member: "Construction of the building, where now the girls are sleeping",

leading to a "reduction of pregnancy rates". The school management believed "It has trained learners to think". The DOS recalls being trained on GRP in 2012 and seeing a signpost for it, indicating a formal integration of gender-sensitive practices.

Voice from the DOS: "I remember we were trained in 2012 about gender-responsive, and the signpost was there."

The school management believes that a key benefit of GRP is "boosting the girl child," stemming from a perception that "girls are intellectually lower than boys, possibly," but that GRP helps to lift them.

Voice from the school management: "Mainly boosting the girl child, mainly, because girls are intellectually lower than boys, possibly, but boosting the girls."

The school leadership and students recognise that the programme has empowered students, improved their self-esteem, and promoted self-discovery and academic improvement.

Voice from the school management: "It has empowered them... improved their self-esteem... Self-discovery... academic improvement."

A student in a focus group confirmed that Tuseme is an organisation that "lifts both girls' and boys' gender in the form of education, providing some essential basic needs and materials to those who are unable to meet those needs and services." This highlights the inclusive nature of the programme.

Voice from a student: "Tuseme is an organisation that lifts both girls' and boys' gender in the form of education, providing some essential basic needs and materials to those who are unable to meet those needs and services."

Another student noted that Tuseme is all about "self-esteem" and gives girls a platform to "talk about... their feelings."

Voice from a student: "What I know about Tuseme, it's all about self-esteem, what girls can talk about, their feelings, what they can confess to others, that's all I know."

The accounts reveal that Tuseme was widely remembered for its energy, inclusiveness, and capacity to empower students with self-confidence, communication skills, and academic improvement. Teachers and the Director of Studies recalled active participation, while the School Management Team's delayed awareness points to a leadership gap in engagement. A notable contradiction emerges in how the programme is perceived: while students and teachers emphasised inclusivity and confidence-building for both genders, some leaders continued to frame Tuseme and GRP primarily as a tool for "boosting the girl child" on the assumption that girls are intellectually weaker. This illustrates both the strength of the programme in challenging gender stereotypes and the persistence of deficit-based thinking about girls' abilities within school leadership. Another gap lies in the uneven depth of awareness: some stakeholders only learned about Tuseme indirectly, suggesting weak institutional embedding. While Tuseme's contributions to reducing pregnancy rates, supporting girls' education, and enhancing student participation were widely acknowledged, these impacts relied heavily on the memory and enthusiasm of individuals,

raising questions about the sustainability of such transformations once external support or key champions withdraw.

Theme 2) Academic and Socio-Cultural Challenges.

The Director of Studies believed Tuseme empowered the girl child, addressing a perceived "demotivation towards their learning". A teacher observed that active Tuseme students were sometimes

***Voice from a teacher:** "Pulled out of class to do that training...and that affected lessons"*

The school management highlighted the potential of Tuseme in developing "skills of writing" The Director of Studies provides an example of academic success, noting that the best student in a senior four class was a girl, which speaks to the success of interventions like Tuseme.

***Voice from the school management:** "In fact, the current senior six, the current senior six, when they were in senior four, the best was the girl."*

The Director of Studies also noted that there are equal numbers of boys and girls taking certain subjects like Biology, which suggests Tuseme's work may have helped break down gender stereotypes in academics.

***Voice from the DOS:** "I personally teach them biology. And you find I have eight students, four girls, four boys."*

The Director of Studies noted an initial environment where "here they thought the boys are better than girls," and Tuseme was seen as a positive force in empowering girls. A teacher suggested a

***Voice from the DOS:** "Mindset, that some students say that debating is for a certain group...that most of them were not involved"*

The school management mentioned that GRP efforts helped stop the mentality that certain tasks "must be managed by only men or boys". The school management acknowledges the existing gender differences but supports promoting the girl child based on "abilities and capacity."

However, this is followed by a statement that the school distributes roles "depending on gender," indicating that traditional gender roles persist in some aspects.

***Voice from the school management:** "We know that naturally they are different. So, we promote the girl child depending on abilities and capacity and nature itself, because why not?"*

***Voice from the school management:** "We distribute roles depending on gender"*

The school's stance on gender is further clarified by a statement that they "do not discriminate between gender" and promote "equal chance and responsibilities" for all learners.

***Voice from the school management:** "We do not discriminate between gender."*

***Voice from the school management:** "We let our learners stand for equal chance and responsibilities, so we look at it as a better methodology for empowering them."*

The evidence points to Tuseme's positive role in enhancing academic performance, building confidence, and shifting gendered perceptions of learning. The Director of Studies highlights concrete outcomes such as girls excelling in examinations and balanced participation in subjects like Biology, showing progress in breaking stereotypes. At the same time, contradictions emerge: while Tuseme is credited with motivating girls academically, teachers noted that its activities occasionally disrupted lessons, which may have undermined learning in the short term. Furthermore, the School Management Team's statements reveal a tension between espoused values and practice: they affirm gender equality and equal opportunities, yet also justify distributing roles "depending on gender." This suggests partial progress in dismantling stereotypes but a continued reliance on traditional norms. Another gap is that some students viewed debating and related activities as exclusive to a few, which limited broader participation. Overall, the theme illustrates Tuseme's transformative potential but also shows how structural barriers and ingrained beliefs constrain its full academic and gender equity impact.

Theme 3) School Environment, Infrastructure, and Wellbeing.

Theme 3 explores how Tuseme influenced the school environment, infrastructure, and student well-being. It highlights how the programme, supported by FAWE and school leadership, enhanced physical spaces such as the girls' dormitory, improved access to resources, and fostered a culture of confidence, participation, and social cohesion among students. The theme also

examines challenges related to sustainability and the reliance on external support, as well as the programme's broader impact on inclusivity and school culture.

According to a school representative, the school provided

Voice from the school management: "The resources, the land. The land space, yes. And the availability of the teacher to supervise the project".

FAWE's support included contributions to the physical environment:

Voice from the school management: "FAWE beautified this place, they put their plants that you see...They put a chain link on the other side. They supported the girls' dormitory construction".

The girls' dormitory itself significantly improved the school environment for the girls, housing "about a hundred girls". The school also allowed the club to use the "computer lab freely". The Director of Studies believes the school's commitment to gender equality is reflected in the promotion of more participation from girls.

Voice from the DOS: "More participation from girls"

Tuseme empowered students, giving them "that right to speak out". The suggestion box introduced by Tuseme helped bring "that sanity in school". The school management believed Tuseme fostered "confidence and self-discovery". A teacher noted an improved "relationship among those students, because if we are in the same group, you automatically become my friend". The Director of Studies

expressed his appreciation for Tuseme, noting that it "empowered now the girl child" and that he "loved the way they were giving children that right to speak out."

***Voice from the DOS:** "As a teacher, I just loved the way they were giving children that right to speak out."*

***Voice from the DOS:** "So, I found Tuseme very beautiful, which empowered the girl child, and so I got interested in it."*

The programme's impact on students' sense of responsibility is highlighted, as they became more "vigilant and participatory."

***Voice from the school management:** "We have seen our learners becoming more vigilant and participatory in several activities."*

A teacher noted that students became more confident and fluent.

***Voice from the Senior Woman Teacher (SWT):** "Mainly the students became confident and fluent."*

The programme also helped promote a sense of togetherness among students.

***Voice from the SWT:** "We encourage everyone to, so that they work together."*

The evidence demonstrates that Tuseme contributed not only to academic empowerment but also to improvements in the broader school environment, infrastructure, and student well-being. FAWE's role in beautification and constructing a girls' dormitory provided tangible benefits that directly enhanced safety and reduced vulnerability, particularly for female students. Teachers, the School Management Team, and the Director of Studies emphasised gains in confidence, responsibility, and social cohesion, indicating that Tuseme strengthened both individual and collective student life. At the same time, contradictions emerge: the reliance on external factors such as FAWE for infrastructure improvements raises concerns about sustainability, as these gains may not be replicated or maintained without donor input. While the suggestion box and other participatory mechanisms created a more open school environment, these changes were not fully institutionalised, leaving them vulnerable to fading once the club's momentum declined. Another gap lies in the emphasis on empowering girls, while evidence also shows boys benefited from improved relationships and fluency, suggesting that the framing of the programme as girl-centred may have overlooked its broader inclusivity. Overall, the theme illustrates the transformative potential of Tuseme in reshaping school culture and infrastructure, while simultaneously exposing the fragility of these advances in the absence of long-term structural integration.

Theme 4) Community and Parental Engagement.

This theme examines the role of parents and the wider community in supporting Tuseme activities. It highlights efforts to involve parents in school projects, raise awareness, and extend the programme's reach beyond the classroom, while also identifying gaps in long-term engagement

and sustainability. The school actively involved parents, particularly in the Tuseme magazine project, by

***Voice from the DOS:** "Going to the parents and pick some information".*

Awareness was also created in the wider community through sensitisation activities. Board and PTA members learned

***Voice from a PTA member:** "It's important to involve the parents and the child as well".*

Community and parental engagement emerged as an important but relatively underdeveloped component of Tuseme. The DOS emphasised how activities such as the Tuseme magazine drew information from parents, creating a link between home and school, while Board and PTA members underscored the value of joint involvement of both children and parents. Sensitisation efforts also extended Tuseme's visibility beyond the school. However, the engagement appears to have been event-driven and project-specific rather than a structured, long-term strategy. A gap exists in sustaining parent and community participation after external facilitation wanes. While parents valued involvement when prompted, there is little evidence of systematic mechanisms for continuous collaboration, which risks reducing engagement to isolated moments rather than embedding it in school culture. This indicates both the strength of Tuseme in opening space for community dialogue and the limitation of its reliance on short-term initiatives without strong institutional follow-through.

Theme 5) Sustainability, Scalability, and Good Practices.

The Director of Studies emphasised the lack of a clear sustainability plan, noting that

***Voice from the DOS:** "When FAWE pulled out, everything ceased".*

Board and PTA members echoed this concern about the temporary nature of donor funding. Good practices included the student-led magazine, the suggestion box, and community sensitisation. The school management suggested providing

***Voice from a PTA member:** "Materials, literature, provide literature. Do you provide journals, magazines to your club members?".*

The Director of Studies highlights the importance of setting clear objectives for such projects to ensure they extend "beyond your school."

Voice from the DOS: "Basically, the objectives. If we have it properly spelt, then we can help to push them ahead... And yet if you follow the objectives, the issue is extending them beyond your school."

Implementation challenges include a lack of accessibility to certain areas, like "refugee camps" and the "availability of the people you want to reach out to."

Voice from the school management: "The issue of accessibility to those refugee camps."

Voice from the school management: "Then the availability of the people you want to reach out to is whether they are there."

The school management suggests potential solutions for improving accessibility and engagement, such as creating regional offices, having dedicated officials for outreach, and establishing focal persons in different areas.

Voice from the school management: "One of them is creating regional offices... Frequent facilitation of officials who can reach out to these places... Creating focal persons in these particular areas, people you can call and reach out to any time, and you get answers."

The school management also emphasises the need for providing reading materials like journals and magazines to club members to improve literacy and writing skills.

Voice from the school management: "Do you provide journals, magazines to your club members... Reading materials so that the learners can learn to write, because you cannot learn how to write without reading."

The school had other active clubs like the Writers' Club. The new curriculum's provision for club time was seen as an opportunity. A major gap was the lack of a robust sustainability plan for Tuseme beyond external funding. The school management also noted a shortage of language teachers.

This theme underscores that while Tuseme introduced several innovative practices, such as the student-led magazine, suggestion box, and community sensitisation, its sustainability was undermined by dependence on donor funding. Once FAWE's support ended, activities ceased, pointing to the absence of a self-reliant institutional framework. Stakeholders like the school management and the DOS proposed solutions such as regional outreach, focal persons, and provision of reading materials, yet these ideas remained aspirational rather than implemented. A contradiction arises between recognition of the need for long-term planning and the reliance on short-term external facilitation. Another gap is the shortage of language teachers, which undermines the continuity of programmes aimed at literacy and writing skills. While the curriculum's provision for club time offers structural space for revival, the failure to integrate Tuseme into the school's permanent systems reflects a missed opportunity for scaling and

institutionalisation. The theme highlights the paradox of high-impact initiatives whose future is cut short by a lack of sustainability planning and overdependence on external actors.

Recommendations for Model Adaptation and Strengthening

Across the different stakeholder groups, there was consensus on the importance of adapting the Tuseme model to ensure both effectiveness and sustainability. The Director of Studies highlighted the need for teachers to undergo training to fully grasp the objectives and benefits of the approach. This view was echoed by the school management, which emphasised not only regular visits from headquarters to provide guidance but also the necessity of financing selected learners so that they could return to the school better equipped to lead Tuseme activities. The school management further stressed that involving government structures would be essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the model. Similarly, members of the Board and the Parent–Teacher Association (PTA) underscored the need for a baseline survey before implementation, which would allow the programme to be contextualised to the realities of the school. Teachers also pointed to the value of creative outputs, recommending the continuous production of magazines as a way of sustaining engagement and visibility of the initiative.

Enabling factors that supported the Tuseme initiative were evident in the early stages of its implementation. Stakeholders recalled the high enthusiasm among both students and teachers, coupled with the immediate impact of the club in boosting student confidence and amplifying their voices. School support through resource allocation and teacher supervision further enabled the programme’s activities. The creation of a suggestion box was cited as a particularly valuable innovation, as it gave students a platform for expression even outside formal club sessions. The alignment of Tuseme activities with the new curriculum also made it easier for the programme to fit into school routines. Teachers expressed continued enthusiasm for reviving the club, and students showed strong interest in participating, suggesting that the model retained relevance even after its initial momentum had waned.

However, several dis-enabling factors also came to the fore, pointing to critical gaps in sustainability. Many stakeholders noted that the heavy reliance on external support from FAWE created dependency, and when this support was withdrawn, the club activities quickly collapsed. The absence of a clear sustainability plan within the school’s own management structures exacerbated this challenge, while internal staff changes further disrupted continuity. Teachers and students alike reported demotivation following the loss of resources once provided by FAWE, including essential materials. Practical constraints such as the congested curriculum and the shortage of language teachers also posed barriers, leaving limited space for Tuseme activities. In some cases, a negative mindset among students weakened participation, further undermining the club’s viability.

ii) Centres of Excellence

The idea of the school as a Centre of Excellence (CoE) has been both aspirational and contested. The institution itself articulates a vision “to create a centre of excellence”, and FAWE initially supported this ambition. Members of the Board and PTA shared the view that the school had the potential to meet this goal, pointing to improvements in performance, growing alumni networks,

enrollment, and facilities. The school management also referred to the school as a CoE and even expressed interest in exchange programmes with other institutions. Yet despite these affirmations, there was little clarity about whether the school had actually achieved CoE status or what this designation required in practice.

Enabling factors included the school's vision statement and demonstrated progress in academic and infrastructural terms. The school management's enthusiasm for collaboration with other CoEs reinforced this ambition. However, FAWE's withdrawal appeared to have stalled momentum, and without continued external support, the aspiration remained largely symbolic. Moreover, across interviews, there was no shared understanding of the CoE framework, its benchmarks, or its current activities. This gap between vision and operational reality highlights a disjuncture where the language of "excellence" persists, but its meaning and implementation remain ambiguous.

iii) Gender Responsive Pedagogy

Awareness and perceptions of GRP were varied across the school community. The Director of Studies, who received training in 2012, reported that the approach had led to notable improvements in girls' participation, both in the classroom and in subject choices. Similarly, the school management expressed an understanding of merit-based promotion that disregarded gender as a limiting factor. However, this progressive outlook was not consistently shared. At least one teacher voiced doubts about girls' intellectual abilities, raising concerns that elements of bias remained entrenched within the teaching body.

Several factors enabled the uptake of GRP. Teacher training was central, with those exposed to the programme reporting positive changes in student confidence and engagement. The school management's efforts to distribute leadership roles more equitably across genders and to encourage mixed grouping also fostered improved relationships between boys and girls. At the same time, obstacles persisted. The school's earlier culture reflected implicit gender bias, and the persistence of at least one teacher's biased perspective signalled that training alone had not fully shifted attitudes. This contradiction between institutional commitments and lingering scepticism among staff suggests uneven internalisation of GRP principles.

4.3.4 Case Study 2: St. James Kagulu Senior Secondary School

General case study context

Table 125: St. James Kagulu Senior Secondary School Profile

Category	Details
School Name	St. James Kagulu Senior Secondary School
School Location	Buyende District, Eastern Uganda
Location Type	Rural
School Level	Lower and Upper Secondary
School Type	Mixed-Gender Partnership School (Day and Boarding), Government-Aided since 2017
Enrolment Figures	750 students
Number of Teachers	24
Tuseme Club Status	Active through FAWE-supported student clubs, for example, Health Club, Girls Education Club, Right to Play, SRHR, Scripture Union
Tuseme Club enrolment figures (21)	Girls (10); Boys (11)
Centre of Excellence Status	Not Established – no awareness or perception of CoE among students or staff
Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) Status	Practised indirectly through inclusive classroom arrangements and FAWE workshops; awareness remains low
Number of Teachers Trained in GRP	Not specified

St. James Kagulu Senior Secondary School, located in Buyende District, Eastern Uganda, is a mixed-gender partnership school with both day and boarding sections. Established in 1987 and grant-aided since 2017, the school operates under the vision "nothing without labour" and the mission "to offer quality education and produce all-round self-reliant students for national development." With 750 students and an even distribution of 24 male and female teachers, the school hosts several student-led clubs, including the FAWE Health Club, Girls Education Club, Right to Play, SRHR, and Scripture Union. This case study examines the presence and impact of the Tuseme initiative, primarily through the lens of the FAWE-supported clubs. St. James Kagulu is a mixed secondary school in Buyende District, serving a community in Eastern Uganda. As stated in the initial information, the school is "registered as a partnership school by the Ministry of Education and Sports" and has evolved from a community school to a government-aided institution with the Church of Uganda as its foundation body.

i) *Tuseme*

Theme 1) Tuseme Club Awareness, Participation, and Impact.

A PTA/BOG member notes the delayed arrival of the project at the school, which highlights the anticipation and interest the community had for the programme.

***Voice from a PTA member:** "Yes, we have heard about it, and it took some time before reaching our school, and we were wondering when it would reach."*

A school management member points out that the headteacher was instrumental in initiating the club, indicating a top-down approach to its establishment.

***Voice from school management:** "It was the headteacher who identified us."*

The same school management member describes the project as an "opportunity to discover" and a source of "very relevant" information, underscoring the teachers' motivation and positive reception.

***Voice from school management:** "It was an opportunity for me to discover what they were doing in schools."*

***Voice from school management:** "The information that they were giving us was very relevant to the young girls."*

A school management member explains the recruitment process involved "convincing the learners," and using "skits, which are educative," revealing a proactive and creative strategy to engage students.

Voice from school management: "Through convincing the learners from class levels, so we could recruit from there."

A female student describes Tuseme as a "girl supporting project", which suggests that, despite its inclusivity, its primary focus on empowering girls is well-understood by the students themselves.

Voice from a female student: "It is a girl supporting project which enables girls to gain confidence, solve their problems, that is all."

A PTA/BOG member notes that the programme initially focused on "girls who are done with secondary school," indicating a specific target demographic at the outset.

Voice from a PTA member: "It was mostly dealing with girls who are done with secondary school."

A male student, however, expresses that he joined because it "fights for the equality of all human beings," demonstrating the club's inclusive appeal and impact on gender perception from a male perspective.

Voice from a male student: "I joined that club... Just because it fights for the equality of all human beings."

Male students describe a sense of pride and happiness from their participation, citing that the club "helps one speak," teaches that "boys and girls, we are equal," and trains them to "speak in public." This highlights the club's role in building confidence and promoting gender equality among male students.

Voice from a male student: "I feel so good when I join those clubs, because it helps one speak, how he feels, and also teaches us that boys and girls are equal."

Voice from a male student: "I feel happy when I join the clubs, because they teach us how to make parties, and they train us how to speak in public."

Several male students expressed a sense of pride and enjoyment, feeling "good and better" as members. This indicates a strong sense of belonging and positive self-image fostered by the club.

Voice from a male student: "I feel good when I'm a member of such a particular club."

Male students also see the club as a tool to help others, particularly their female peers, and to become "an advocate". This demonstrates that the club cultivates empathy and a sense of social responsibility.

Voice from a male student: "It's a kind of club that can help my sister, my friend, and my classmates, plus my village mates."

The club is credited with improving students' public speaking skills, as evidenced by male students' remarks about being able to "speak up our voices" and become "audible enough." This shows a direct impact on communication skills.

Voice from a male student: "It helps us to speak up for our voices."

A male student links the club's activities to personal growth, stating it will help him "look at the future and avoid the violating acts," highlighting the club's role in shaping moral character and future-oriented thinking.

Voice from a male student: "It will still help me to look at the future and avoid the violating acts."

Multiple male students highlight the club's role in developing self-confidence and public speaking abilities, leading them to feel they can "stand in public and I speak out" and speak "without fear." This indicates a significant boost in self-assurance.

Voice from a male student: "I've learned being self-confident, such that I can stand in public and speak out about anything that I feel like, that can help out the country and others at large."

Voice from a male student: "I learned to be patient and to speak without fear."

A male student expresses a desire to "fight for the rights of our sisters," which shows the club successfully instils a sense of shared responsibility for gender equality.

Voice from a male student: "To fight for the rights of our sisters, the girls."

A male student mentions the practical skill of making "reusable pads," which highlights the club's focus on providing tangible, useful skills.

Voice from a male student: "FAWE helped us to make reusable pads."

A male student notes a shift in his behaviour, learning to "help" girls rather than "laughing at" them when they have problems. This demonstrates the club's success in changing attitudes and promoting supportive behaviour.

Voice from a male student: "I learned that instead of laughing at girls when they have a problem, I just help them."

The club's focus on social responsibility is further confirmed by a male student who learned to "avoid the violating acts" and "direct those who are in need to the positions or the places that they can get help from."

Voice from a male student: "I should avoid violating acts against other genders and direct those who are in need to the positions or places where they can get help from."

The club's impact extends to broader social issues, as a male student notes it has helped them "conserve our environment," showing a holistic approach to youth development.

Voice from a male student: "Those clubs have helped us to conserve our environment."

A male student emphasises the value of unity and cooperation within the club, indicating that it promotes a sense of teamwork.

Voice from a male student: "It helped me to know that we should be united over cooperative, working hand in hand with the others, since it is a group."

The blood donation programme is cited by a male student as a particularly "beneficial" and "best activity," highlighting the positive reception of activities that contribute to the wider community.

Voice from a male student: "My best activity that we did here was a programme of blood donation."

A male student highlights that the club's activities help learners focus on education and avoid harmful "violating acts," showcasing the club's role in promoting discipline and academic commitment.

Voice from a male student: "Concentrating on education and leaving those violating acts that most boys engage in."

A male student states that making sanitary pads can "create employment" and that participating in such activities helps boys acquire skills and build friendships, underscoring the development of life skills and economic empowerment.

Voice from a male student: "Making sanitary pads can also create employment."

Voice from a male student: "When the boy engages in those activities, he will get skills to make the things which can help him to get money."

Voice from a male student: "It can also help him to create friendships because he can deliver those things to his friends."

A male student explains how the club's practical skills, such as making sanitary pads, can be used to help others, illustrating the club's impact on problem-solving and social support.

Voice from a male student: "When this and this happen to you, you do this and solve it. In simple terms, when I know how to make these sanitary pads, I can make them and I deliver to my friends who are there or who are lacking those sanitary pads."

A male student expresses that the club helps him focus on his education and future, indicating a long-term, goal-oriented mindset fostered by the programme.

Voice from a male student: "It will help me to focus on my education."

A male student's statement that he can "become a politician" and help his community demonstrates that the club inspires leadership aspirations beyond the school context.

Voice from a male student: "I can even become a politician in that I can help my fellow people in my village."

A male student believes that textbooks from organisations would help them "do more research" and "teach others," suggesting a desire for more resources to enhance their roles as educators and advocates.

Voice from a male student: "We need some textbooks, for example, that are from the organisations that may help us to conduct more research, how to teach others and how to conduct such activities to improve our clubs."

The testimonies from teachers, PTA members, and both female and male students collectively illustrate that while the Tuseme club began with a clear emphasis on empowering girls, it has evolved into a holistic platform that nurtures inclusivity, confidence, and social responsibility across genders. The headteacher's role in initiating the programme demonstrates a top-down entry point, but the enthusiasm of learners expressed through their pride, skill acquisition, and future-oriented aspirations reveals a bottom-up ownership that sustains its impact. Importantly, male students' reflections show a transformative shift in attitudes toward gender equality, from simply recognising girls' struggles to actively positioning themselves as advocates, helpers, and community leaders. The club is therefore not only a gender empowerment tool but also a vehicle for cultivating leadership, life skills, and civic consciousness, with ripple effects that extend beyond the school into families and communities.

Theme 2) Academic and Socio-Cultural Challenges.

A male student raises a concern that unequal punishments could lead to girls dropping out of school, pointing to a negative aspect of GRP implementation when not executed equitably.

Voice from a male student: "But if we come to a situation that we have made wrong in class, when the teacher punishes us, when punishes, she gives us five strokes, when he or she gives girls over ten, that one will lead to school dropouts of girls."

A male student highlights that the club "helps us to improve on our academic performance" by bringing together boys and girls, including "those who are isolated," to "fight so that they can

improve on their performance." This shows the club's positive influence on collaborative learning and academic outcomes.

Voice from a male student: "It also helps us to improve our academic performance."

Voice from a male student: "In the way that when they bring on board both boys and girls, they can also bring on board those who are isolated, and they can be together to fight so that they can improve on their performance."

A mixed group of students reveals a reciprocal learning dynamic where boys help girls with mathematics and girls help boys with English, demonstrating that the club's activities facilitate peer-to-peer support across gender lines.

Voice from a mixed FGD of students: "This thing helps us if there is a weak student in class, maybe like girls mostly sometimes, we are weak in mathematics, the boys can help, and even we girls, we can help them in English."

A male student affirms that students are given "equal opportunities and equal rights," citing the presence of both male and female leaders, which suggests a successful implementation of gender equality principles.

Voice from a male student: "... we are given equal activities because in the art clubs we have leaders of both sexes, girls and boys. We are leading those clubs. So, we are given equal opportunities and equal rights and activities."

In contrast, another male student expresses a feeling that "girls were more prioritised than boys" and that "boys are a bit slowing down" because organisations give "more attention to girls." This reveals a perception of imbalance and a feeling of being left out among some male students.

Voice from a male student: "When it came, again, girls were more prioritised than boys."

Voice from a male student: "Boys are a bit slowing down because every organisation, everybody, they are giving more attention to girls than boys."

The feeling of boys being "left out" is a recurring sentiment, with one male student noting it "always touched my heart." This indicates a psychological impact of perceived favouritism.

Voice from a male student: "The boys are left out as per now."

Voice from a male student: "It always touched my heart because everyone gives attention to the girls."

A male student expresses a feeling of injustice in disciplinary matters, believing that a girl's complaint will always "win you," which highlights a perception of unequal treatment and a potential barrier to genuine equality.

Voice from a male student: "When you report, assuming a girl reports that maybe you insulted her or you hurt her, you need much, you need little. The girl will have to win you."

A male student directly states that "girls are given more chances than boys," reinforcing the sentiment of perceived gender bias.

Voice from a male student: "The girls are given more chances than boys."

A male student argues for the inclusion of boys in the club, stating it will help him learn things he can share with friends in other schools, demonstrating the club's potential for wider-reaching impact through male advocacy.

Voice from a male student: "In addition to my brother, who has said, when we boys are also engaged in these clubs, it will still help us."

Voice from a male student: "Some of us have friends who are girls who are not in these clubs from certain schools."

Voice from a male student: "Means that when I'm also there, included in those clubs with a boy, it will help me also to know something that I can go and tell my friend that this and this, when it happens to you, you do this to solve it."

A male student notes that the club promotes the idea that "we are all equal" and should "help each other," which highlights the club's success in changing gender perceptions and fostering a culture of mutual support.

Voice from a male student: "Tells us that we are all equal."

Voice from a male student: "All girls and boys, we are equal, and we should help each other through."

A male student points out a subtle form of gender bias where a female teacher "cannot give an example using a boy" and "must at least use the name of a girl," revealing a potential disconnect between the club's teachings and classroom practices.

Voice from a male student: "For us here, for example, if it's a female teacher teaching, like she wants to give an example. She cannot give an example using a boy. Like narrating

an experience that she passed through. She must at least use the name of a girl, not of a boy."

A female student notes that boys can be "bossy" and "bully others," indicating that traditional gender dynamics and power imbalances can still be a challenge within the club environment.

Voice from a female student: *"There are those boys that are bossy, they call themselves bosses, they come and bully others, and they tell you, won't do this or other."*

A male student mentions a "challenge also of disrespect," pointing to a general issue that the club may need to address.

Voice from a male student: *"There is a challenge also of disrespect."*

Male students describe a fear of public speaking and shyness as challenges, highlighting the importance of the club's role in building confidence and providing a safe space for expression.

Voice from a male student: *"Other students fear speaking publicly."*

Voice from a male student: *"The challenge that I found is that some people are very shy."*

A school management member identifies a "challenge of exposure" and notes that "the girls feel inferior," which justifies the club's focus on empowering girls and highlights the underlying issues it aims to solve.

Voice from school management: *"We have a challenge of exposure."*

Voice from school management: *"You see, the girls feel inferior."*

A male student emphasises that the club helps promote respect and stronger relationships, demonstrating its positive impact on social dynamics.

Voice from a male student: *"It helps one to respect one another, and it also creates stronger relationships between boys and girls."*

A male student also notes that the club helps foster a sense of individual responsibility.

Voice from a male student: *"It has helped everyone to know that he or she is a responsible person. He should take on the responsibilities his or herself. Yeah."*

The reflections in this theme reveal both the strengths and the tensions in the implementation of gender-responsive programming within the Tusame clubs. On one hand, the clubs are credited with improving academic performance, fostering peer-to-peer support across gender lines, promoting respect, building confidence, and nurturing a sense of equality and responsibility among students. Boys and girls alike describe the benefits of reciprocal learning, leadership opportunities, and strengthened social relationships, pointing to genuine progress toward inclusive

empowerment. On the other hand, some male students expressed feelings of exclusion and bias, citing unequal punishments, perceived favouritism toward girls, and classroom practices that appear to prioritise female experiences. These sentiments, at times emotional, underscore the risk that equity efforts may be misinterpreted as preferential treatment if not carefully balanced. Meanwhile, challenges such as shyness, bullying, disrespect, and girls' feelings of inferiority persist, highlighting the ongoing need for sensitisation, mentorship, and equitable reinforcement. Overall, the theme underscores that while Tuseme clubs are reshaping gender relations in constructive ways, achieving true balance requires continuous dialogue, sensitivity, and intentional strategies to ensure that empowerment of one group does not inadvertently create perceptions of marginalisation in another.

Theme 3) School Environment, Infrastructure, and Wellbeing.

School management members and a mixed FDG of students confirm that the school provides "materials" and "time allocation" for the club, indicating strong institutional support.

***Voice from school management:** "The school supported us by giving us some materials."*

***Voice from school management:** "We normally have like a full hour in the school timetable."*

***Voice from school management:** "Even during assemblies, they give us slots, and then we present."*

***Voice from an Assistant DOS:** "They are given time allocation for discussions."*

A former DOS explicitly mentions that the school provides "manila papers" and "markers," showing the tangible support given to club activities.

***Voice from a former DOS:** "The school supported materials like manila papers, and these markers for writing their information, and also organising their meetings, the school had that, which allowed it to take place."*

Students state that their parents are "aware" of their club involvement because of the "support" they receive and the "activities" they discuss at home, indicating a positive flow of information and a good relationship between the club, students, and their families.

***Voice from a male student:** "Yes, they are aware, because of the support that we get from the clubs."*

***Voice from a male student:** "They are aware because when we get back home, we get to interact with them."*

***Voice from a male student:** "We also tell them of the activities we do."*

One student acknowledges that some parents are "very tough" and "cannot be explained to," highlighting a potential barrier to parental engagement and a gap in the club's outreach.

***Voice from a male student:** "There are some of our members in the club whose parents are not aware of that."*

***Voice from a male student:** "Because some parents are very tough and they cannot be explained to."*

A student links the club's support to tangible benefits like "scholastic materials", which makes parents more aware of the club's value.

***Voice from a male student:** "Other groups provide us with scholastic materials like books and pens to use in our studies."*

***Voice from a male student:** "Whenever someone sees his or her child coming with a book, ask that person where they got those books?"*

A school management member mentions the practice of informing parents about students' movements, indicating a proactive approach to parental communication and safety.

***Voice from school management:** "We would tell the parents they are moving with us."*

An Assistant DOS expresses concern that the withdrawal of the club would negatively affect the "disciplinary department" due to a lack of "continuous counselling," underscoring the club's vital role in student well-being and school discipline.

***Voice from an Assistant DOS:** "The club activities assist in the disciplinary department because there is continuous counselling among students from the support of the club, so when the club withdraws, the disciplinary department will be affected."*

This theme highlights the strong institutional and parental support structures that underpin the sustainability and effectiveness of the Tuseme club. School leadership and staff not only allocate time within the timetable and assemblies but also provide tangible resources such as manila papers, markers, and other scholastic materials, demonstrating their commitment to embedding the club into the academic environment. The recognition that parents are generally aware of and supportive of their children's participation, partly due to the visible benefits like scholastic materials, shows a healthy linkage between school, home, and club activities.

However, the mention of "tough" parents who resist explanation reveals a gap in outreach and the need for strategies to strengthen parental engagement across the board. Importantly, the Assistant DOS underscores the club's role beyond extracurricular activities, noting its positive influence on discipline and counselling, which suggests that the club has become integral to the school's overall well-being and behavioural management framework. Together, these insights emphasise that while institutional and parental support are key enablers of success, continuous communication and sensitisation are necessary to bridge remaining gaps and ensure sustained impact.

Theme 4) Community and Parental Engagement.

The data on parental awareness and communication, as detailed in the Psychosocial Wellbeing section above, shows the club's successful efforts to bridge the gap between school and home.

Students consistently reported that their parents were aware of the club activities due to the support they received and the discussions that took place at home.

Voice from a male student: "Yes, they are aware, because of the support that we get from the clubs."

This indicates that tangible support and visible benefits, such as materials or participation in club projects, help reinforce parental understanding and appreciation of the club. Students further elaborated on how regular interaction with their families allows them to communicate the learning and experiences gained from the club.

Voice from a male student: "They are aware because when we get back home, we get to interact with them."

These reflections show that students themselves act as conduits for information, extending the reach of Tuseme beyond the school walls and enhancing parental engagement. The school management complements this by proactively informing parents about students' movements and participation, creating a structured feedback loop between school and home.

Voice from a male student: "We also tell them of the activities we do."

Voice from school management: "We would tell the parents they are moving with us."

Together, these practices suggest that Tuseme successfully fosters a culture of transparency and accountability, where parents are not only aware but also recognise the value of club activities. This ongoing engagement strengthens the legitimacy of the club in the community and underscores the importance of integrating parental involvement into extracurricular programmes. At the same time, the findings imply that such engagement is most effective when it combines student initiative with deliberate school-facilitated communication, ensuring sustained parental and community participation.

Theme 5) Sustainability, Scalability, and Good Practices.

A school management member suggests that "sensitisation" is needed and that former club members who are now in universities could "come and help," proposing a sustainable model of peer-to-peer mentorship and knowledge transfer.

***Voice from school management:** "They also need some sensitisation."*

***Voice from school management:** "We could use some of our learners who have been in these clubs, and they are now in universities; they can come and help."*

A male student mentions that activities are chosen based on "trending topics" and that "co-educators" left by the leaders help with implementation, indicating a flexible, student-driven approach and a focus on passing on leadership skills.

***Voice from a male student:** "Actually, by the leaders. For example, in the community concerns, we have the co-educators who were left."*

***Voice from a male student:** "We take these activities according to the topics that are going on or being taught by the leaders."*

A male student points out the challenge of identifying club members, and another suggests providing T-shirts for this purpose, highlighting a practical problem and a simple, effective solution.

***Voice from a male student:** "Other members of our group might not be identified, in such a way that when we like to have a meeting, we find it difficult to collect our friends when they are not identified."*

***Voice from a male student:** "We provided some T-shirts to help others be identified."*

A male student describes a key challenge of "inadequate materials" and suggests working with the administration to get them, demonstrating a proactive, problem-solving mindset.

Voice from a male student: "We also have a challenge of inadequate materials to use."

Voice from a male student: "Requesting the administration for the inadequate materials used in some activities, like making reusable pads."

A male student and a school management member both highlight the challenge of limited time, with students requesting more time on the timetable. This indicates a high level of engagement and a desire for more opportunities to participate.

Voice from a male student: "I think that we are being given a limited little time to participate in our clubs."

Voice from school management: "As much as the allocated time, that small time, the time was not enough."

Voice from a male student: "We have tried at least to talk to our teachers to fix the time on the school timetable so that we are also inclusive and give us enough time to conduct our business with our colleagues in the clubs."

A school management member also points to a lack of support from other teachers and a shortage of financial resources, which are key obstacles to the club's sustainability.

Voice from school management: "Sometimes even the support from other teachers was lacking in information."

Voice from school management: "We were lacking resources."

Voice from school management: "Like we need to transport the children."

The school management member notes that topics are chosen by "negotiating with the learners," demonstrating a student-centred approach to curriculum and activity planning.

Voice from school management: "We were always negotiating with the learners."

Theme 5 highlights both the promising practices and the persistent challenges in ensuring the sustainability and scalability of the Tuseme clubs. The use of former members now in universities as potential mentors reflects an innovative peer-to-peer model that could institutionalise continuity and intergenerational learning. The flexibility of student-driven leadership, with activities aligned to "trending topics" and the presence of co-educators, underscores the adaptability of the club and its emphasis on building future leaders. At the same time, practical concerns such as the need for identification (T-shirts), inadequate materials, and limited time on the timetable reveal structural barriers that must be addressed to fully harness student enthusiasm. The school management's

recognition of limited teacher support and scarce financial resources also points to the need for stronger institutional buy-in and resource mobilisation. Importantly, the collaborative approach of negotiating activity topics with learners ensures that programming remains relevant and inclusive. Overall, this theme illustrates a strong foundation of good practices rooted in student agency and adaptability, but emphasises that sustainability requires consistent resourcing, institutional support, and deliberate strategies to scale the model while maintaining quality.

Recommendations for Model Adaptation and Strengthening

The findings suggest several ways in which the Tuseme initiative at St. James Kagulu can be strengthened. Training student leaders to serve as co-facilitators would enhance peer-to-peer learning and ensure continuity of knowledge transfer. More frequent visits from the FAWE team would provide ongoing mentorship and sustain momentum within the clubs. Equal involvement of both boys and girls is essential, and this can be achieved by deliberately designing activities that reflect the interests and needs of different genders. Engagement with key school stakeholders, such as the PTA and BOG, during their meetings would reinforce institutional support, while open enrollment policies would widen access and allow all interested students to participate. Increasing facilitation for activities, including the provision of materials and logistical support, would further boost the effectiveness and visibility of the programme.

Several conditions at St. James Kagulu create a favourable environment for the Tuseme initiative. The presence of other extracurricular activities with similar objectives has strengthened the programme's sustainability by fostering a culture of student engagement. The school leadership has shown responsiveness to student advocacy, as evidenced by the provision of a changing room for girls. The initiative also aligns well with national educational priorities, particularly the new lower secondary curriculum, which promotes student participation and collaborative learning. Furthermore, the practical skills acquired in the clubs, such as making reusable sanitary pads, carry the potential to serve as income-generating opportunities for students, adding tangible value to their participation.

Despite these strengths, several obstacles continue to limit the programme's impact. Many students remain unaware of the Tuseme initiative by name, which weakens its visibility and recognition. The time allocated for club activities is inadequate, with only one hour per week formally available, restricting meaningful engagement. Membership selection is not always interest-driven, as teachers sometimes assign students to clubs without considering their preferences, leading to disengagement. Some boys expressed concerns that activities often prioritise girls' issues, creating perceptions of imbalance. Resource limitations also pose challenges, since students are sometimes expected to contribute materials they cannot afford. Teachers supporting the initiative have limited opportunities for professional development, and parental engagement remains inconsistent, with some parents lacking information about the clubs and therefore offering little support.

ii) Centres of Excellence

There is no evidence of awareness or perception of Centres of Excellence status among students or staff at St. James Kagulu. As a result, no clear enabling or disabling factors could be identified in this area. This indicates a need for clearer communication about the concept and its potential

benefits, so that the school community can recognise and engage with the designation more meaningfully.

St. James Kagulu has the potential to become a COE in gender-responsive education. It's already on the right path by fostering an inclusive environment where male students can act as advocates for gender equality, successfully integrating club activities into the school timetable, and demonstrating a collaborative spirit between students and the administration. To fully realise its potential as a COE, the school must tackle the remaining challenges of perceived gender bias and inconsistent parental support. By doing so, it can serve as a powerful example to other schools in Uganda on how to successfully implement a truly equitable and sustainable gender-responsive programme that benefits all students and the wider community.

iii) Gender Responsive Pedagogy

Awareness of FAWE's Gender Responsive Pedagogy framework is generally low among students, who benefit from the practices but are unfamiliar with the terminology or its provisions. There were differing perceptions of gender balance: while many students felt that girls received more attention, others, especially the girls themselves, considered the implementation to be fair and inclusive. The national lower secondary curriculum has played a key role in embedding gender responsiveness by encouraging boys and girls to sit together and participate equally in classroom activities. FAWE's role in providing workshops and seminars has further supported this inclusivity. However, the absence of explicit awareness of GRP and the mixed perceptions around gender favouritism point to gaps in communication and suggest that stronger sensitisation is needed for both students and teachers.

4.3.5 Case Study 3: Balawoli Secondary School

General case study context

Table 136: Balawoli Secondary School Profile

Category	Details
School Name	Balawoli Secondary School
School Location	Balawoli, Kamuli District, Uganda
Location Type	Rural
School Level	Lower and Upper Secondary
School Type	Government-Aided Secondary School
Enrolment Figures	871 students
Number of Teachers	31 (24 male, 7 female)
Tuseme Club Status	Previously Active – potential for revival and institutionalisation
Tuseme Club enrolment figures (24)	Girls (12); Boys (12)
Centre of Excellence Status	Aspirational – strong foundation in student-led empowerment; requires formalisation of Tuseme and other clubs
Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) Status	Principles evident in practice through inclusive activities and FAWE-supported workshops; formal awareness is low
Number of Teachers Trained in GRP	Not specified

Balawoli Secondary School is a government-aided secondary school located in Kamuli District, Uganda, and it is registered with the Ministry of Education and Sports. The school has a sizable student population of 871, served by a teaching staff of 31, comprising 24 male and 7 female. The school's vision is "To develop an institution of excellence," and its mission is "To nurture students with love for discipline, education, and skills for overall success in life." Currently active student-led clubs include the debating club, the writers club, the Iowa State University Club, the Good School Club, and the health club. The now-defunct Tuseme Club, previously supported by FAWE, operated within this environment and aimed to empower students, particularly girls.

The primary participants in discussions related to Tuseme include students and teachers. Teachers in presented a range of demographic characteristics: varying ages (24-50+), marital statuses (single, married), teaching experience (1-10+ years), and subject specialisations. This diversity likely influenced their perspectives on student clubs and the needs of the student body. Students in FGD 9 were secondary school students, although their precise demographic details, such as age

and grade, were not explicitly documented, but their experiences and understanding of Tuseme reflect their position within the school.

i) Tuseme

Theme 1) Tuseme Club Awareness, Participation, and Impact.

Both parents and students are highly aware of the clubs, and parents feel "relieved" by their children's participation, viewing the clubs as a source of "training and development." The clubs are credited with providing students with skills, promoting self-reliance, and teaching about rights and gender equality. A parent states,

***Voice from a parent:** "The clubs have done us well as parents because we feel relieved, and we are requesting you add more activities."*

Students report gaining life skills, self-confidence, improved discipline, and a more positive attitude towards tasks like domestic chores. A parent notes,

***Voice from a parent:** "A child who used to complain about digging, these days they are the first ones to get a hoe and go to the garden."*

Clubs have a positive effect on student social life, encouraging them to freely interact with peers of all genders and develop better social skills. A parent observes,

***Voice from a parent:** "Our children's social life and interaction with people are important in human development. Every time a child relates with their friends, it shows that the child has changed."*

The clubs empower students to become more self-driven, leading to improved academic performance. Parents have noted an increase in first-grade passes since the club's implementation. A parent states,

***Voice from a parent:** "They are getting first grades."*

The club's activities, such as singing, dancing, and presenting during assembly, are highly engaging for students. The involvement of girls in leadership is identified as a particularly striking and positive change. A SWT observes,

***Voice from a SWT:** "The most striking change that is seen up to today is the involvement of the girls in the leadership."*

A parent shares that:

Voice from a parent: "Two girls came up for that position, which means that they are building self-confidence in them."

Students express a desire to be empowered, learn life skills, and gain confidence for future success, such as becoming a politician or starting a charity organisation to combat gender-based violence. A male student states,

Voice from a male student: "I'm going to start one of the vulnerable groups so that I can also try to impart something to the students."

Teachers, acting with "the heart of a parent," view their role as catering to the learner and providing them with skills they can get outside the classroom. A teacher says,

Voice from a teacher: "I think as teachers of this school, what drives us is the heart of a parent towards this child."

The data reveal that both parents and students are highly engaged with and appreciative of the Tuseme clubs. Parents see the clubs as a source of relief and development, while students value the skills, confidence, and leadership opportunities they provide. The clubs are not only improving social interaction and discipline, but are also linked to better academic performance. Girls' increasing participation in leadership demonstrates progress in gender empowerment. This theme shows that the initiative is successfully bridging life skills, academics, and personal growth.

Theme 2) Academic and Socio-Cultural Challenges.

Teachers note that while clubs are beneficial, there is a challenge in balancing academic work with club activities. They fear that students may become so interested in clubs that they do not focus on their classwork. A teacher explains,

Voice from a teacher: "Now some of these students may get so much interested in some of these clubs, and you find them not really concentrating on classwork."

Parents identify cultural differences and language barriers as potential challenges for adopting the clubs in other settings, like refugee camps. They also express concern about the insecurity in refugee settlements. A parent states,

Voice from a parent: "The cultural differences might be a challenge, for example, language."

Teachers note a challenge of staff not being involved in the clubs. This can lead to a perception of favouritism and a lack of collective implementation. A teacher explains,

Voice from a teacher: "The teachers who were trained come in, and they are now taking information and not involving the whole staff."

Teachers also express a lack of motivation, feeling they receive "very little" for their efforts and are being given "another burden." A teacher says,

Voice from a teacher: "You work with the learners, but at the end of the day, for them, they achieve, they receive birds, but the teachers receive very little."

Parents can sometimes be an obstacle, cautioning students about attending club activities on weekends, which can lead to students missing lessons. A DOS notes,

Voice from a DOS: "When students are invited to attend clubs on weekends, for tailoring classes, the parents are always an obstacle, cautioning them."

There are also challenges related to gendered perceptions of activities, with teachers noting that girls "don't want to use a lot of energy" for digging, but are more inclined to participate in baking and writing. A teacher states,

Voice from a teacher: "When it comes to digging, boys are there. And as you by the girls' nature, they don't want to use a lot of energy."

While the benefits of the clubs are clear, concerns emerge around balancing academic priorities with extracurricular participation. Teachers worry about students becoming overly invested in clubs at the expense of classwork. Issues of staff motivation and involvement point to gaps in ownership and shared responsibility. Parents also play a dual role, sometimes encouraging but also discouraging participation due to cultural or logistical constraints. This theme highlights the tension between enrichment opportunities and academic demands, as well as the need for stronger support structures for teachers and parents.

Theme 3) School Environment, Infrastructure, and Wellbeing.

Financial and logistical support from the school is crucial. The school provides financial assistance for things like workshops and transport, which are essential for the clubs to operate. A teacher said,

***Voice from a teacher:** "The school gave us some funds for transport."*

The school also provides practical support in the form of time and space. This includes allocating time on the timetable for club activities and providing a designated room for meetings and workshops. A teacher said during the FDG that;

***Voice from a teacher:** "The school provides us with some seating arrangement, like a room, to conduct all those activities."*

The school administration's openness and monitoring role are also key factors. Teachers report that the school is "very open" to the clubs and actively monitors their progress, which makes them feel more supported. A teacher states,

***Voice from a teacher:** "Our school has been very open to these clubs. The school goes ahead to monitor all sorts of programmes we carry on with these students."*

The availability of teachers is an important resource provided by the school. The administration ensures that teachers are available and in charge of the clubs, which is critical for their success and sustainability. A school management member mentioned that,

***Voice from school management:** "There are teachers who are in charge."*

The school's commitment to financial, logistical, and administrative support is a key factor in the clubs' success. By providing funding, time, space, and teacher involvement, the administration demonstrates openness and accountability, which strengthens the sustainability of the programme. The monitoring role of the school also fosters accountability and teacher motivation. This theme illustrates how institutional support creates an enabling environment for the Tuseme initiative to thrive.

Theme 4) Community and Parental Engagement.

The PTA plays a key role in supporting the programme through monitoring and mobilisation. A PTA member directly participates in sensitisation efforts to explain the programme to parents and encourage them to support their children. A PTA member stated that there should be an initiative:

***Voice from a PTA member:** "Encouraging parents to support the students in this programme."*

The PTA also has a monitoring role and requires reports from the headteacher, indicating a formal role in overseeing the implementation of school programmes. A PTA member mentioned that:

Voice from a PTA member: "We need those reports from the headteacher whenever there are meetings."

Another PTA member mentioned that:

Voice from a PTA member: "We also have to monitor and see that these programmes are being implemented."

Parents express a desire for more direct involvement and training, suggesting they want to be more than just passive supporters. They see an opportunity to learn the skills themselves and potentially help train others. A parent said,

Voice from a parent: "If there was a chance, they would invite us, the parents say on Saturday or Sunday to also learn some of these club activities."

Parents and the PTA play an active role in legitimising and sustaining the clubs. Their monitoring, mobilisation, and calls for more direct involvement reflect a strong sense of ownership and a desire to share in the learning process. Parents view the initiative not only as beneficial for their children but also as an opportunity for their own empowerment. This theme underscores the importance of engaging families as active partners rather than passive supporters, thereby extending the impact of the clubs beyond the school walls.

Theme 5) Sustainability, Scalability, and Good Practices.

A major concern for teachers is the sustainability of the clubs, which they believe are dependent on external funding. They state that when donor interest shifts, the clubs can experience a "natural death." A SWT warns,

Voice from a SWT: "That will mean the club will die totally, it will be a natural death."

Teachers also express that the training they receive is often too brief and lacks follow-up. A SWT says,

Voice from a SWT: "Personally, I feel they needed more. Especially for sustainability, they're starting a club, but keeping it moving is another thing."

To improve sustainability, a SWT suggests the need for training manuals and the development of clear objectives and aims. A SWT recommends,

Voice from a SWT: "Having training manuals, where these patrons can also train some club members who also keep training others in their activities."

Parents advocate for not limiting the number of students who can join the clubs. They believe all

students should have the opportunity to participate. A parent says,

Voice from a parent: "They should be ready to take all the students."

The school provides significant support for the clubs, including financial assistance, allocating time on the timetable, providing physical space like a room, and designating teachers to be in charge. This support creates a sense of better cooperation with the administration and leads to more active participation from teachers. A teacher explains,

Voice from a teacher: "When that support is provided, we feel that we are one thing with the administration."

Teachers point out that the information used for club activities is often based on the training they received, which can lead to a lack of involvement from the rest of the staff. A teacher says,

Voice from a teacher: "The teachers who were trained come in, and they are now taking information and not involving the whole staff."

The new curriculum is seen as an opportunity for the clubs to thrive, especially with activities that involve sharing materials and ideas in groups. A DOS mentions,

Voice from the DOS: "Sharing materials, especially in groups, and this is impactful during the new curriculum, with seating together, they share ideas."

Sustainability remains a critical challenge, as the clubs are often dependent on external funding and limited teacher training. Teachers and parents alike call for more inclusivity, structured training resources, and broader participation. However, the integration of the clubs into the school timetable, provision of physical space, and alignment with the new curriculum are promising signs of scalability. This theme highlights both the fragility and potential of the initiative, showing that long-term success depends on institutional ownership, adequate resources, and deliberate planning for continuity.

Recommendations for Model Adaptation and Strengthening

Based on the case study of Balawoli Secondary School, the following recommendations are provided to revive and sustain the Tuseme club and similar initiatives.

The primary reason for the club's decline was its heavy reliance on a single, committed patron and external funding. To prevent this from happening again, the school must take full ownership of the initiative. This means integrating it into the school's core structure, rather than treating it as an add-on. The school should allocate a permanent line item in its budget for club activities, materials, and teacher training. It should also formalise a clear, internal succession plan for club patrons, ensuring a smooth transition of leadership and knowledge when a teacher is transferred or leaves. This will create a resilient framework that can withstand changes in personnel and donor priorities.

While the Tuseme club was effective in empowering girls, the case study reveals a need to address the perceptions of favouritism and ensure that all students feel included. The initiative should be

reframed as a vehicle for holistic empowerment that benefits everyone. Club activities should be diversified to appeal to both boys and girls, and their benefits, such as leadership, communication, and life skills should be explicitly linked to the development of all students. By promoting a shared understanding of gender equality as a positive-sum game, the school can ensure that the empowerment of one group does not come at the perceived expense of another.

The case study highlights both a lack of teacher motivation and a gap in parental understanding. To address this, the school should provide sustained, hands-on training for teachers with clear manuals and follow-up support. This will ensure they feel equipped rather than burdened. The school should also actively involve parents and the PTA by including them in club workshops and sessions. By inviting parents to learn life skills alongside their children, the school can extend the club's impact into the home and transform parents from passive spectators into active partners in their children's education. This will also help bridge cultural and logistical barriers.

To ensure the club's longevity, the school must focus on building internal capacity. One way to do this is to train students as "co-facilitators" who can lead activities and mentor their peers. This approach not only empowers students but also creates a self-sustaining cycle of knowledge transfer. Furthermore, the school should leverage the new curriculum's emphasis on group work and collaboration to align club activities with academic goals. This will help address teacher concerns about a lack of focus on classwork. Finally, the club should be open to all students, as both teachers and parents recognise the immense value of universal participation.

ii) Centre of Excellence

Balawoli Secondary School has the potential to become a COE in student-led empowerment. It already has a strong foundation with a dedicated teaching staff and active student and parent communities. To achieve this, the school must formalise its Tuseme and other clubs into a flagship programme. This means not only institutionalising the club's structure but also documenting its best practices, such as involving students in leadership and fostering parent engagement. By sharing this knowledge with other schools, Balawoli Secondary School can turn its past challenges into a blueprint for others to follow, truly embodying its vision of becoming a centre of excellence.

iii) Gender Responsive Pedagogy

Students were not generally aware of FAWE's GRP framework by name, though many of its principles were evident in practice. Some students felt that girls were favoured in certain contexts, while others, particularly girls themselves, reported that both genders were treated equally. The national curriculum has created opportunities for embedding gender responsiveness by requiring boys and girls to sit together and engage in collaborative learning. FAWE's workshops and seminars have supported inclusivity, though the limited awareness of GRP among learners suggests that communication about its presence and purpose needs to be strengthened. The mixed perceptions regarding favouritism also highlight the need for continued sensitisation of both boys and girls to ensure that equity is understood as a shared value rather than a zero-sum approach.

4.3.6 Case Study 4: Namasagali Secondary School

General case study context:

Table 147: Namasagali College Profile

Category	Details
School Name	Namasagali College
School Location	Kamuli District, Eastern Uganda
Location Type	Rural
School Level	Middle and High School (Lower and Upper Secondary)
School Type	Mixed Day and Boarding Public School
Enrolment Figures	541 students
Number of Teachers	31
Tuseme Club Status	Inactive – no memory of its existence within the school community
Tuseme Club enrolment figures (26)	Not applicable
Centre of Excellence Status	Not established – strong potential through existing active clubs and student engagement
Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) Status	Partially embedded through extracurricular activities; limited institutional awareness and gender imbalance among teachers
Number of Teachers Trained in GRP	Not specified

Namasagali College is a mixed day and boarding school for middle and high school students in Kamuli District, Eastern Uganda, established in 1965. Initially a joint venture between the Busoga Kingdom and the Mill Hill Fathers, it became a public school in 2001. With a student population of 541 and 31 teaching staff, the college aims to provide world-class education and equip learners with the skills and values necessary for making positive societal contributions. Various student clubs, including the Lowa State University club, BRAC, Debating, Scripture Union, and Raising Voices, are active in the school. No specific demographic details of potential Tuseme club members or teachers associated with Tuseme were mentioned, as there was no memory of the club's existence. However, the general student population is mixed day and boarding, with 541 students and 31 teaching staff, most of whom are male, which teachers noted could be a barrier for girls reporting problems.

i) Tuseme

Theme 1) Tuseme Club Awareness, Participation, and Impact.

Students reported joining the clubs for diverse reasons, though all were connected to their personal growth. Some sought practical livelihood skills such as agriculture, tailoring, and beekeeping,

which they viewed as pathways to future income. One girl explained,

Voice from a female student: "I wanted to be one of the people who practice agriculture in this country."

Others joined to build confidence and strengthen their communication skills. For example, one girl said,

Voice from a female student: "I wanted to gain some skills in public speaking... I wanted to be a radio presenter."

Similarly, boys shared that their motivation was to improve their debating skills and self-esteem, often linking these ambitions to future careers in leadership and politics. One boy reflected,

Voice from a male student: "The reason I joined the debating club is that I wanted to regain the confidence to be good when giving public speeches because I know that one day I will be a politician."

In addition to confidence building, some students mentioned that the clubs helped them develop emotional resilience and social relationships. A boy shared,

Voice from a male student: "I joined the BRAC club to learn how to manage emotions, build friendships and relate with others."

Beyond individual benefits, students also described the sense of ownership they gained when they were allowed to select club activities themselves. One boy explained,

Voice from a male student: "These activities are chosen by the club members, not by the teacher."

Teachers confirmed that the ripple effect of these clubs was visible across the broader school population, as other learners became more eager to engage in activities. A SWT noted,

Voice from a SWT: "You find that others are now encouraged... at least you see that there is a change among learners."

Parents and administrators also emphasised the role of the clubs in promoting gender equality and mixed participation, which they saw as integral to building unity and discipline. As one parent remarked,

Voice from a parent: "We do not discriminate between these learners... we have got football for girls, netball for boys."

The benefits of such inclusivity were also recognised by students themselves, who pointed to the opportunities for exchanging ideas and gaining confidence when working alongside the opposite gender. A boy explained,

Voice from a male student: "I like to study with the girls because it makes me confident."

Teachers further highlighted that the clubs played a vital role in keeping learners in school, nurturing talent, and offering tangible support such as scholastic materials and, occasionally, school fees. A Director of Studies commented,

Voice from a DOS: "They play a big role, like keeping our learners in school... it has also helped us to identify the students' talents."

Overall, clubs serve as a platform where students acquire practical skills, emotional resilience, and confidence, while teachers and parents recognise their broader impact on school culture and student retention. The integration of gender inclusivity further enhances the sense of community, suggesting that the clubs play a transformative role in both personal and institutional growth.

Theme 2) Academic and Socio-Cultural Challenges.

Despite their benefits, several challenges hinder the smooth functioning of the clubs. Teachers and parents alike emphasised the constraint of limited time, as the school's academic schedule dominates the day, leaving only a narrow window for extracurricular engagement. One teacher observed,

Voice from a SMT: "Time is a big challenge. In academic institutions, most of the time is allocated to academics, so club activity is almost an inconvenience."

A parent echoed this concern, pointing out the clash between long academic hours and students' availability:

Voice from a parent: "Remember, school here ends around 5 p.m. That is where the timetable ends. So, the remaining little time left is the time left for clubs."

In addition to time constraints, the lack of adequate resources was a recurrent theme. Both students and teachers admitted that limited materials hindered the meaningful practice of learned skills. As one girl lamented,

Voice from a female student: "There are books which they tell us to buy. And they are expensive."

Student attitudes also emerged as a barrier. Some learners skipped meetings, resisted participation, or showed indifference. A girl expressed frustration,

Voice from a female student: "Other people dodge... they are not interested."

Teachers noted that while some topics were driven by students, they often dictated subjects themselves to accommodate the sensitivities of learners. As one teacher admitted,

Voice from a teacher: "They are not the ones that choose; actually, we dictate, because there are certain things that if you begin talking about, they will shy away."

However, students highlighted that equal treatment by teachers helped to foster unity and positively influenced academic performance. One student explained,

Voice from a mixed student FGD: "Teaching us equally helps us to perform well, all of us. In the final exams, when you pass, you all pass."

Administrators also pointed to discipline challenges, with some students misinterpreting their rights and neglecting responsibilities. The District Inspector of Schools (DIS) remarked,

Voice from a DIS: "Most of the learners have misinterpreted their rights... They have failed to fulfil their responsibilities and are taking their rights for granted."

The academic pressures, insufficient resources, and wavering student commitment present significant hurdles to the success of the clubs. Yet, the acknowledgement of equal treatment as a driver of improved academic outcomes shows that with stronger institutional support and attitudinal change, these challenges can be mitigated.

Theme 3) School Environment, Infrastructure, and Wellbeing.

Teachers and administrators consistently emphasised the importance of institutional support for the clubs. They explained that school leadership not only authorises the existence of these programmes but also makes small financial contributions to keep them running. As one teacher remarked,

Voice from a SWT: "First of all, the school, the administration allowing these people to come to school, that is support number one."

A parent confirmed this, noting that,

Voice from a parent: "As a school we come together and we support teachers under that project in terms of giving that small money to support."

At the same time, students described structural and logistical challenges that made participation difficult. The absence of dedicated rooms for club meetings often forced them to gather outside, exposing them to unpredictable weather. One girl explained,

Voice from a SWT: "First of all, the school, the administration allowing these people to come to school, that is support number one."

A parent confirmed this, noting that,

Voice from a PTA member: "As a school we come together and we support teachers under that project in terms of giving that small money to support."

At the same time, students described structural and logistical challenges that made participation difficult. The absence of dedicated rooms for club meetings often forced them to gather outside, exposing them to unpredictable weather. One girl explained,

Voice from a female student: "We do not have a room where to sit... and then we are affected by bad weather conditions."

School administrators and students alike underlined the value of equal treatment, stressing that no differentiation is made between girls and boys. This inclusive environment builds harmony among learners. A Director of Studies noted,

Voice from a DOS: "We treat students equally, we don't differentiate between girls and boys."

A student echoed this sentiment,

Voice from a mixed FDG with students: "Being treated equally with my other friends in the same class makes us very friendly to each other."

Despite this supportive culture, the PTA and BOG reported financial constraints and teacher shortages. Parents' delayed fee payments often limit resources available for sustaining NGO-initiated programmes, while the lack of sufficient teachers sometimes leaves learners unattended. One parent explained,

Voice from a PTA member: "Our school has a few teachers... The learners show up to learn, and they are not learning because at that time the teachers are not around."

The District Inspector of Schools further highlighted government requirements, such as mandating every school to have a SWT and a SMT to ensure student well-being. He explained,

Voice from a DIS: "Every school must have a SWT and a senior male teacher."

For the students themselves, the clubs provided a vital outlet to cope with personal struggles, particularly for girls. One shared,

Voice from a female student: "I used to, like, if somebody annoyed me, I would think of maybe killing myself. I learned how to manage my bad emotions." (FGD with girls, Namasagali College)

The school environment demonstrates both commitment and constraint: while leaders foster inclusivity and institutional backing, limited infrastructure, scarce resources, and teacher shortages hinder the full potential of the clubs. Importantly, the clubs act as safe spaces for emotional support, underscoring their value beyond academics.

Theme 4) Community and Parental Engagement.

Parental perspectives on the clubs were mixed, with financial and attitudinal challenges emerging as key issues. On one hand, some parents were hesitant to meet obligations such as feeding fees, which placed additional strain on schools. The District Inspector of Schools observed,

Voice from a DIS: "The feeding, parents are hesitant to pay."

A girl added that school fee challenges often limited participation:

Voice from a female student: "Sometimes you can want to attend the meeting... but that very day they chase you out of school because of school fees."

Parents themselves expressed a desire for financial relief through scholarships or support from organisations, believing this would both attract and retain learners in clubs. One parent suggested,

Voice from a parent: "If they say we will take the best 5 students on scholarships, this will even attract the S.1s to join the club in the hope of getting the scholarship."

Despite these concerns, some parents spoke proudly about the confidence and skills their children had gained. A mother shared,

Voice from a female student: "My parents are okay with the clubs I am in... when I spoke, they said yes, our girl has confidence."

Similarly, a father explained,

Voice from a parent: "I know these clubs are helpful because my daughter can now sew clothes... after school, if the academic route doesn't work out, then she has a skill."

Nevertheless, certain parents remained sceptical, prioritising academics and discouraging participation in extracurricular activities. A Board member remarked,

Voice from a PTA member: "There are parents who will come and tell you, for example, I need my child in academics, I do not think they should be in the pitch or participate in anything else."

Recognising this, education officials emphasised the need for community sensitisation to address cultural norms. As the District Inspector of Schools put it,

Voice from a DIS: "Community sensitisation is very key on radio, even in schools."

Parental engagement is a double-edged factor: while supportive parents amplify the clubs' impact, resistant attitudes and financial barriers limit consistent participation. Strategic sensitisation and targeted financial support could significantly enhance community ownership of these initiatives.

Theme 5) Sustainability, Scalability, and Good Practices.

A recurring concern among teachers was the heavy reliance on external partners for funding. Without this support, clubs risk collapsing. A SMT observed:

Voice from a SMT: "These clubs depend on partners for sustainability, so their stopping to fund marks a death nail to their existence."

Another structural challenge to sustainability was the frequent transfer of teachers who serve as patrons. As one teacher explained,

Voice from a SMT: "Most times when the patrons leave, the clubs collapse."

On the other hand, government officials described a framework of policies intended to strengthen sustainability. These include requiring a minimum of five active clubs in each school and conducting termly inspections. The District Inspector of Schools highlighted,

Voice from a DIS: "Every school should have a minimum, not less than five clubs, active in the school... we usually have termly inspection as the education office to find out the activity of the clubs."

Opportunities for scalability were also identified. Stakeholders pointed to Uganda's stable governance, receptive school leadership, and alignment of the new curriculum with project-based learning. A sub-county community officer explained,

Voice from a sub-county community officer: "The opportunity is that we have the teachers who are willing to welcome this idea, to embrace it."

At the same time, scaling up to refugee and internally displaced communities would require additional measures: financial and material support, targeted teacher training, community sensitisation, and the inclusion of boys. A former Director of Studies emphasised,

Voice from a former DOS: "They don't leave out the boy child. There is also a need to train the teachers who are there."

While government frameworks and a supportive environment offer pathways to sustainability and expansion, the dependence on external funding and patron transfers remains pressing threats. Addressing these gaps through local capacity building, diversified funding, and inclusive practices would strengthen both the longevity and scalability of the Tuseme clubs.

Recommendations for Model Adaptation and Strengthening

From a broader stakeholder perspective, particularly that of the PTA and Board of Governors, strengthening the Tuseme clubs and related initiatives requires deliberate planning for sustainability beyond donor funding. Parents and teachers emphasised that interventions supported by partners should leave behind structures that schools can independently maintain. They suggested that schools ensure full student involvement by integrating club participation into daily routines, while also introducing counselling sessions to address students' psychosocial needs.

Standardised monitoring templates should be developed to help track activities and impact across clubs, and online platforms should be promoted for sharing information and best practices. Stakeholders also recommended organising inter-school competitions to boost motivation and peer learning, and creating regular reflection spaces for club leaders to assess progress and exchange experiences. Frequent accountability for club funds was also highlighted as essential for transparency and trust.

In refugee and displaced communities, adaptations will need to be more context-specific. Stakeholders proposed the adoption of a common language of instruction, community sensitisation to build stronger buy-in, and personnel training to ensure they are equipped to respond to the particular needs of displaced learners. The broader lesson emerging from these recommendations is that sustainability goes beyond financial inputs. It depends on building systems of accountability, inclusivity, and reflection. Strengthening mechanisms such as monitoring, inter-school collaboration, and contextual adaptation will be central to embedding resilience in the model.

The presence of diverse and active clubs in schools has provided multiple entry points for student engagement, with visible school support in the form of land, financial contributions, teacher guidance, and openness to external partnerships reinforcing these efforts. Existing school policies that require students to join at least two clubs have ensured broad participation, while parents' appreciation of practical skills such as tailoring and agriculture has reinforced the value of extracurricular activities. In addition, the opportunities to align club work with the competence-based curriculum and to use school land for income-generating projects further strengthen the integration of clubs into mainstream learning. Taken together, these factors show how institutional support, parental recognition, and favourable policy frameworks create fertile ground for sustaining and expanding the clubs. By linking club activities more explicitly to curriculum reforms, schools can position them as integral to education rather than as peripheral add-ons.

At the same time, several challenges undermine the long-term viability of the Tuseme model. In some schools, there is no clear institutional memory of the Tuseme club, limiting continuity of gender-focused interventions. Teacher commitment is uneven, with some educators failing to take club activities seriously or even obstructing them. Infrastructure gaps, such as the absence of girls' changing rooms, continue to discourage participation, while a perceived imbalance in partner focus, where girls receive more attention than boys, creates tensions. The timing of club activities can also disadvantage day scholars who must return home for household duties on weekends, and heavy reliance on external funding makes sustainability precarious. Student absenteeism linked to unpaid fees further reduces participation, while limited government subvention and inadequate facilitation for extracurricular programmes restrict the scope. High student turnover and frequent transfers of teacher patrons further interrupt continuity. These constraints reveal the fragility of the current model. Unless there is stronger ownership within schools, targeted investment in infrastructure, and a more balanced focus on both genders, the long-term prospects of the clubs will remain uncertain.

ii) Centres of Excellence

The enthusiasm and active participation of students in clubs such as debating, beekeeping, and child rights advocacy point to a strong foundation for developing Centres of Excellence. Students' eagerness to suggest improvements demonstrates their readiness for structured growth, and the availability of multiple clubs provides diverse opportunities to cultivate skills. Linking these activities to inter-school competitions and curriculum reforms could further enhance their visibility and impact. Despite this potential, persistent challenges continue to limit the development of clubs into recognised centres of excellence. Chronic funding limitations, dependence on external partners, and inconsistent availability of resources hinder growth. Organisational weaknesses, including irregular student attendance, limited teacher engagement, and disruption caused by frequent transfers of patrons, also undermine continuity. The analysis suggests that with greater institutional investment and consistent facilitation, existing clubs could evolve into Centres of Excellence that showcase best practices in leadership, skill-building, and gender responsiveness. Without addressing structural weaknesses, however, this potential may remain unrealised.

iii) Gender Responsive Pedagogy

Awareness of gendered challenges is visible, particularly in relation to the absence of girls' changing rooms and concerns about unequal attention between boys and girls. Yet, there remains little visibility of a specific Tuseme club, suggesting that gender-responsive approaches are inconsistently embedded. The existence of active clubs and overall school support for extracurriculars nonetheless provides a platform to integrate gender-responsive pedagogy, and the presence of Senior Women and Senior Male Teachers offers an institutional entry point for structured gender support. At the same time, weak institutional memory of Tuseme has undermined continuity, while the gender imbalance among teaching staff reduces the presence of role models for girls. Specific challenges faced by girls, including the lack of private facilities and discomfort in reporting sensitive issues to male teachers, remain unresolved. Addressing these issues requires embedding gender sensitivity across all clubs and ensuring that both girls' and boys' needs are equally prioritised. More fundamentally, gender awareness needs to be institutionalised within school culture, rather than treated as an external or donor-driven initiative.

4.3.7 Discussion of Ugandan findings, including implications for adapting the Tuseme model in IDP and Refugee Settings

This analysis synthesises key findings from the evaluation of the Tuseme model and related initiatives (GRP and COE) across selected Ugandan schools. As part of Phase 1 of a broader research project, the goal was to understand the factors influencing the success and sustainability of these programmes in mainstream educational settings. The insights gained from schools in Kiboga, Buyende, and Kamuli, including government-aided and partnership schools, provide a critical foundation for adapting the Tuseme model for use in refugee and IDP contexts. The study's objectives were to evaluate the implementation of these FAWE programmes, draw lessons from their successes and challenges, and provide evidence-based recommendations for their potential application in humanitarian settings. This discussion addresses these objectives by aligning findings with established theoretical frameworks and a comprehensive review of relevant literature.

Key Findings and Lessons Learned

The research revealed several critical findings from the Ugandan schools, highlighting both enabling and disabling factors for the Tuseme model. The Tuseme model and its associated clubs, such as those supported by FAWE, were largely perceived as highly beneficial by students, teachers, and parents. As noted in the Balawoli case, parents felt "relieved" by their children's participation, while students saw the clubs as a platform to gain practical skills, self-confidence, and a sense of agency. This aligns with Empowerment Theory (Rachmad, 2022), which suggests that individuals gain a sense of control over their lives through such multidimensional processes. For male students in St. James Kagulu, clubs helped them develop public speaking skills and a commitment to gender equality, fighting for the rights of their "sisters," which reflects the inclusive nature of the programme and its potential to address negative gender norms.

A major recurring finding across all schools, particularly highlighted in the Namasagali and Balawoli cases, was the lack of sustainability. The Tuseme clubs tended to decline or cease entirely once external funding and a key facilitator or patron departed. A SMT in Namasagali stated that "partners are the life and blood of clubs; removal of funding is a death nail to clubs." This underscores a critical lesson: a model's success cannot be dependent on external, temporary support. For a programme to be truly sustainable, it must be deeply embedded within the school's own policies and budget, ensuring it is a core part of the institution's DNA rather than a temporary project.

While the principles of GRP were evident in practice, a nuanced understanding was often lacking. In Balawoli, a Senior Woman Teacher (SWT) noted the positive change of girls' increased involvement in leadership, yet some male students in St. James Kagulu felt that girls were "prioritised," leading to a perception of imbalance. This demonstrates a key lesson: gender equality initiatives must be carefully implemented to avoid creating new tensions or feelings of marginalisation. GRP must be understood as a framework that benefits all genders, not just one,

as it aims to create an equitable environment for everyone. This aligns with Human Rights Theory (Donnelly, 2013), which emphasises the universality of rights for all individuals.

The clubs' impact extended far beyond academics. They were found to enhance students' psychosocial well-being, social skills, and emotional management, as seen in the Namasagali case, where a student learned to manage thoughts of self-harm. These outcomes directly resonate with the principles of Self-efficacy and Human Motivation Theory (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020), which posits that a learner's perceived capabilities are a key motivator for positive life choices. The clubs provided a safe space for students to acquire and practice new behaviours, thereby improving their self-efficacy and resilience.

Recommendations for Adaptation in IDP and Refugee Settings

Based on the lessons learned from mainstream Ugandan schools, the following evidence-based recommendations are crucial for adapting the Tuseme model for refugee and IDP settings.

1. Prioritise Context-Specific Content and Ownership. The Tuseme model should be adapted to directly address the unique realities of refugee and IDP communities, including the layered vulnerabilities and psychosocial impacts of adverse childhood experiences (Cantor et al, 2021). The model must be co-created with the community, allowing participants to choose activities that are most relevant to their needs, whether it be vocational skills for livelihood, language training, or psychosocial support. The ownership of the model must be with the community and camp leadership from the very beginning.

2. Embed Comprehensive Sustainability Planning. To avoid the "natural death" observed in mainstream schools, sustainability must be a core component of the model's design. This involves training a cohort of community members as facilitators, who can then train others, creating a cascade of knowledge. The model should not rely on external financial aid, but rather on low-cost, high-impact activities and local resource mobilisation. The school or community centres in these settings must be empowered to take full financial and administrative responsibility for the programme.

3. Implement Inclusive, Trauma-Informed, and Gender-Transformative Approaches. The Tuseme model should be intentionally designed to be gender-transformative, promoting equitable participation from both boys and girls. The model must also be trauma-informed, acknowledging the unique experiences of displaced youth and providing a safe space for them to process emotions and develop resilience. This aligns with cross-sectoral research (UNHCR, 2018), which emphasises the need for programming that integrates mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) principles. The model should also ensure equitable participation of day scholars and other groups with time constraints, as found in the Namasagali case.

4. Strengthen Teacher and Facilitator Capacity. The success of the clubs is directly linked to the dedication and capacity of their patrons. In IDP and refugee settings, teachers and facilitators must be given comprehensive and ongoing training not only on the Tuseme model's curriculum but also on psychosocial support and trauma-informed care. This continuous capacity-building

will enable them to effectively respond to the complex needs of students and provide a consistent, supportive presence.

4.5 Validation

4.5.1 Validation in Ethiopia

The validation workshop for Phase One data collection in Ethiopia was held on April 15, 2025, in Addis Ababa at the Vibes Hotel (Figure 9a, Figure 9b, Table 18). The workshop brought together a diverse group of participants from various regions, including Addis Ababa, Adama, Bahir Dar, and Hawassa. Notably, there were representatives from the Addis Ababa Education Office and the Ministry of Science and Technology Innovation, as well as both male and female members of the Tuseme club, school directors, deputy directors, and Tuseme focal teachers from the four participating schools. The objectives were to share the research findings from Phase One and to enable the study participants to confirm whether their responses were accurately captured. The process involved a welcoming speech, followed by a presentation of the Phase One findings by the HERS-EA lead researcher. This was followed by comments and questions from the participants, with a significant portion of the discussion focusing on strategies to revitalise the Tuseme initiative based on the findings. Participants also engaged in group work to discuss major challenges and contributions related to the findings.

Table 158: Composition of stakeholders who participated in the validation process in Ethiopia

Category	Participants from Addis Ababa, Adama, Bahir Dar, and Hawassa, Ethiopia.	Total
Boys in Tuseme Club	2	2
Girls in Tuseme Club	2	2
School Children (Non-members)	0	0
Student Club Leadership	0	0
School Teachers	4	4
Parasocial workers	2	2
School Governance and Management	4	4
Parents	0	0
PTA	4	4
FAWE Trainers	0	0
Government Officials	4	4
Total	20	20

Figure 9 a): Below, Phase one validation workshop, April 15, 2025, Vibes Hotel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



Figure 9: b) Above, Phase one validation workshop, April 15, 2025, Vibes Hotel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

4.5.2 Validation in Kenya

The validation of the Phase One findings in Kenya took place on April 16, 2025. Two validation exercises were conducted: One in Mfangano Island, Homa-Bay County, and another in Machakos (Table 19).

Mfangano Island Workshop: This workshop brought together PTA members, parents, teachers, para-social workers, and learners, all of whom were study participants for Wasamo Girls Secondary School. The objectives were to share the research findings, enable participants to confirm the accuracy of their responses, and address any issues not captured during the initial research. The process involved a presentation of the findings, followed by an open discussion where participants provided feedback and clarifications.

Machakos Workshop: This validation was held with participants from Masaku Integrated Primary School, representing a broader group of stakeholders from the four Phase 1 schools in Kenya. Attendees included teachers, PTA members, School Board of Management (BOM) representatives, and para-social workers. The primary objectives were to review the preliminary findings, obtain participant validation, and gather feedback on the most impactful components to prioritise for the advancement of the Tuseme model. The workshop involved a thorough review of the project report and interactive discussions to pinpoint key issues and elicit further inputs.

Table 19: Composition of stakeholders who participated in the validation process in Kenya

Category	Wasamo Girls	Masaku Special School	Total
Boys in Tuseme Club	0	0	0
Girls in Tuseme Club	3	0	3
School Children (Non-members)	0	0	0
Student Club Leadership	1	0	1
School Teachers	4	2	6
Para-social workers	0	4	4
School Governance and Management	3	2	5
Parents	4	6	10
PTA	4	2	6
FAWE Trainers	0	0	0
Government Officials	0	1	1
Total	19	17	36

4.5.3 Validation in Uganda

The validation workshop for Phase 1 data collection in Uganda took place on April 16, 2025, in Kamuli district (Figure 10a and Figure 10b). The workshop brought together a diverse group of participants in Uganda, including teachers, headteachers, PTA members, students (including Tuseme club members), and representatives from district education offices. The objectives of the workshop were to present the initial findings of the Phase 1 research, to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to verify the accuracy and completeness of the findings, and to gather their perspectives on the implications of the findings for the Tuseme programme in Uganda. The process involved a presentation of the key findings by the research team, followed by interactive sessions where participants could ask questions, provide comments, and engage in discussions to validate the findings. Table 20 summarises the composition of stakeholders who participated in the validation process in Kamuli district, Uganda.

Figure 10 a): Phase 1 validation workshop in Kamuli district, Uganda, April 16, 2025



Figure 10: b): Phase 1 validation workshop in Kamuli district, Uganda, April 16, 2025



Table 20: Composition of stakeholders who participated in the validation process, in Kamuli district, Uganda

Category	Number	Region (If Applicable)
Boys in Tuseme Club	0	N/A
Girls in Tuseme Club	0	N/A
School Children (Non-members)	8	Kamuli and Buyende Districts
Student Club Leadership	0	N/A
School Teachers	4	Kamuli and Buyende Districts
Para-social workers	4	Kamuli and Buyende Districts
School Governance and Management	4	Kamuli and Buyende Districts
Parents	1	Kamuli and Buyende Districts
PTA	3	Kamuli and Buyende Districts
FAWE Trainers	3	Kamuli and Buyende Districts
Government Officials	5	Kamuli and Buyende Districts
Total	32	

V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.0 Integrated Discussion of Cross-Country Findings

The synthesis of findings from Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia provides a comprehensive, multi-faceted perspective on the Tuseme model and its associated initiatives. This integrated discussion highlights key areas of convergence, divergence, and complementarity, while firmly grounding the analysis in the theoretical frameworks and literature reviewed for this study. The insights from the in-country validation workshops were crucial in enriching this analysis, ensuring it is grounded in the lived experiences of local stakeholders.

5.1 Areas of Convergence

The positive impact of the Tuseme model on students was consistently and overwhelmingly affirmed across all three countries, directly aligning with the Empowerment Theory (Rachmad, 2022) and Self-efficacy and Human Motivation Theory (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). A student's ability to "be free and share our problems freely" and another's newfound ability to "speak in front of people" are not isolated incidents but a testament to the model's efficacy in fostering agency and self-efficacy. This echoes findings from empirical literature, such as that by Mkumbo et al. (2015), which highlighted the programme's positive contributions to developing "life skills." The Tuseme model's use of participatory pedagogies, such as drama and peer-led discussions, directly reinforces the principles of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) by creating a safe environment for observational learning and the practice of new behaviours. This is a foundational finding that underscores the value of the Tuseme approach, making it a compelling candidate for adaptation in other contexts, particularly those involving adolescents with adverse childhood experiences (Cantor et al., 2021).

The most significant and pervasive challenge identified across all three nations was the lack of sustainability post-external support. This finding directly addresses Primary Research Question 1 and confirms a key insight from the Empirical Literature Review (FAWE, 2005; 2022), which highlights the critical role of strong school leadership and community buy-in for programme success. The reliance on external funding and the dedication of a single charismatic patron teacher created a precarious foundation for the clubs. The departure of key facilitators and the lack of formal handover mechanisms consistently led to the "natural death" of the clubs. This underscores a critical, universal lesson: any successful and scalable model must be deeply embedded within the institutional and financial fabric of the host school or community, a concept that aligns with the need for a "supportive structural framework" identified in Empowerment Theory.

Furthermore, the importance of dedicated teacher support was a central pillar of success in all contexts. This directly correlates with Secondary Research Question iv and reinforces the findings from prior FAWE evaluations, which documented that programme success hinges on continuous

capacity-building of facilitators. Without a consistent and passionate facilitator, even the most well-designed programme will languish.

5.2 Areas of Divergence and Research Gaps

While the core impacts and challenges were similar, a deeper dive into the country-specific findings revealed important variations in awareness and perception, which directly addresses Primary Research Question 2. In Kenya, there was a higher reported level of parental awareness and, in some cases, resistance to the club's empowerment focus. In contrast, Ethiopia faced a significant gap in awareness among parents and government officials, highlighting a need for a more robust mainstreaming strategy. This supports the notion within Human Rights Theory (Donnelly, 2013) that achieving universal rights requires overcoming varied social and cultural barriers that can deny individuals, particularly girls, their rights to education and participation.

The contextual challenges were also distinct. The Tuseme clubs in Ethiopia had to navigate regional security issues and national policies on school clubs, which were unique to their environment. This directly relates to the literature on Empowerment Programming in Displacement-Affected Settings (UNHCR, 2018), which emphasises the necessity of culturally and contextually relevant interventions. In Uganda, the primary concerns revolved around managing parental expectations and balancing club activities with intense academic demands. These findings align with the Secondary Research Question 2 regarding major challenges and highlight the need for a flexible model that can be adapted to specific environments.

5.3 Areas of Complementarity and Adaptation Lessons

The country studies, when viewed together, provide a rich tapestry of complementary knowledge that strengthens the overall understanding of the Tuseme model and directly addresses Secondary Research Questions iii and iv. The strong community support observed in some Kenyan schools, as affirmed in the validation workshops, offers a replicable model for fostering local buy-in—a critical lesson for adaptation in refugee and IDP settings where community engagement is paramount for sustainability.

The validation workshops provided a crucial platform for stakeholders to articulate their challenges and propose localised solutions. This participatory approach aligns with the principles of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, where learners are active co-constructors of their social realities, reinforcing the core tenets of the Tuseme model. Similarly, the "Give Back" initiative in Ethiopia, where students engaged in community service, highlighted a powerful model for promoting social cohesion. This provides a concrete strategy for resource optimisation and broadened impact, addressing the need for self-sustaining, low-cost activities that can be leveraged in resource-constrained humanitarian settings.

In conclusion, the integrated analysis demonstrates that while the core impact of Tuseme on youth empowerment is universal, its implementation, challenges, and opportunities are profoundly shaped by local context. The lessons gleaned from these cross-country comparisons, the need for a community-owned model, continuous capacity-building for facilitators, and a flexible, contextually relevant programme are invaluable for adapting the model for the unique complexities

of IDP and refugee settings. The synthesis of these findings offers not just a set of recommendations but a comprehensive blueprint for informed and sustainable programme design, thereby fulfilling the Primary Objectives of Phase 1 of this research.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This Phase 1 research provides a comprehensive assessment of the Tuseme programme within mainstream schools across Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia. The findings highlight the positive impact of Tuseme on students' empowerment and skill development, while also revealing significant challenges related to sustainability and contextual adaptation. This section synthesises these key insights and offers actionable recommendations, integrated directly into the framework of the project's subsequent phases, for both the research team and a broader audience of stakeholders.

6.1 Conclusion

The Tuseme programme consistently demonstrates its efficacy in promoting positive empowerment outcomes, particularly by enhancing students' self-confidence, communication skills, and leadership potential. Across all three countries, students involved in Tuseme clubs reported a greater sense of agency and a deeper understanding of gender and social issues. The validation workshops in Kenya and Ethiopia corroborated these findings with tangible examples of the programme's transformative impact on students. However, sustainability emerged as a major concern. A critical finding across all contexts is the challenge of sustaining Tuseme clubs beyond the initial FAWE intervention. Factors contributing to this include leadership turnover due to student graduation and teacher transfers, limited financial and material resources, and the absence of robust institutionalisation mechanisms. The validation workshops in all three countries echoed these concerns, emphasising the urgent need for a sustainable model that doesn't solely rely on external support.

The research also highlighted contextual variations in how the programme was implemented and perceived. Levels of parental and community awareness, the degree of integration with other school initiatives, and specific challenges were highly dependent on the local context. The validation workshops were crucial in highlighting the importance of local perspectives for understanding these nuances and for the need for context-specific approaches. The pivotal role of teachers and facilitators was identified as essential for the success of Tuseme clubs. The dedication and consistent support of these individuals were directly correlated with the vibrancy of the clubs, while their turnover significantly impacted programme continuity.

Despite these challenges, the research identified several opportunities for leveraging existing strengths. These include strong community support in some areas, the enthusiasm of student participants, and the potential to integrate Tuseme principles into broader school activities. The validation workshops further identified opportunities like the inclusion of boys (Kenya), mainstreaming the programme within the national education system (Ethiopia), and leveraging existing student-led initiatives (Uganda).

6.2 Recommendations for Subsequent Project Phases

Based on the key insights from Phase One, the following evidence-based recommendations are integrated into the planned activities for the next project phases to ensure a more effective and sustainable adaptation of the Tuseme model.

Phase 2: Baseline and Scoping

The planned scoping exercise for Phase 2 is vital. To ensure its success and address the findings from Phase 1, the following recommendations should be integrated into the research activities:

1. **Conduct an In-Depth Needs Assessment:** The scoping exercise should go beyond identifying communities to include a comprehensive needs assessment. This must assess the specific vulnerabilities, cultural norms, and existing resources within target refugee and IDP settings, as well as the unique psychosocial needs related to displacement.
2. **Explore Sustainable Models:** The stakeholder consultation should be specifically designed to investigate sustainable implementation models for resource-constrained displacement settings. This includes exploring the use of community volunteers, peer facilitators, and integrating Tuseme principles into existing educational or psychosocial support programmes.
3. **Identify Barriers and Facilitators:** The planned stakeholder analysis should actively identify potential barriers, such as security concerns or community resistance, and facilitators, such as existing community networks and support from local leaders. This will directly inform the adaptation strategies in the next phase.

Phase 3: Adaptation

The adaptation phase must directly incorporate the lessons learned from Phase 1 to design a model that is both impactful and sustainable.

1. **Implement a Community-Led Co-Creation Process:** The adaptation should not be a top-down process. Instead, it must be co-created with the community, allowing participants to choose activities most relevant to their needs. This approach will foster a sense of ownership from the outset, directly addressing the sustainability challenges observed in mainstream schools.
2. **Prioritise Low-Cost, High-Impact Activities:** To address the resource scarcity identified in the mainstream schools, the adapted model must prioritise activities that are low-cost but have a high impact, such as peer-to-peer mentorship, drama, and local resource mobilisation efforts.
3. **Integrate Trauma-Informed Principles:** Based on the literature on adverse childhood experiences and the unique context of displacement, the adapted model must be intentionally trauma-informed, providing a safe and supportive space for adolescents to process emotions and develop resilience.

Recommendations for Broader Stakeholders and Policy

These recommendations are directed towards a wider audience to create a more supportive ecosystem for the programme's long-term success.

1. **Mainstream Empowerment Programmes:** FAWE and government ministries should advocate for the integration of Tuseme principles into national education policies and curricula. This will ensure broader reach and long-term sustainability beyond specific project cycles.
2. **Invest in Continuous Training:** It is crucial to invest in comprehensive and ongoing training for teachers and facilitators. This training should go beyond the Tuseme curriculum to include gender-sensitive pedagogy and trauma-informed care.
3. **Strengthen Community Linkages:** Build stronger connections between schools and community-based organisations, including those in refugee and IDP populations. This will help to embed the programme within the community and create a supportive ecosystem for empowerment initiatives.
4. **Policy Support for Extracurriculars:** Advocate for policies that recognise the importance of empowerment clubs and other extracurricular activities for the holistic development of students, ensuring they have a protected place within the school schedule.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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