



Kepler

BREAKING BARRIERS

Empowering Girls on the Journey from Secondary to Higher Education.

Gender Equity in Education Toolkit

Target Users

Education Program Managers

Policymakers

School Leaders

CSOs

Community-Based Organizations

Youth Mentors

Development Partners



ABOUT KEPLER

“

...graduated over **1,000 bachelor's** degree students, including **50% women** and 25% refugee youth.

Kepler creates pathways for vulnerable African youth to gain employment and exit poverty. We do this through a hybrid tertiary education model that combines in-person and online coursework with on-the-job learning and placement opportunities. Kepler has served more than 10,000 young Africans and graduated over 1,000 bachelor's degree students, including 50% women and 25% refugee youth. Over 90% of our graduates are employed within six months. Since 2013, our organization has laid the foundation for under-resourced young people in Rwanda to earn a degree from Southern New Hampshire University and successfully transition into formal employment. In our effort to scale impact, we launched Kepler College in 2022, an accredited higher education institution offering degrees at the intersection of business and technology. Our Graduate Employment Program (GEP), a short upskilling program, provides soft skills and employability training at technical colleges and our Iteme preparation programs support refugee youth in their transition from secondary school.

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1. Background and Purpose of the Toolkit

Despite progress in expanding access to education, girls—especially refugees and those in vulnerable communities—continue to face significant barriers in transitioning from secondary to higher education. Rooted in cultural norms, economic challenges, gender-based violence, and policy implementation gaps, these obstacles limit girls’ academic and career opportunities (UNHCR, 2023). In response, Kepler and its partners convened a regional Gender Learning Session to explore practical, context-specific solutions. Drawing from insights shared by experts, youth, and community leaders across Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Uganda, this toolkit consolidates proven strategies to foster safer, more inclusive, and empowering learning environments for girls at both secondary and tertiary levels.

To provide practical, evidence-informed strategies and tools that enable education actors across East Africa—especially in Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Uganda—to dismantle barriers that prevent girls, particularly refugee girls, from transitioning successfully from secondary school to higher education.



2. Key Barriers Identified

- Gender-based violence and unsafe school environments.
- Early marriage and teen pregnancy.
- Cultural norms and gender stereotypes.
- Weak enforcement of existing policies.
- Limited gender-responsive teacher training.
- Economic barriers and lack of school materials.
- Invisibility of refugee girls in data and policy.
- Lack of mentorship and psychosocial support (TheirWorld, 2018).



3. Priority Intervention Areas & Actionable Strategies

A. Safe and Inclusive Learning Environments

Goal:

Ensure schools are physically, emotionally, and socially safe for girls.

Strategies:

- Enforce zero-tolerance policies on GBV, harassment, and corporal punishment.
- Provide separate toilets and entrances for girls and boys.
- Install lighting, fencing, and safe transportation options.
- Conduct regular school safety audits.
- Provide confidential reporting and referral services.

B. Gender-Responsive Pedagogy and Teacher Training

Goal:

Equip educators with the skills to foster equitable classrooms.

Strategies:

- Train teachers in gender-sensitive teaching and classroom management.
- Promote positive discipline and trauma-informed approaches.
- Provide continuous professional development with peer learning.
- Embed gender equity modules into teacher training institutes.



C. Curriculum and Learning Materials

Goal:

Create learning experiences that challenge stereotypes and empower girls.

Strategies:

- Integrate gender and human rights education in the national curriculum.
- Use inclusive textbooks and materials.
- Support life skills and leadership programs for girls.
- Link classroom content to employability and real-world success.

D. Mentorship and Psychosocial Support

Goal:

Build girls' self-confidence, resilience, and career aspirations.

Strategies:

- Establish girls' clubs and peer support networks in schools.
- Connect students with female mentors and role models from their communities.
- Offer psychosocial support for refugee and trauma-affected girls.
- Extend orientation programs beyond academics to include life and career readiness.

E. Community Engagement and Mindset Change

Goal:

Mobilize parents, community leaders, and boys to support girls' education.

Strategies:

- Conduct community dialogues on girls' rights and education (e.g., Umuganda, Umugoroba w'Umuryango).
- Engage boys and men as allies.
- Translate policies into local languages and culturally appropriate materials.
- Use storytelling, media, and role models to shift social norms.



F. Targeted Scholarships and Retention Support

Goal:

Eliminate financial barriers and improve retention.

Strategies:

- Offer scholarships specifically designed for refugee and low-income girls.
- Provide school supplies, menstrual products, and transport support.
- Design flexible and longer learning pathways for vulnerable girls.
- Advocate for policy reform around age limits, re-entry policies, and bridging programs.



4. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability

Goal:

Track progress and identify gaps in real time.

Strategies:

- Disaggregate data by gender, age, refugee status, and location.
- Monitor the implementation of gender-responsive policies in schools.
- Use student voice surveys to assess inclusion and safety.
- Involve girls in program design and policy feedback loops.

5. Young People as Change Agents

Goal:

Empower youth to mentor peers and inspire the next generation.

Strategies:

- Support youth-led initiatives that promote education and entrepreneurship.
- Involve students in creating safe school campaigns.
- Facilitate return-to-community mentorship by university students.
- Encourage youth to document and share success stories.

6. Tools and Resources

Tool	Description	Link/Format	Authors
Gender-Responsive Audit Template	Checklist to assess physical and social school and organization's safety	A Guide for Identifying Gaps in Gender Responsive Policies and	Akina Mama wa Afrika with support from Hivos (Akina Mama wa Afrika)
		Gender Equality in Education Snapshot Tool (GES) Guidance	UNGEI (UNGEI)
Parent Advocacy Letter	Template to report GBV or corporal punishment	See Annex 1	N/A
Career orientation Program Template	Guide for comprehensive student induction	See Annex 2	N/A
Girls' Club Facilitation Guide	Topics for self-confidence, health, and goal setting	See Annex 3	N/A
Community Dialogue Facilitation Toolkit	For mobilizing parents and local leaders	See Annex 4	N/A
Mentorship Framework	Roles, recruitment, and activities for mentors	See Annex 5	N/A

7. Sample Indicators for Program Monitoring

Area	Sample Indicator
Access	% of refugee girls enrolled in secondary and higher education
Retention	Dropout rate of girls vs. boys in target schools
Safety	% of girls reporting feeling safe in school
Teacher Training	# of teachers trained in gender-sensitive pedagogy
Community Engagement	# of community dialogues held per quarter
Scholarship Distribution	% of scholarships awarded to refugee girls





8. Recommendations for Stakeholders

For Governments and Policymakers:

- Mandate gender-sensitive training in national teacher certification.
- Fund girls' education beyond tuition—cover sanitation, materials, transport.
- Ensure refugee girls are counted in national education statistics.

For Schools and Educators:

- Create gender-responsive school development plans.
- Incorporate girls' voices in school leadership and decision-making.
- Conduct annual gender audits with student feedback.

For CSOs and NGOs:

- Provide bridging programs for girls with learning gaps.
- Train community mentors and youth educators.
- Monitor school policy compliance and advocate for enforcement.

For Kepler and Higher Institutions:

- Adjust academic entry routes to accommodate non-linear learner journeys.
- Partner with secondary schools on career awareness and orientation.
- Track female student transitions and tailor support programs accordingly.



9. Final Message

Girls cannot succeed in systems not designed to support them. This toolkit reflects a shared commitment to break the barriers they face—from community gatekeepers to curriculum gatekeepers—and provide the mentorship, infrastructure, and equitable policies they need to thrive. Let us act, together.

Annexes

Annex 1

Sample parents' advocacy letter

Your Name]

[Your Village/Community Name]

[Date]

To: **[Name of Parent/Guardian]**

[Address if known]

Subject: **Support for [Girl's Name] to Remain in School**

Dear [Name of Parent/Guardian],

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to you not only as a fellow parent and community member, but as someone who cares deeply about the future of our daughters, including [Girl's Name].

I have heard that there are plans for [Girl's Name] to leave school, possibly due to family or community expectations. I understand the pressures and challenges that families face, especially when traditions and financial needs are involved. However, I respectfully urge you to reconsider.

Educating a girl is one of the greatest investments we can make—for her future and for the community. Girls who complete their education are healthier, more confident, and better able to contribute to their families. They are less likely to marry early and more likely to raise educated, thriving children.

[Girl's Name] is bright and full of potential. By allowing her to stay in school, you are giving her a chance to build a life of dignity, opportunity, and respect. Let us work together to ensure that our daughters, like our sons, have a fair chance to succeed.

With respect and hope,

[Your Name]

Community Member / Advocate

[Phone number if appropriate]

Annex 2

Career Orientation Program Template for Secondary School Girls

Program Title:

“My Future, My Voice: Empowering Girls Through Career Exploration”

Target Group:

Girls in upper secondary school (Senior 3–6 / Grades 9–12)

Duration:

4–8 weeks (can be adjusted for holiday or term-time programming)

Program Objectives:

1. Increase awareness of diverse career pathways, including non-traditional fields for women (e.g., STEM, leadership, entrepreneurship).
2. Build confidence and life skills to make informed career and academic decisions.
3. Provide mentorship and real-life role models to inspire girls’ ambition.
4. Link education to employment by demystifying academic and vocational options.



Program Structure

Week	Theme	Activities	Facilitator
1	Introduction to Career Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Icebreakers - Goal setting - Understanding talents & interests 	School counselor / youth facilitator
2	Understanding Career Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation on local & global careers - Videos and Q&A with women in various fields 	Guest speakers (nurses, engineers, entrepreneurs)
3	Education Pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overview of university, TVET, and apprenticeships - Scholarships & funding info 	School liaison or Ministry rep
4	Entrepreneurship & Soft Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basic business skills - Communication, time management, teamwork 	NGO trainer / Youth mentor
5	Gender & Career Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discuss cultural/gender barriers - Self-advocacy skills - Community norms roleplay 	Gender equality advocate
6	Mentorship Sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Career Sister" guest talk - Small group mentoring circles 	Female professionals (alumnae, staff, local leaders)
7	Career Action Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each girl creates a personal career roadmap - Peer review of plans 	Teachers / Youth coach
8	Showcase & Parent Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentations from students - Parent dialogue on supporting girls' education 	Students + community leader



Program Materials

- Career exploration worksheets
- Posters and role model profiles
- Goal-setting templates
- Journals for personal reflections
- Contact lists for mentors and scholarships

Monitoring & Evaluation

Tool	Purpose
Pre- and post-program survey	Assess knowledge and confidence growth
Attendance and participation tracking	Monitor engagement
Focus group discussion	Gather qualitative feedback from girls
Career action plan submissions	Evaluate planning skills



Key Partners to Involve

- Local women professionals
- Ministries of Education or Gender
- Civil society and NGOs
- Parents and school leadership
- Refugee/IDP education support groups (if applicable)

Annex 3

Girls' Club Facilitation Guide

Title: Strong Girls, Strong Voices

Purpose:

To provide a safe and supportive space where girls can express themselves, build confidence, learn life skills, and discuss issues affecting their education, health, and future.

Key Principles for Facilitators:

- **Be Safe:** Ensure confidentiality, emotional safety, and zero tolerance for bullying.
- **Be Inclusive:** Respect every girl's voice, ability, religion, and background.
- **Be Supportive:** Listen actively and guide discussions—don't dominate.
- **Be Role Models:** Demonstrate respect, fairness, and empowerment.

Suggested Weekly Themes (1–1.5 hrs per week)

Week	Topic	Sample Activities
1	Welcome & Self-Esteem	Icebreakers, "Who Am I?" exercise
2	Girls' Rights & Education	Storytelling, rights charter
3	Health & Hygiene	Menstrual health Q&A, myth busting
4	Confidence & Assertiveness	Roleplay: saying "no", public speaking
5	Gender Roles & Equality	Debate: "What boys can do..."
6	Safety & GBV Awareness	Safe/unsafe spaces map, reporting tips
7	Career & Goal Setting	Vision boards, guest speaker
8	Celebration & Reflection	Showcase talents, share lessons learned

Materials Needed:

- Flipchart/marker
- Journals or notebooks
- Inspirational quotes or storybooks
- Menstrual hygiene kits (where possible)
- Role model posters

Optional Enhancements:

- Invite female mentors or alumni
- Organize joint events with boys' clubs (on gender allyship)
- Link club to school leadership or community advocacy projects



Community Dialogue Facilitation Toolkit

Title:

“Together for Her Future”
Mobilizing Communities to Support Girls’ Education

Purpose:

To foster open, respectful discussions with parents, caregivers, religious and local leaders about the value of girls’ education and how communities can collectively address barriers such as early marriage, school dropout, and gender stereotypes.

Step 1: Preparation

- Identify key stakeholders: Parents (especially fathers), village leaders, teachers, religious figures, and girls themselves.
- Set a safe, neutral venue: School grounds, church/mosque compound, or community hall.
- Agree on goals: Improve girls’ retention, delay early marriage, reduce school absences

Step 2: Structure of the Dialogue (90–120 mins)

Session	Time	Description
Welcome	10 mins	Greet participants, explain purpose and ground rules
Opening Story or Drama	15 mins	Share a real-life story or perform a skit showing barriers girls face
Discussion Groups	30 mins	Divide into small groups: parents, leaders, youth. Discuss: What keeps girls from school? What can we do?
Group Feedback	20 mins	Each group shares key ideas. Use a flipchart or poster.
Community Commitments	20 mins	Facilitate agreements (e.g., “No more marriage under 18”, “Fathers to escort daughters to school”)
Closing Remarks	10 mins	Thank participants, recap next steps, share a snack if possible



Key Discussion Questions

- Why do some families stop girls from continuing school?
- How can we support girls during menstruation, exams, or chores?
- How does educating girls benefit the whole community?
- What is our role as parents, leaders, and neighbors?

Facilitation Tips

- Use local language
- Be respectful of cultural beliefs, but encourage questioning of harmful norms
- Let women, girls, and youth speak early—give them the floor
- Focus on solutions, not just problems
- Celebrate existing local champions or role models

Tools & Materials

- Flipcharts/markers
- Story cards or real-life testimonies
- Posters or flyers with key messages
- Commitments board or sign-up sheet
- Local legal/policy brief on girls' education rights (simplified)

Follow-Up Actions

- Assign local ambassadors (e.g., “Girl Education Champions”)
- Organize a father-daughter day or home visits
- Monitor changes (e.g., fewer dropouts, more parent involvement)

Mentorship Framework: Empowering Secondary School Girls

Purpose

This mentorship framework aims to support secondary school girls—particularly those from refugee, rural, or underserved communities—by connecting them with trained mentors who can provide guidance, motivation, and practical support. The goal is to help girls stay in school, develop confidence, and make informed decisions about their future.

Objectives

- Encourage girls to stay in and complete secondary education.
- Build self-esteem, leadership, and resilience.
- Provide academic and career guidance, including for non-traditional fields.
- Create a safe and trusted space to discuss challenges.
- Prepare girls for transition to higher education or vocational pathways.

Target Groups

- **Mentees:** Girls aged 13–19 in secondary school, prioritizing those at risk of dropout or vulnerability.
- **Mentors:** Female university students, teachers, professionals, or trained community leaders.

Mentorship Structure

- **Format:** One-on-one or small groups (up to 5 girls per mentor)
- **Duration:** 6 to 12 months
- **Frequency:** Monthly meetings (in person or virtual)
- **Methods:** Guided discussions, storytelling, role-playing, and project-based tasks

Mentor Responsibilities

- Be a role model and active listener
- Support mentees in setting academic and life goals
- Share personal experiences and strategies for overcoming challenges
- Encourage participation in school and community life
- Maintain confidentiality and report any concerns to program leads

Suggested Topics

- Setting goals and overcoming obstacles
- Academic planning and time management
- Menstrual health and body confidence
- Dealing with peer pressure and discrimination
- Career awareness, especially in STEM and leadership fields
- Scholarships, higher education, and life after school

Support & Monitoring

- Program staff or school counselor oversees matching and check-ins
- Mentors receive basic training in gender-sensitive mentorship
- Mentees and mentors complete feedback forms quarterly
- Peer sharing sessions for mentors to exchange experiences

Indicators of Success

- Improved school attendance and performance
- Increased confidence and participation in class or leadership role
- More girls expressing interest in higher education or cStrong, respectful mentor-mentee relationships



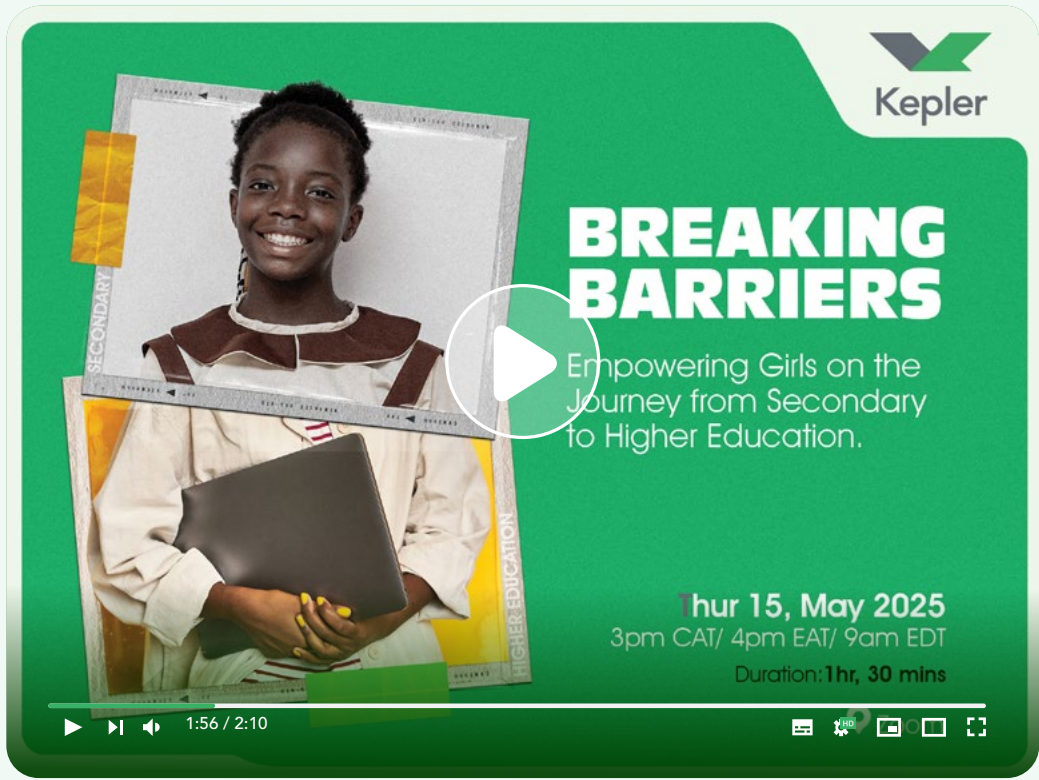
Sustainability Tips

- Link with girls' clubs and alumni groups
- Celebrate mentors and mentees at program events
- Encourage peer mentorship as girls grow in confidence

Annex 6

Gender Learning Session

Rewatch the Gender Learning Session here:



The video player interface features a green background. On the left, a young woman with dark hair, wearing a white and brown sailor-style top, holds a laptop. The video frame is overlaid with a play button icon. To the right of the video frame, the text 'BREAKING BARRIERS' is displayed in large, bold, white capital letters. Below this, the subtitle 'Empowering Girls on the Journey from Secondary to Higher Education.' is written in a smaller white font. In the top right corner of the video player, the Kepler logo is visible. At the bottom right, the event details are listed: 'Thur 15, May 2025', '3pm CAT/ 4pm EAT/ 9am EDT', and 'Duration: 1hr, 30 mins'. A video progress bar at the bottom shows the current time as 1:56 / 2:10. Standard video control icons (play, pause, stop, volume, full screen) are located at the bottom right of the player.

[Click to Play Video](#)

New Pathways to Employment



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