She's the first

2026 Final Report

1. Note any significant changes within the organization since the grant was approved.
As you know, we merged with Girl Rising, another Together Women Rise grantee! This became official on April 2, 2026. She's the First programs and teams now exist under the Girl Rising entity. We relaunched girlrising.org to reflect our powerful new model together.

From January 2026 - present, we've been working diligently on integrating our teams and program models, finding early success that delivers on the promise of our merger vision.

Girl Rising works with girls and those around them — schools, families, and community organisations — to build a world where all girls are educated, respected, and heard. When She's the First merged into Girl Rising, we united our strengths at a critical moment as policies and resources for girls' and women's rights are regressing. Together, we bring 16 years of proven work and an established reputation in the U.S., Kenya, India, and Guatemala.

Our work comes together through three connected programmes where girls gain skills and confidence, learn to speak up, tell their stories, and advocate for issues they care about — while those around them learn to nurture their potential and be supportive allies.

- **In Schools:** RISE builds life skills, confidence, and gender equity for adolescent girls and boys through a creative, story-based curriculum. It also engages teachers and parents to address harmful social norms and unlock opportunities for girls, primarily in government schools, in collaboration with local governments.
- **In Communities:** The Girls First Institute (GFI) supports women-led grassroots organisations to co-create programming with the adolescent girls they serve, focusing on confidence, sexual and reproductive health, and mentorship.
- **Directly with Girls:** Girls Leadership Programmes equip girls with skills to lead advocacy on issues that matter most to them, amplifying their voices locally and globally.

Our education and community-based work is deepest in Kenya, India, and Guatemala, though our leadership programmes engage girls worldwide, including in the United States.

2. Explain material changes, if any, in the financial situation of the organization.
She's the First had a strong financial year in 2025 ($1.9M revenue), bringing strong cash flow to Girl Rising. This happened for two reasons:

1) Budget Reduction: With the financial instability in the sector, especially following the defunding of USAID, we reduced our budget size. We retained our full program staff and activities. Our reduction put an unsustainable strain on the operating side of our organization; however, knowing that the merger was on the horizon, we pushed through.

2) New Major Gifts: We received a bequest at the end of the year; it was the largest individual gift in our history. We also started 2026 strong, bringing a new partnership with LEGO into Girl Rising.

We are proud to say that She's the First, now integrated into Girl Rising, is financially secure, with strong capacity, and diversified revenue streams.

3. Describe what progress you have made with the problems, needs, or opportunities.
Our **Girls First Institute (GFI)** remains a cornerstone of our strategy to strengthen community-based organisations (CBOs) that work with adolescent girls. This was a valuable asset we brought into Girl Rising. The Institute provides practical, context-sensitive training and resources that equip mentors and practitioners to design and deliver girl-centered programming — especially around **sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)**.

With Together Women Rise's $15,000 grant installment in 2025, we continued to **scale access to our signature girl-centered toolkits and mentorship training**.

Throughout 2025, we deepened our intervention by launching the first Advanced Certification cohort in Uganda, expanding the Essential Certification network in Kenya, and strengthening the work of both Partners and Fellows. By the end of 2025, the current Partner cohort will have completed its program, demonstrating tangible progress in both organizational capacity strengthening and girls' agency and self-esteem.

The project's three core components include:

1. **Girls First Institute Certifications**: including the Girls First Summit and subsequent support through the Essential (Kenya and Uganda) and Advanced tracks (Uganda).

2. **Girl-Centered Incubator Fellowship (GCI)**: a three-year capacity-building program for emerging women-led organizations that graduated in July 2026.

3. **Partner Coalition:** a peer-learning and mentorship network for women-led CBOs advancing girl-centered approaches to SRHR programming, which graduated in December 2025.

This report presents the activities, impact, and stories of change from each component during the 2025 implementation period.

Girl First Certification: Girls First Summit

In 2025, the Girls First Institute deepened its certification program across Kenya and Uganda through two major convenings: the **9th Annual Girls First Summit (Nairobi)** and the **2nd Girls First Summit (Kampala)**, alongside continued delivery of the Essential and Advanced Certification tracks.

The Essential Certification track provides organizations with a foundational understanding of girl-centered design. Participants gain practical tools and resources to integrate girls' voices and needs into their programs. The Girls First Summits (GFS) serve as the cornerstone of this certification, bringing together organizations for intensive in-person learning, peer exchange, and reflection. The 2025 summits in Kenya and Uganda were tailored to address the specific needs of these cohorts, combining training on feminist mentorship and SRHR with opportunities for networking and collaboration.

2025 Activities:

- **Girls First Summit in Kenya:** We invited experts in storytelling and mental health to address recurring themes raised by the organizations. Girls led the opening "Girl Hour" panel, sharing their perspectives on mental health, SRHR, and the importance of being heard. We also held a session on girl-centered SRHR programming, equipping practitioners to design interventions based on girls' actual needs rather than external assumptions. Besides the partners and fellows, 40 more organizations attended the summit, which included 92 practitioners and 28 girls.

- **Girls First Summit in Uganda:** In Uganda, we included 15 additional organizations that had not previously attended the summit. These groups represented diverse backgrounds, including those working with girls with disabilities or from different religious communities. They participated in similar foundational sessions and began their Essential Certification journey.

- **Virtual training and access to resources:** Organizations in this track also had access to virtual learning opportunities, including sessions on Listening to Girls and Safeguarding and the Risk Register. They could also access practical tools, such as the Listening to Girls Toolkit and the Feminist Mentorship Manual, to support the ongoing application of girl-centered approaches. To date, 89 organizations in Kenya and Uganda have been trained through this initiative, gaining foundational knowledge and support to strengthen their programs

Results & Early Outcomes:

The 2025 Girls First Summits in Kenya and Uganda brought together over 200 participants, including practitioners, mentors, and girls, to strengthen knowledge and collaboration around girl-centered programming and SRHR. Participants described the experience as inspiring, practical, and transformative, noting that the sessions helped them reflect on their work and reimagine how to involve girls more meaningfully.

Through interactive sessions on SRHR, mental health, safeguarding, and feminist mentorship, participants gained new tools to design inclusive, girl-centered programs. Girls emphasized the

need for safe, stigma-free spaces where they can openly discuss their bodies, relationships, and emotions, linking SRHR to safety, self-esteem, and leadership.

Three months after the Summits, early results show strong evidence of learning application and organizational change. While data collection is ongoing, 94% of respondents reported gaining substantial knowledge from the SRHR programming session, and 89% said the Girl Hour helped them better understand girls' needs. So far, 72% of organizations have already adapted a framework or policy within their programs based on what they learned at the Summits.

Story of Change: Pa Maa Education Initiative

Pa Maa Education Initiative, based in Northern Uganda, works to enhance access to quality education for girls. Through its participation in the Girls First Institute Essential Certification program, the organization has learned to design programs *with* girls rather than *for* them. The team now co-creates initiatives with girls, valuing their input in every stage of design and implementation.

The trainings and resources from She's the First, including the *Feminist Mentorship Manual* and *Risk Register* webinar, have provided practical tools that strengthened the organization's systems and safeguarding practices. Pa Maa developed its own Risk Register and now includes senior women teachers in its programs, using the *Feminist Mentorship Manual* to train them as mentors.

Pa Maa's approach to SRHR education has also evolved. In the past, menstrual health sessions were delivered as one-size-fits-all lectures. Now, the organization facilitates smaller, age-specific groups where girls can openly discuss menstruation, relationships, and bodily changes. These safe, interactive spaces have helped girls build confidence, understand their rights, and learn to advocate for themselves.

Girls First Advanced Certification in Uganda

The Advanced Certification track of the Girls First Institute (GFI) in Uganda builds on the Essential Certification, guiding organizations to apply and deepen their understanding of girl-centered design, feminist mentorship, and SRHR programming. We launched the first Advanced cohort of 29 organizations in 2025, composed primarily of those that participated in the 2024 Summit. The track began with a three-day in-person training in Kampala, followed by a series of virtual sessions and ongoing coaching. This cohort will continue through 2026, with graduation planned for August 2026.

2025 Activities

a. Hybrid Training:
    i. A 2-day in-person training alongside the Girls First Summit. This covered introductory modules on girl-centered design, feminist mentorship, sexual and reproductive health programming for girls, and M&E. Organizations engaged in rich peer-to-peer discussions and explored the foundations of SRHR programming.
    ii. Monthly virtual training sessions focused on the Girls First Institute's curriculum, going deeper into the concepts of girl-centered SRHR and mentorship programs.
b. Coaching
    i. Quarterly 1:1 coaching sessions to assist organizations in integrating and applying learnings from the training into program implementation and to refine their mentorship and SRHR strategies.
c. Access to Resources:
    i. Organizations received physical copies of our toolkits to use with their organizations and share with the rest of the team. This included the Feminist Mentorship Manual and the Listening to Girls toolkit.
d. Networking opportunities:
    i. Organizations are building a strong group of girls' organizations in different regions.

Early Outcomes and Impact

Participants in the Advanced Certification described the in-person training as eye-opening and practical, helping them strengthen their leadership and understanding of girl-centered SRHR programming. They shared that the sessions on feminist mentorship, emotional intelligence, and girl-centered design gave them new tools to lead with empathy and purpose.

Many reported gaining a clearer understanding of how to discuss sensitive SRHR topics with girls, create safe spaces for open conversations, and design mentorship activities that reflect girls' real experiences. One participant shared, *"The feminist model really stood out for me because it emphasized relationship and collaboration between mentor and mentee."* Another said, *"I discovered more important SRHR topics that I initially thought were not as important."*

Since the training, we have seen continued high engagement from participants in virtual sessions and in the community group. The cohort has completed the first module on *Listening to Girls*, during which organizations mapped and assessed their programs to identify potential biases. They are now using these insights to guide conversations with girls and identify gaps in their current SRHR programming. The next module will help participants integrate these findings into the design of programs that directly address girls' needs around sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Story of Change: Give Hope Uganda

Give Hope Uganda (GHU) is a community-based organization that empowers vulnerable adolescent girls and young women to lead healthy and dignified lives. After joining the Girls First Institute through the Essential Certification in 2024, GHU advanced to the first cohort of the Advanced Certification in 2025. Through the in-person training in Kampala and virtual sessions, the team deepened its understanding of girl-centered SRHR programming, feminist mentorship, and girl-centeredness.

After joining the Girls First Institute and participating in the Girls First Summit, the organization began collaborating with other organizations and strengthening its networks in its region. One of the most significant outcomes was the launch of "Empower Her to Speak," a project inspired by the training. It transformed GHU's approach from a one-way model to a participatory one, where girls are encouraged to speak up, ask questions, and take the lead in sessions, such as facilitating card games and discussions about their bodies and relationships. Girls now feel a stronger sense of ownership, actively contributing to solutions for the challenges they face. Beyond their own programs, GHU has guided three other organizations on how to use these tools effectively, amplifying the impact of the Girls First Institute in their community.

Girl-Centered Incubator Fellowship

The Girl-Centered Incubator (GCI) is a three-year fellowship for young, visionary women leaders in the Global South who are building programs for vulnerable girls. Our cohort includes two organizations in Kenya and three in Uganda, collectively reaching approximately 2,175 girls in rural communities each year. Fellows now operate more mature programs grounded in girls' voices, feminist mentorship, and rights-based SRHR.

2025 Activities

a. **In-Person Convening and Girls First Summit**
The GCI Fellows met in Kenya for the annual in-person conference, held in parallel with the Partner Coalition meeting. They had training and peer-learning sessions that included joint sessions with partners, as well as targeted training for the GCI cohort. Joint sessions included SRHR program design and girl-centered programming, which allowed fellows and partners to share what was working, identify common challenges, and co-create strategies together. Fellows also participated in targeted sessions designed from their 2024 assessments and individual goals, which strengthened their skills in budgeting, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and building functional boards. They concluded the convening by joining the Girls First Summit for more shared learning and networking.

b. **Individual Goal-Setting & External Mentorship**
   Following the in-person convening, each fellow organization defined a clear annual goal for the final year of the fellowship (e.g., strengthening governance, addressing cultural barriers, or planning for scale). Based on these priorities, they were matched with external women leaders in the sector who have regional or thematic expertise. Fellows meet with these mentors quarterly through 2025 and 2026.
c. **STF Coaching for Founders**
   In addition to external mentors, fellows received 1:1 coaching from STF staff to address day-to-day leadership and organizational challenges, such as structuring sustainable budgets, designing their in-school programming, or building their teams.
d. **Fundraising & Sustainability Bootcamp**
   In the last quarter of 2025, fellows participated in a 5-week virtual boot camp in partnership with The Little Big Fund, focusing on fundraising and sustainability. By the end of the course, fellows are expected to (i) strengthen their fundraising knowledge, (ii) develop a clear 2–3 page case for support, and (iii) identify priority funders and strategies for the coming year.

Outcomes and Impact

As the GCI Fellowship came to a close, with the cohort graduating in June 2026, the female leaders demonstrated transformation in their leadership, organizational structures, and impact on girls. Fellows reported shifting from project-focused initiatives to structured, girl-centered programs that actively include girls in their design. They strengthened governance by putting clear policies in place and worked to grow their organizations through improved fundraising and scaling strategies.

This transformation is reflected in the impact they are having on girls. Across the six fellows, more than 1,200 girls consistently participated in SRHR programming. Fellows describe girls as more confident, informed about their rights and futures, and increasingly taking up leadership roles in their schools and communities.

Story of Impact

When Lizza Marie Kawooya from Uganda joined the Girl-Centered Incubator Fellowship, her organization, Dwona Initiative, had a strong vision but limited systems to support it. Through mentorship and coaching, her team learned to shift their question from *"What can we offer girls?"* to *"What do girls think, want, and need?"*

One focus group revealed how a girl managed her period by cutting pieces of her mattress to use as pads. Her experience inspired Dwona to co-create *Rasbombie's First Period: A Journey*

to Understanding and establish Period Giving Corners in schools, where girls can access pads and information without stigma.

With support from She's the First, Dwona now designs programs with girls, not for them. This shift has strengthened the organization's foundation and ensured that girls' voices directly shape the solutions meant for them. (Read more here.)

Partner Coalition:

In 2025, She's the First concluded the third and final year of the Partner Coalition (2023–2025), a bold initiative uniting 15 women-led, community-based organizations across ten countries in East and West Africa, Latin America, and South Asia. With Together Women Rise's support, three Partner Coalition members in Kenya and Uganda received flexible funding and intensive technical assistance to strengthen their mentorship and SRHR programs. These organizations are graduating from the program with stronger SRHR programs for girls and solid organizations that are ready for sustainable growth. The results are already evident in the girls, with a decrease in early pregnancies, reduced school dropout rates, and increased leadership for girls.

2025 Activities

In 2025, we convened partners for three days of peer learning, important moments for network building and support, and to celebrate their wins. These partners have become thought leaders and support for younger organizations, like the GCI fellows incubators.

Outcomes and Impact

i. 15 organizations across 10 countries, including 3 in Kenya and Uganda
ii. 9,475 girls were directly reached through coalition programming in 2025, contributing to a cumulative reach of 27,701 girls since 2023.
iii. Mentor participation in STF trainings increased from 28.6 % to 54.5 %.
iv. Use of STF toolkits for mentorship and SRHR programs nearly doubled (26.6 % → 47.5 %).
v. Girls' agency scores improved by 10 percentage points, with notable gains in self-esteem, decision-making, and awareness of their rights.

These achievements stem from intentional collaboration and consistent practice of feminist mentorship and girl-centered design.

Story of Change

Msichana Empowerment Kuria (MEK) in Kenya joined the Partner Coalition in 2023. With Together Women Rise's support, we worked together to transform its mentorship approach into a girl-led model. In 2025, the organization applied its learnings on girl-centered design by training girls to conduct their own community research and leading discussions with other girls. This shift gave girls the confidence to speak about issues affecting them and to take leadership roles in addressing those issues.

The findings from this research led MEK to revamp its programs. While the organization continues to focus on reducing female genital mutilation in Kuria, the research revealed that girls face broader challenges. MEK has since expanded its approach to include mentorship on understanding their bodies and rights, learning to advocate for themselves with families and peers, and making informed decisions about their education and futures.

Program data collected by She's the First reflects this transformation: girls' overall agency scores rose from 106 to 114, with significant improvements in decision-making (+3%) and awareness of rights (+19%). Beyond the numbers, girls now co-lead program monitoring and engage parents and local leaders to support girls' education and safety. MEK plans to share its girl-led research approach with other partners and continue to expand this model of feminist mentorship and advocacy.

As anecdotal evidence of this growth, MEK secured multiyear funding from the Segal Family Foundation earlier this year. MEK directly attributes this milestone to the capacity building and the networks and connections opened up to them through the Partner Coalition.

4. Identify changes, if any, to the scope of your project and explain these changes.

There are no changes to report.

5. Share challenges you have experienced and lessons learned:

A key challenge has been ensuring that organizations complete the graduation requirements for certification. While many are actively implementing learnings and engaging in virtual sessions, completion rates remain lower than anticipated, reflecting the need for continued follow-up and coaching to help organizations meet all certification milestones.

A lesson learned here is that some of the certification requirements may not have aligned with organizations' most urgent priorities, and in some cases were more rigorous than organizations had the capacity to meet — even as they remained highly engaged and excited about the training itself. Going forward, we're exploring how to offer multiple pathways and checkpoints toward graduation, such as a mix of attending live sessions, completing self-paced modules, using toolkits, and participating in focus groups, so that organizations have more flexible ways to demonstrate progress and complete certification.

6. Do you anticipate future challenges to complete your project?
No

7. Provide a detailed list of all expenses incurred during the reporting period, which have been paid for with the Together Women Rise grant.

Category	Amount (USD)	Description
Training Manager Salary	$5,000	Supported staffing costs for our Kenya-based Training Manager, who led in-person and virtual training sessions, and one-on-one mentorship and advising for over 40 CBOs.
Partner Coalition Grants	$10,000	Direct support to Partner Coalition organizations. Funds enabled local implementation of girl-centered programming, including mentorship groups, SRHR sessions, and monitoring & evaluation activities aligned with the Girls First Institute.
Total	**$15,000**	

8. Include any other relevant information in the comments box.
We are proud to merge with another Together Women Rise grantee and would love to showcase our future vision to your members.

We are in the midst of our strategic planning process for 2027-2029. While not yet finalized, some key principles will be:

- **Go deep and create proof points:** -
  - Prioritize **depth of programming over expansion**
  - **Concentrate efforts on core geographies** where there is momentum and partnership
  - **Integration of models/resources** from each legacy organization as a way of deepening impact
- **Lean into storytelling/narrative change** within our program models and as an organization
- **Invest in measurement and evaluation systems and practices to** clearly capture and communicate impact across approaches and in order to test and learn.
- **Ensure girl-centred engagement practices** across programs

We will finalize our 3-year plan by the end of the year.