Measuring Progress: Educational Development for Girls in Kibra, Kenya

Christina Field, Masters of International Development Practice Candidate 2016, University of Minnesota; John Chisholm, Masters of International Development Practice Candidate 2016, University of Minnesota; Amanda Traaseth, Masters of International Development Practice Candidate 2016, University of Minnesota

Keywords
Monitoring and Evaluation, education, women, girls

Abstract
The Sustainable Development Goals have emphasized that education - especially that of young women - is essential to disrupt the cycle of poverty and positively transform communities and nations economically, politically, and socially. The Kibra (also known as “Kibera”) slum of Nairobi, Kenya is perhaps the largest slum in Africa, and it is a place where girls face especially difficult odds pursuing an education. During the summer of 2015, our team of Master of Development Practice (MDP) students engaged in a fieldwork project in Kibra with the purpose of developing and implementing a program evaluation plan for a tuition-free secondary girls’ school called the Kibera Girls Soccer Academy (KGSA).

Our project partner, KGSA, is dedicated to improving the lives of at-risk and disadvantaged young women by providing tuition-free secondary education, artistic programming, and athletic opportunities in Kibra. The organization firmly believes that through active participation in education, arts, and athletics, young women will have the opportunity to develop a stronger confidence in their minds, bodies, and spirits – empowering them to become inspiring leaders of their own lives, communities, and country.

This project had two main objectives: the primary objective was to design and develop a pilot monitoring and evaluation plan (M&E) to be conducted annually by KGSA; the secondary objective is to begin gathering and organizing qualitative data regarding potential positive youth development indicators for long-term, future analysis of KGSA’s effects on girls and community.

There is a critical need for local, regional, and international government entities and NGOs to focus on the quality of young women’s education. Current programs and initiatives do exist, and with the implementation of comprehensive evaluation plans school programs are better able to assess and meet the ongoing needs of their students. Evaluation results provide an opportunity to determine if another’s methodology can be transferred to a new and different context.

Introduction
The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent a powerful manifestation of global partnership and cooperation in the ongoing effort to address the many dimensions and forms of poverty, with a mission to better lives for many men, women, and children in our world. Indeed the globe has seen, and continues to see, significant developments taking shape through governments, non-governmental organizations, local institutions, and grassroots coalitions. As the United Nations and the world moves to define and soon enact the next stage of international development agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), development practitioners around the world are contemplating how to improve action taken at the local, national, regional, and international level for long-term viability. In these efforts, it is clear that the empowerment of women and girls continue to remain a central piece in the mission to positively transform
communities and nations economically, politically, and socially. One MDG goal was to “promote gender equality and empower women” but the issues are far from eradicated. Therefore, we see the issue taking a forefront position as the SDGs take shape. In addition, education remains a fundamental component for the international development agenda, as it has shown to be an effective tool in breaking the cycle of poverty. It has been brought up as a critical component of the SDGs to help children reach their full potential.

The project conducted by our team this summer incorporated both of these key agenda themes, girls and education, as well as the critically important practice of Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E). In the final stages of creating the SDGs, there has been a strong emphasis on the need for on-going monitoring and regular evaluation systems for long-term progress in the implementation of the SDGs.\(^1\) Our work provides an on-the-ground perspective of micro-level international development work that incorporates key features of the proposed SDGs in a particular location in the world. We are honored to be invited to present at the 3\(^{rd}\) Annual International Conference on Sustainable Development regarding our time spent in Nairobi, Kenya working for an inspirational example of development work in the form of an all-girls tuition-free secondary school.

In November 2014, the Kibera Girls Soccer Academy Foundation submitted a project proposal to the University of Minnesota, Masters of International Development Practice program to request assistance in the design and development of a Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) plan. Until this summer, the organization and school had never conducted an evaluation nor had they determined a baseline from which to work from. The three of us, Christina Field, John Chisholm, and Amanda Traaseth, were selected for the project. After several months of preparation including numerous Skype calls, planning and strategy meetings, grant applications, Kiswahili lessons, country and education-system research, we arrived in Kibra on June 3, 2015.

Before we begin diving into the details of our project, allow us to provide important locational context. Positioned approximately 3 miles from the bustling city center of Nairobi, Kenya, there is a low income, crowded informal settlement known as Kibra. Kibra is believed to be the largest “slum” in Africa, with upwards of 250,000 people of diverse backgrounds living in approximately 2.5 square kilometers, or 630 acres.\(^2\) Hundreds of NGOs have flocked to Kibra due to the extreme level of poverty, public health crises, and lack of access to basic needs including water and a functioning sanitation system.\(^3\) Yes, it is true that unemployment is high and life expectancy is low. According to Centre for Disease Control, the HIV prevalence rate in Kibra in significantly higher than the rest of the country.\(^4\) As recently as May 2015, a cholera outbreak was detected in the community.\(^5\) In our experience during the nine week long project during the summer of 2015, it is clear that Kibra faces many challenges. However, it is also our experience that Kibra is a busy, vibrant community with a complex history and strong identity.

As you walk through Kibra, you are overwhelmed with the number of men, women, and children that surround you, the piki piki (small motorbikes) as they zoom past, and the winding mud paths that everyone else seems to navigate without hesitation. It is in the neighborhood of Makina that you will find a school called the “Kibera Girls Soccer Academy” or KGSA.

---

KGSA Background
KGSA was founded in 2006 by a man named Abdul Kassim, a Kibra native, with land donated by his grandmother. Abdul is an extremely well known man in Kibra and is seen as a community leader. This strong connection to the community is an absolute asset to the school, as it provides confidence that the school is representing the needs of the people in which they are serving. The school began with eleven students and unpaid teachers; it now has 130 students, a small staff of paid teachers, and ambitious plans to construct a dormitory building next-door to house vulnerable girls starting in January 2016. To this day, and unlike the public schools nearby, KGSA does not require any student or her family to pay tuition.

KGSA has four classrooms, one for each “Form”, with approximately 30 students to each classroom. They also recently built a laboratory and a library that currently functions as a teachers lounge due to space limitations. The students follow the Kenyan Ministry of Education curriculum, receiving training in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, English, Kiswahili, and so on. In Kenya, all books are preselected by the national government, but the school also offers extra texts for curious students. In addition to their classes, the students are offered an opportunity to participate in a variety of clubs including drama, science, and journalism. The purpose of these clubs is to foster long-term skills and build confidence, such as learning new trades for potential professional possibilities. We found the students loved the clubs, and many participated in them.

The school has also operated a microfinance program for graduating students and their families in the past, however, it has been temporary shutdown due to lack of funding and leadership. The school has also created a cybercafé and photography studio, serving as a business partner with the school. This enterprise is called “Shedderz” and staffs KGSA graduates. This is representative of some ideas of what sustainability means to KGSA. During girls’ secondary education, the school’s clubs hone skills such as writing, photography, and editing that may, if interested, result in a KGSA student working at Shedderz after completing Form Four and ensuring employment opportunities. These various initiatives show the school’s commitment to positively impacting the lives of students even after they graduate.

The Project
Over the last few years, KGSA has been approached by major international donors and seemed to have a strong chance of receiving support. However, the school could not produce many of the records, documents, or evidence that these major donors required in order to provide assistance. As we mentioned previously, there was no evaluation plan in place prior to our project. To some organizations, this may seem to be an easy fix but to a small scale school with staff that is already overworked and, frankly, underpaid, there is simply no extra time to create an entire plan to the level needed for major donation support. KGSA is growing and expanding its operations, and they realized it is critical to begin implementing M&E to track to progress and make sure objectives and goals are being met.

That is where we come in. Both in our academic and professional lives, the three of us have been exposed to the various intricacies involved in grant proposals and donation requests, as well as the necessity of an organization’s monitoring and evaluation plan. By learning about the school from the staff and administration, we were able to use our time and background knowledge to assist them with a comprehensive plan for future funding opportunities and internal improvement.

If you are interested in learning more about the school, please feel free to visit the foundation website at http://kgsafoundation.org/kibera-girls-soccer-academy.
It is important to note that the school requested our team to create an M&E plan, not to conduct an in-depth evaluation. This was agreed upon by all involved in the project due to the strong belief that an accurate and comprehensive evaluation could not be conducted in nine weeks' time, specifically without an effective evaluation plan already in place. Stakeholders and MDP students alike believed that instead of external M&E being conducted, that for the longer-term success of the organization, it was important that KGSA stakeholders were involved in the process and that an M&E plan could be created that internal actors could also implement on an ongoing basis. The M&E plan that we created does not claim to provide instructions for an impact evaluation, as this requires in-depth statistical analysis that is beyond the organization's capacity at this point. Simply put, the M&E plan will help the school observe changes happening in the school and therefore intervene when possible.

The M&E plan has both internal and external purposes. Internally, the school is interested in assessing how well their programming addresses a variety of issues including the condition of the school compound, the quality of education, and the school’s ability to promote the students emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing. In order to do this, a baseline needs to be identified. With a baseline, changes can be tracked over the weeks, months, and years and some assumptions can be made about the effect of the program. Externally, the information can be used to show others KGSA’s successes as well as challenges over time. If M&E tools reveal some areas are lacking, analysis can be conducted and causes can be shared with donors, enabling the organization to ask for exactly what support is needed.

**Methodology**

Our team decided to first define what makes KGSA unique and translate it into a comprehensible model. The model of KGSA that we identified is meant to represent what it is about them that makes their activities and programming special, what is critical to their identity as an organization. This took a considerable amount of time out of our allotted nine weeks, as it was necessary for us to build a strong reputation with the staff and students, observe the daily interactions within the school, and conduct a series of data collection methods to begin piecing together the story of KGSA. In our experience, it was critical to take the necessary time to get to know the unique context. It was also required that we hold validation meetings with various stakeholders to constantly reexamine all that we believed we were seeing and experiencing at the school. Constant feedback is the only way to determine if what you are creating will ever be implemented and therefore useful.

In order to define the unique model of KGSA and ultimately create tools for the M&E plan, various research methodologies were used to gather information, including:

- Observation
- Dozens of one-on-one interviews with school staff and stakeholders
- Implementation of a questionnaire completed by 215 students
- Facilitation of seven focus groups
- Four home visits with students’ families
- Two all-staff meetings at the school
- Attendance of several extra-curricular activity events, including soccer, volleyball, journalism, and drama.
- General desk research

Since the M&E plan is to be used by the organization and for the organization, the main focus of the project was to engage with stakeholders and understand what aspects were important to
them at school and what they identified as indicators pointing to what a “high quality” school meant. Stakeholders considered indicators not only about academic performance, but key components that considers students’ wellbeing, how they could reach their full potential, and how they would transition from secondary school into adulthood to contribute to their communities and families.

As we mentioned in the previous section, the nature of an M&E is not to make recommendations, per se, since the M&E team members are not experts in the field of education, nor are the member natives of Kenya or Kibra where the school is located. The objective of the M&E team is to observe and, through various methods, gather information from all the stakeholders involved in the KGSA organization to help identify what issues and values are most important. Once identifying what stakeholders are interested in and the school’s unique model, indicators and M&E tools are created for the organization to use in both short-term and longer-term situations. An M&E plan is intended to help the organization to be reflective and to progress forward, but it is not set in stone and should not be a substitute to additional decision-making processes e.g. participatory actions of stakeholders or political processes.

The following Indicators of Quality were identified by stakeholders and therefore provided the basis for our M&E tools. The M&E tools are used to capture information that represents these indicators:

1. Affordability and Financial Sustainability.
2. Experiential Education and Practice Training
3. Health & Safe Space
4. School Culture and Mission
5. Achievement
6. Promoting Gender Equity

For each indicator, there is a series of sub-indicators that identify what makes up that particular indicator. For example, under the Health & Safe Space indicator we have listed several sub-indicators based on what we learned was important to the school such as physical safety from teachers and other students, students do not experience robberies in school compound, the school structure is solid, and clean water, soap, and quality latrines are provided for sanitation and health reasons. The four sub-indicators are: (1) tuition free education; (2) low or no activity fees; (3) low or no expenditure on school supplies/uniforms; and (4) students should not be denied education for lack of funds. Once we defined these indicators and sub-indicators for the school, we began to formulate the various metric(s) used to capture the information, the timeline for implementing the data collection tools, who/what are the sources of data, the baseline data, goals, and the individual(s) responsible for collecting and/or analyzing the data for each sub-indicators.

As we discuss moving from the MDGs to the SDGs, the focus becomes long-term, sustainable responses and solutions. In our plan, we incorporated this concept and included longer-term M&E tools such as alumni follow-up and information recordkeeping, career services and list skills trainings for graduating seniors. With these tools, the school will be able to monitor how the graduating students are doing as they move forward in their lives, and hopefully offer support.
We tried to create tools that would be useful and reasonable within the context of our partner organization, KGSA. One of the first deliverables we completed for the project was an organization chart and staff directory. This helped the organization see staff members’ strengths and where capacities may be already for present for some staff members to implement M&E tools and conduct analysis. We also maintained a certain technological level, based on resources available and staff members’ comfort level, mainly utilizing Excel or Microsoft Word, to ensure access and implementation would not be an issue.

**Observations and Findings**

We identified several key observations and findings during our project that we believe provide important insights into developing a monitoring and evaluation plan within this context.

First, it is critical that relevant development practitioners involved in monitoring and evaluation are able to distinguish between macro-level and micro-level M&E. For example, in the case of KGSA, the concept of the school as a “family” was critical to the organization and the project. KGSA staff value building trust and rapport with students and being able to counsel them if needed. The school has gone above and beyond throughout its history to help students who are sick or who have lost a family member, for example. While these maybe out-of-school issues, the KGSA model believes that issues at home or in the community can negatively impact how a student is able to learn or focus on studies. KGSA believes that by offering additional support to a student, the student will increasingly see the school as a safe place. KGSA alumni shared that this “family” model has resulted in them keeping in contact with the school and giving back to the school long after graduation. These types of values, though, would be difficult to manage at a large school or to try to duplicate at a macro level. This component had a strong impact on our entire M&E plan. The idea that the school operates as a close-knit family does not translate similarly to all schools or organizations, even those in similar scope and context.

Second, while outside knowledge can be very beneficial to an organization, it requires local knowledge and relationship in order to be successful. The three of us have varying experiences in traveling through East Africa or working with recent immigrants from East Africa in the United States. We also have experience working for nonprofit organizations, frequently involving education, and we all have worked with youth in various capacities. However, when we arrived in Nairobi, we could not begin to speak on the specific relationships, struggles, and processes experienced by KGSA staff and students. We needed the expertise, experiences, and associations of the staff and students in order to provide them with an M&E plan that fit them and their context. Local stakeholders have a deeper understanding of the history of the area and school, and are instrumental in thinking about how M&E may adapt to changing conditions.

Third, an M&E plan needs to meet the needs of the organization while also remaining within their abilities. Development practitioners in this setting need to determine what resources are available to the organization, what technology is currently utilized or able to be utilized by the organization, and what time and labor constraints fit within their reality. For example, at KGSA, the school possessed a couple of laptops and had experience using Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel. All of our data collection tools were created with these two programs. In addition, we ensured that all products we created were easy to print due to the school’s preference to handwrite grades, attendance, and other information. Therefore, M&E tools were in both hard and soft copy versions and staff were provided were printed materials as well as flash drives.

Fourth, there will be times where, as a development practitioner, you have an idea of what you believe are important and what must be measured. Or you find that you are simply curious to
learn something about the school, but it is not necessarily important to include in M&E. It is important to assess what is actually important to evaluate. It is simply unrealistic to learn everything about an organization and those involved, and it will only make the plan complicated, convoluted, and will ultimately miss the needs of the organization.

Fifth, operating an organization on the ground is often very different from the assumptions made from the outside. Many times during the summer, we witnessed circumstances where the organization had to make quick decisions that would be, frankly, confusing to an outsider. The organization stressed to us the importance of a savings or unrestricted funds that would allow KGSA to adapt to unforeseeable events and emergency situations. This point also ties to varying culture views that can occur between foundation and the organization on the ground. For example, in Kibra, many believed that a building project should begin before all of the funds are available to complete the project. Half-built buildings are a common sight in Kibra, and throughout Nairobi, and it is common to simply collect funding as construction is underway, and it can serve as a sign that funds are being put to use right away without suspicion of corruption. In the eyes of the U.S. based Board of Directors, it was too risky to begin building, though, without at least 80% of the total funds needed. Therefore frequent communication between site locations and donors is absolutely essential to ensure all parties reach an understanding and to help monitor project progress.

Project Limitations, Considerations and Challenges

While this M&E project had a dedicated team who worked to create a comprehensive M&E plan, it has some limitations. It is important to discuss the strengths of a project, but equally as important to address the challenges. Due to time and distance constraints, the M&E team was unable to thoroughly meet with parents/households of students or key current or potential donors of the school. Nor did the team research other schools in Kibra for comparison. Other partner programs of KGSA were not thoroughly investigated such as the cyber cafe/photo project called "Shedderz", the community soccer program, or microfinance program (since it is currently not operating) and therefore the M&E plan does not extend to that level. These are areas that could benefit from further research.

Also, it is important to consider the implications that the M&E team was externally sourced. As outside characters, responses from stakeholders may be altered. In some cases, stakeholders felt free to give honest answers and feedback because they knew the team did not have any authority to punish students or families or respond with other negative consequences. They also were aware of the fact that it was the responsibility of the team to listen carefully and consider their responses. On the other hand, though, the team members were involved at the school for a short period of time, just a couple months, and therefore it may have been difficult to build rapport with some stakeholders to understand issues in more depth. In addition, the stakeholders may have made assumptions that the M&E team had resources they could offer the school, and therefore gave slightly more negative responses, hoping it would lead to more assistance.

There were challenges that we faced, immediately arriving at KGSA and throughout the nine week project. When we first arrived at KGSA, it came to our attention that another secondary school had been built directly next door. We were not informed of this new school prior to our project and spent considerable time determining if the schools were indeed completely separate or essentially combined. This second school created issues for our project as it was a mixed boys' and girls' school and was funded from a different organization. The schools share clubs, feeding programs, field trips, administration, uniforms (for girls), staff, admission procedures,
teachers’ office, location, and school schedule. When schools forms a strong partnership, it needs to be made clear to students’ families, donors, and staff members to ensure resources are being properly allocated and managed, and to have clear expectations of services provided to students. As we moved forward in our project and tried to assess the effects of the school’s extracurricular activities, academic programming, and other aspects, it became clear that we often could not completely discern between the second school and KGSA. This issue may come to the forefront of M&E for development programs as organizations seek new partners in a global society. More M&E tools may need to be formed to properly assess the impact of different organizations in a collaborative project with different tasks.

In addition to this complicated scenario, we were informed this summer that the KGSA foundation is restructuring their role and relationship to the school. Mainly, the foundation no longer wishes to be the main funding source for the school but is instead encouraging the school's local leadership to seek out additional funding through Kenyan and international funding sources.

The M&E plan is just that: a plan. The product is now in the hands of the members of the organization and it is to their discretion and willingness to implement parts of the plan. Furthermore, even upon using the tools and conducting analysis, it is up to members of the organization to choose actions based on the yielded results. By nature, monitoring and evaluation is done with the mind set of possible change. Each year students and staff change and the M&E tools can be used to catch changes in the organization over time and to adapt to morphing conditions. Therefore, M&E is an on-going process.

Conclusion
The proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will soon replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and become a new framework to consider for international development practitioners as the world moves forward. The drafted SDGs build off of the MDGs by encouraging long-term, maintainable solutions to issues that continue to plague our work. Specifically, as it relates to our project in Kibra, Nairobi, Kenya this summer, the SDGs continue to emphasize the important of addressing the objective of attaining “gender equality and empower all women and girls”, as well as the target of “inclusive and equitable quality education” to “promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

There is a critical need for local, regional, and international government entities and NGO’s to focus on the quality of young women’s education. Current programs and initiatives do exist, and with the implementation of comprehensive evaluation plans school programs are better able to assess and meet the ongoing needs of their students. The benefits of M&E can be felt by the organization implementing the various programs and activities, and the community at large. M&E provides an opportunity for an organization to assess their current programming and activities, determine what is working and what is not, and therefore make decisions and/or adjustments to their practices. This information can then be shared with similar organizations, and others can begin to evaluate their own models.

---

7 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. “Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals.”
References


