

so they can

Executive Summary

Girls and Women 2026

On behalf of Cassandra Treadwell
Founder and CEO of So They Can
cassandra@sotheycan.org
+ 64 27 871 9031

Australian Aid

*All figures in this Executive Summary are in AUD

So They Can is a leading international NGO that delivers development projects to reduce poverty and improve access to quality education in East Africa.

56,000 children and 35,600 community members have directly benefited since 2009 through So They Can's direct partnership with 55 government schools and their communities in Kenya and Tanzania. In 2023, So They Can received full accreditation with the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), which means that So They Can delivers development projects on behalf of the Australian Government annually. It is a testament to So They Can's effectiveness and transparency in governance, operations and accountability.



The Reality of Being Born a Girl in Kenya or Tanzania

In Kenya and Tanzania, girls and women face disproportionate barriers to accessing a number of human rights, particularly their right to education, due to poverty, harmful cultural norms and practices, and inadequate access to resources.

Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of girls out of school globally. Female Genital Cutting (FGC), child marriage, early pregnancy, and forced child labour are harsh realities faced daily by many girls born in So They Can's partner communities.

In the Manyara Region, where So They Can operates in Tanzania, 58% of girls and women have been subjected to FGC, the highest rate in Tanzania. 40% are married as children. In Baringo County, one of the regions where So They Can operates in Kenya, 60% of girls are estimated to be at risk of child marriage.

Despite the practice being illegal, FGC remains common in traditional communities to prepare girls for child marriage. This includes girls as young as 5 years old.

'According to tradition, the first man who comes forward and pays a dowry, is considered the future husband, and no other man can be given the right to that child.'
Peter, So They Can Champion Father in Tanzania.

In response, So They Can uses a gender lens across our development work. This means that our holistic programs are designed to not only reduce poverty through access to education, but are simultaneously protecting and advancing girls' and women's rights.

Our Approach To Advance Gender Equality

So They Can takes a holistic, community-led and sustainable approach to gender equality, advancing girls' education and women's rights, recognising that lasting change cannot be achieved by working with girls alone.

Gender inequality in our partner communities is driven by deeply entrenched social norms, poverty and inadequate systems and resources. To address this, So They Can designs and delivers integrated Education and Community Development Programs that work at multiple levels of influence. From individual girls, boys, women and men, to families, schools, traditional leadership structures and government systems.

Girls and Women at the Centre

So They Can works to secure the safety, education and empowerment of girls and women, particularly those most at risk of FGC, child marriage, early pregnancy and exclusion from school. Through access to quality education, scholarships, safe and inclusive infrastructure, health education and targeted protection mechanisms, girls are supported to remain in school and realise their rights. The women in the communities where we work are also empowered through economic education and strengthening, health services, and leadership opportunities that increase their agency and decision-making power within households and communities.

Families as Key Enablers of Change

Recognising that families are critical gatekeepers to girls' education, So They Can works directly with parents and caregivers to reduce the economic and social pressures that drive harmful practices. Our projects support improved livelihoods for women and families, increased understanding of girls' and women's rights, and shift attitudes towards education, supporting families to choose schooling over early marriage and child labour.



Safe, Gender-Responsive Schools
So They Can partners with government schools to create safe, inclusive and girl-friendly learning environments. Investments in infrastructure (such as gender-disaggregated toilets, changing rooms and dormitories), menstrual health education, gender-responsive pedagogy for teachers, and child rights' training and clubs ensure that schools are places where girls can attend consistently, learn with dignity, and succeed academically. As is demonstrated below, our approach has significantly improved enrolment, retention, performance and transition to secondary education.

Community and Tribal Leadership
Change is only sustained when it is locally led. So They Can engages tribal leaders, elders, champions and community groups to challenge harmful norms from within. By supporting local advocates including our trained Parent Champions, Alternative Rites of Passage (AoH), holistic education programs and survivor networks, So They Can helps communities redefine harmful traditions in ways that protect girls while respecting cultural identity.

Systems and Government Engagement
So They Can's programs are implemented through direct partnership Memorandum of Understandings with local and national governments. Through collaboration with education authorities, health services and protection systems, and leadership within national networks such as Girls Not Brides, So They Can strengthens systems to respond to gender-based violence, enforce child protection laws, and scale sustainable solutions.

Together, this multi-layered approach enables So They Can to achieve measurable, lasting impact ensuring that girls are educated, women are empowered, and communities are equipped to protect the rights of the next generation.



So They Can's Three Key Projects
Advancing Girls' Rights

Our gender lens spans across all of our development work and interlinked projects: 8 Education projects, and 4 Community Development projects. This means that our holistic programs are designed to not only reduce poverty through access to education, but are simultaneously protecting and advancing girls' and women's rights.

However, across our Education and Community Development Programs there are three key projects that work specifically on girls' rights:

1. Keeping Girls in School Project
Provides reusable sanitary products and menstrual health management education for girls, and sexual and reproductive and health rights education for girls and boys.

2. Ambassadors of Hope Project
Directly supports 21 Kenyan girls from Baringo, aged 7-10 years old, who have escaped child marriage with a scholarship for the costs of school fees, boarding, educational materials, and medical and psychosocial support to continue their education.

3. My Voice Project
Empowers girls, and boys, to understand, claim, and protect their rights by building awareness, strengthening reporting and protection mechanisms, and promoting child participation through school and community-based initiatives, including My Voice Clubs in schools.

28,000 girls have accessed quality education, across 55 partner government schools, through So They Can's Education Program since 2009.





Chamkal's video is a personal testimony on the direct impact of So They Can rescuing girls from child marriage.

Transforming Lives: Our Impact on Girls

Across our Education and Community Development Programs, and three specific projects dedicated to girls' rights, we've seen remarkable impact.

- There is gender parity in enrolment.
- 544 girls have been directly rescued from Female Genital Cutting and child marriage and enrolled in So They Can supported schools.
- 167 girls' toilets constructed.
- 31 girls' changing rooms constructed.
- 77,554 reusable sanitary pads provided to school girls.
- 12,475 girls educated on sexual, reproductive and health rights in schools.
- 20 scholarships for girls rescued from child marriage.
- 24 scholarships for teenage mothers returning to school.
- 5 girls' dorms constructed in secondary schools for 500 girls to continue their education.

Evidence of girls who are now safe, empowered and being educated is also captured through So They Can's qualitative data, our impact stories: www.sotheycan.org/blog

'So They Can's work for girls' education has been simply revolutionary. Just a few years ago, most girls were condemned to an early marriage, early motherhood, a lifetime of servitude. Now they are defying all odds and daring to dream big. We see girls topping exams, captaining debates, even winning science fairs! It's no longer a question of if they will complete school, but how far they will go.'

Gender Desk Quote from Tanzania Program Evaluation (2019-2024)

So They Can's Three Key Projects
Advancing Women's Rights

Whilst our primary mission at So They Can is reducing poverty through access to quality education, our model is also underpinned by the belief that all members of society have to be empowered to achieve this goal. This is why, in addition to our three specific projects dedicated to girls' rights, we also focus on empowering the women in the communities we work with. Women are the backbone to thriving communities and stewards of the next generation.

This means that we also have 3 projects focused on women's empowerment:

1. Wezesha Business Skills Project
Supports women to develop practical skills in entrepreneurship and financial literacy, and access micro-loans. It focuses on empowering women with the knowledge and confidence needed to start, manage and grow sustainable small businesses.

2. Community Health Project
Ensures women can access essential healthcare services, health education, and maternal & newborn services. It strengthens women's ability to make informed health decisions for themselves and their families, leading to healthier communities overall.

3. Family Strengthening Project
Supports mothers, and their children, by building parenting skills, emotional wellbeing, and economic resilience. It helps mothers create safe, stable, and nurturing home environments that allow their children to continue their education.

17,800 women have been empowered through So They Can's Community Development Program since 2015.





Transforming Lives: Our Impact on Women

Economic Empowerment

- 1,916 women trained in business skills.
- 7,800 children benefitting through their mothers' empowerment.
- 1,000 additional adults benefiting by being in the women's households.

'The objective of our initiative is to challenge traditional gender roles and oppose the belief that only men have the aptitude to put food on the table... We must set an example for our girls by introducing different perspectives and thinking. And what better way to express this in our group than the saying haba na haba hujaza kibaba – consistent small steps, can accomplish a huge task. It can be done, And yes, we're doing it.'

Nyambura, Chairperson, Faith Abundant Women's Group supported by So They Can.

Women's Health

- 10-bed maternity wing at Chesirimion Clinic in Baringo, Kenya constructed in 2024, 181 safe, live deliveries.
- 200 women accessing quality maternal and newborn care every year at 2 remote partner health clinics in rural Kenya.
- 1,231 households visited by a cadre of 48 Community Health Promoters to support mothers and their families access basic health care services near our 2 partner health clinics.
- 1,500 women accessing basic healthcare at So They Can's annual 1-day medical camps.

'The clinic being supplied with resuscitation equipment and Mama Packs has played a major role in encouraging mothers to consider safely delivering at the facility.'

Agnes, the Nurse-in-Charge at Chesirimion Clinic shares how new equipment has enabled specialised, quality care for mothers and their babies.

Family Strengthening

- 82 families supported - 340 children supported with school requirements.
- 123 caregivers supported for improved livelihoods.

'I am grateful for the training because it changed my thinking about business. Earlier, I thought business was only for the educated and people with money, but now I know that it is for all people.'

Cheponot, Mother in our Family Strengthening Program.

Partnership Opportunity:
The Power of Leverage and Scale

With further investment from partners, together we can reach more girls and women through our evidence-based model.

So They Can's 3-phase Sustainable Schools Development Model is embedded in public education systems in 3 targeted regions where education outcomes are lowest in Tanzania and Kenya. Through direct partnership with governments, schools and communities, we implement 2 core programs to improve education and development outcomes. From the outset, our model makes it clear to all strategic partners that So They Can's goal is to strengthen government schools and their surrounding communities over an eight year period by co-contributing infrastructure, resources, training, and advocacy. The outcome of which leaves schools able to independently sustain high-quality education when we exit. So They Can's partnerships and operations are led, and staffed by 100% nationals, based in our partner communities.

Partnership for Scale

So They Can holds Full Accreditation by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Awarded for the effectiveness of our sustainable development model, it puts So They Can in the top 1% of Australia's 60,000+ charities. Prospective partners who are looking to invest for scale can leverage our Full Accreditation - donor funding unlocks increased DFAT funding to So They Can through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program.

A $3.6 million investment will sustain all 43 government primary schools currently in So They Can's Education Program in Kenya and Tanzania. 12,000 primary school girls a year, and an equal number of boys, will access quality education for the long term.

A $7.2 million investment will scale our model to the 14 secondary schools in our partner communities, so that girls, and boys, can continue their educational journey and access quality secondary education through our proven holistic model.



Partnership for Immediate Impact: Girls' Education

Project	Project Cost
A girls' secondary school dormitory for 100 girls	$150,000
So They Can's Keeping Girls in School project in Kenya	$83,500
So They Can's My Voice project in Kenya	$70,500
Water borehole that will prevent girls having to walk to collect water minimising their exposure to gender based vioence	$50,000
So They Can's My Voice project in Tanzania	$50,000
So They Can's Keeping Girls in School project in Tanzania	$32,500
Girls' changing room at school, enabling girls to not miss one week of their education a month when they stay at home as they have their period	$8,350
Support a girl for a year, who has escaped child marriage to become an Ambassador of Hope, to access education, health and mentorship and develop into a community leader in Kenya	$2,900
Sensitisation of a school community on the importance of girls' education and the prevention of FGC/child marriage through our network of Champion Mothers and Fathers	$3,700
Direct support for a girl who So They Can has supported to escape FGC and child marriage, to remain in school for a year in Kenya	$600
A pack of re-usable sanitary pads so a girl can manage her menstrual hygiene with dignity and attend all school days regardless of her menstrual cycle	$16

Partnership for Immediate Impact:
Women's Empowerment

Project	Project Cost
The provision of medical supplies to ensure quality, well-resourced health care services for mothers and their babies at two partner clinics in Kenya	$37,000
Direct support to a vulnerable mother, and her children, through our Family Strengthening Project in Kenya	$5,140
A two-day medical camp to provide access to basic health services to mothers and families in remote areas of Kenya	$8,000
A micro loan for a woman to start or grow their small business, and keep her children in school in Kenya	$750
To provide business skills training, life skills and ongoing mentorship for a woman to improve her economic independence in Kenya	$600





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