GIRLS Inspire is a partnership between the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and community organisations in Mozambique to address the barriers keeping girls and women from full participation in society.

Girls are a critical agent for social change and global development. Closing the gender gap during adolescence in education, economic activity and health will significantly increase national economic growth and well-being.1 But barriers such as child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), distance to school, security concerns, cultural values and the costs of schooling all prevent girls and women from participating in educational opportunities.

GIRLS Inspire’s three-year project, funded by the Government of Canada, focuses upon preventing CEFM in Mozambique through open, distance and technology-based education. Ending CEFM is crucial to Mozambique achieving eight of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

With partner agencies Ajuda de Desenvolvimento de Povo para Povo (ADPP) and Associação Progresso (Progresso), 16 community-agreed safe learning environments were established, and 242 agreements were signed with parents and spouses to allow girls to attend school. Partnerships with the Institute of Labour and the National Institute for Employment and Vocational Training resulted in mobile classes, which enabled previously unreached girls to participate in vocational courses.

EDUCATING FOR BETTER LIVELIHOODS AND HEALTH

Through the safe learning spaces and mobile classes, 666 women and girls completed skills training and 386 girls reintegrated into formal schooling, setting them on the path to greater earning ability.

In addition, through life skills workshops on sexual and reproductive health, family planning and HIV/AIDS, girls learned about young mothers who experienced complications in early pregnancies. A total of 171 girls accessed family planning services.

MAKING PROGRESS SUSTAINABLE

Twenty-eight ADPP staff members have been trained as community facilitators, monitoring and evaluation officers, data collectors and course material developers. Twenty-two Progresso staff were trained in gender mainstreaming and other ways of supporting women and girls.

BUILDING COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Through 74 events, GIRLS Inspire raised awareness in all sections of the community about CEFM, domestic violence, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health. Community radio, national TV spots, debates, role-playing and presentations, community meetings and community performances by cultural groups reached at least 9,803 community members. In addition, a GIRLS Inspire project was featured on national TV and seen by over half a million people.

ENCOURAGING POLICY CHANGE

Ten exchanges with external agencies yielded excellent results, including: (1) an MOU signed with the Ministry of Health to develop life skills courses on sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS; and (2) MOUs signed with the Ministry of Labour to allow the use of their mobile training facilities and allow linkages with internship and work placements.

Progresso also continually discusses co-ordination of the project with the Ministry of Education and the Direcções Provinciais da Educação e Desenvolvimento Humano.