

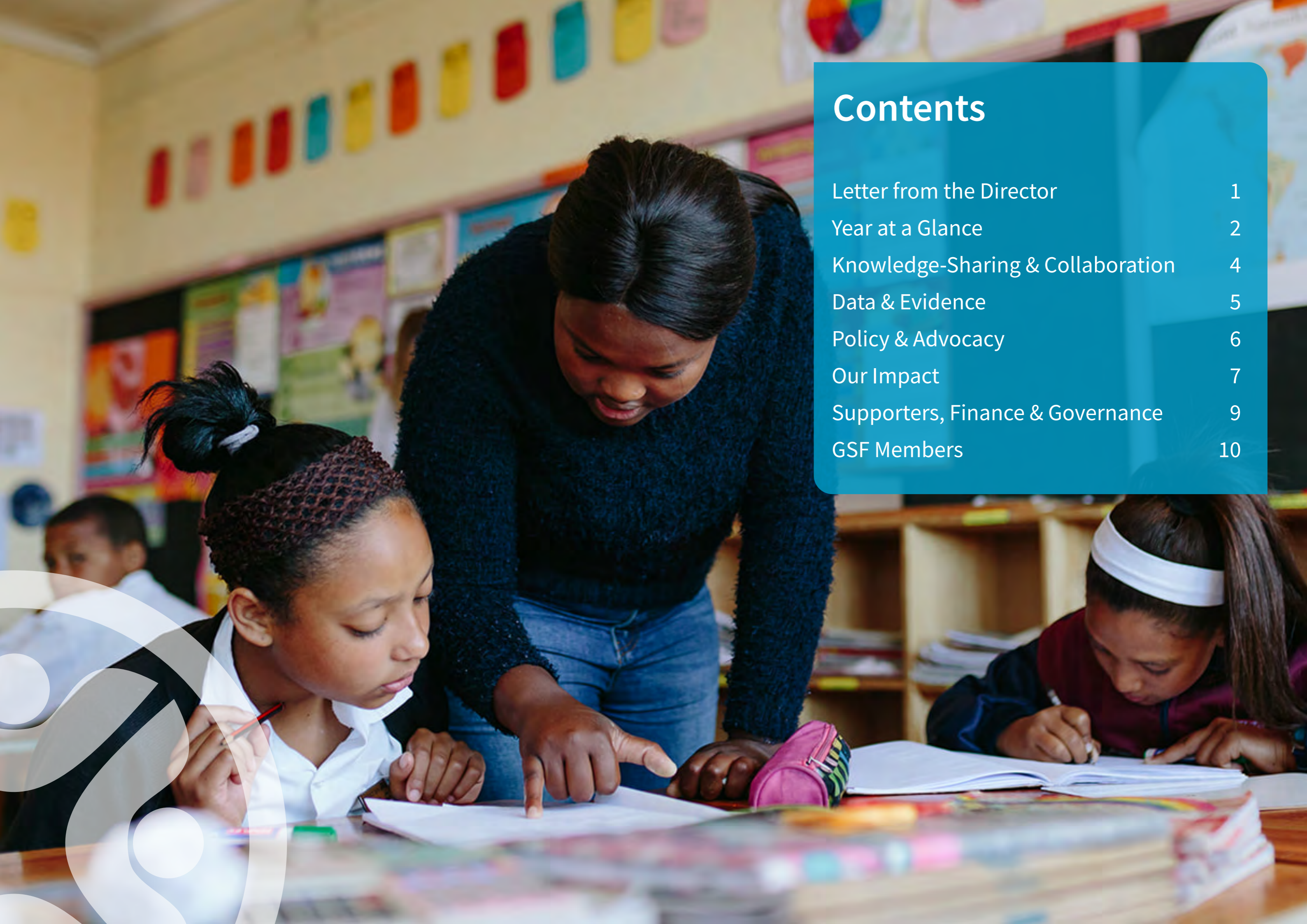


GLOBAL
SCHOOLS
FORUM



2019-2020 Annual Report

Christel House
South Africa



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Letter from the Director

Dear GSF Supporter,

What a year we have all had! It has demanded innovation and flexibility on the frontline, and the GSF community has been tested to the limit.

However, our members have risen to the challenge with new strategies and programmes to support their communities and keep children learning during this time. Many have gone beyond the realm of possible to reach the over 2.3 million children that they provide schooling to. The tenacity and commitment have been complemented by efforts to share, collaborate and partner — with our members being recognised as valuable partners to governments, and to the wider education community.

We swung into action in early 2020 to support our members as they dealt with the range of complex challenges emerging from COVID-19 and near universal school closure.

Our team has been humbled by the incredible work that all our members are doing to support the children in their care, and the pandemic has reinforced our belief in the value of establishing a trusted network connected by our shared mission to provide children with access to a quality education.

As a result, this year, GSF significantly expanded its network with 12 new members. Our 58 members run or support some of the most innovative schools across 46 countries in South America, Sub Saharan Africa, and South and East Asia.

The team focused on deepening the impact of our Knowledge-Sharing & Collaboration work to support our members.

We have experienced increased participation and engagement from both our older and newer members, as we customise our offer to reach more specialised functions within member organisations — including professional development, M&E, and recruitment. Through an expanded offer, our members strengthened their relationships with one another, building an even stronger community and network.

Our Policy & Advocacy offer sought to protect the policy, funding, and operational space for nonstate actors in education. With a goal to enable our members to continue to do their excellent work and enable more children to access quality education, our work in this area fed into key processes and strategies affecting the environment for non-state schools, and awareness-raising of the opportunities and challenges facing the sector because of COVID-19.

And finally, we have initiated work to strengthen the quality and use of Data & Evidence emerging from the non-state sector, making it more widely accessible to inform and influence wider education systems.

Plans to launch Learning Labs are afoot, to provide funding opportunities for members to test and iterate innovations in their organisations. It is a core principle of our work that the outputs will be high quality, open source, 'global public goods' and that they will be realised through partnerships with research organisations.

As we look ahead, we are excited for some big developments in 2021. We are laying strong foundations as we plan to spin out as an independent entity. We are further building the team with the addition of new roles, including for the Data & Evidence and Policy & Advocacy programmes. While we continue to receive generous financial support from private donors, we have laid the groundwork for financial sustainability through the introduction of member fees in 2021 — albeit plans that we put temporarily on pause with the onset of COVID-19, and its financial impact on our members. And finally, we are diversifying our leadership by expanding the composition of the GSF Board of Trustees to include representation from independent experts and member organisations.

On behalf of the GSF team, thank you for your continued support and engagement.

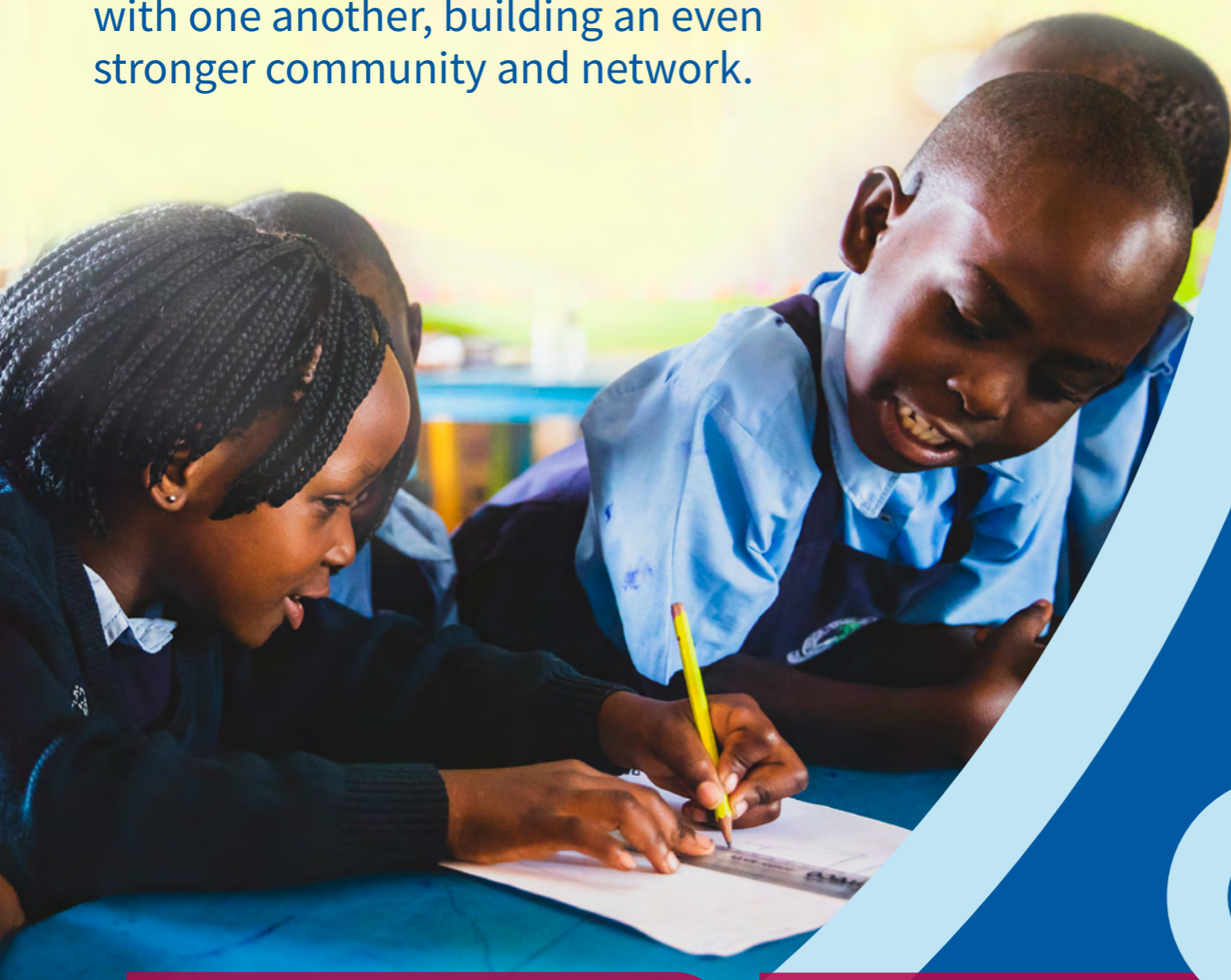


Aashti Zaidi Hai
Executive Director



Year at a Glance

This year, GSF significantly deepened its impact. We grew our membership and we experienced increased participation and engagement from our older and newer members. Through an expanded offer, our members strengthened their relationships with one another, building an even stronger community and network.



GSF is...

The only international membership organisation that supports the **non-state education sector**.

Our members are school networks and intermediary organisations providing high-quality education to low-and middle-income students in developing countries.

 **58** members

 **46** countries

 **17,300** schools

 Providing quality education to over **2.3 million** children

 **47** school operators, **11** intermediaries

Growing and diversifying membership

- 12 new organisations have joined GSF, reaching an additional 14 countries across the world.
- Of these, 3 are intermediaries providing support for whole-school improvement through varying approaches, from financial services to developing school leadership.

Expanded member offer

- We held our first 'Spotlight' event, a three-day targeted event bringing together a smaller group of participants around an issue of relevance to their organisations. The February 2020 Spotlight was held in Johannesburg with representatives from 13 member organisations taking an in depth look at 'Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Development'.
- We delivered our first training series in partnership with a member. GSF and Hippocampus Learning Centres collaborated to deliver a six-module series focused on Early Childhood Education.
- We offered tailored support during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing members with opportunities to connect virtually and showcase solutions to shared challenges.
- We expanded our advocacy efforts towards protecting the policy and regulatory environment for non-state schools and raised awareness of the opportunities and challenges facing the sector, particularly as a result of COVID-19.

Increased collaboration between members

- GSF connects members to strengthen their practice. 71% of members reported that they were connected to another member or stakeholder by GSF.
- GSF creates structured opportunities for growth and learning. GSF facilitated its first peer review process in which members from South Africa and Uganda looked critically at a peer organisation's approach to supporting and developing its school principals.
- GSF empowers members to lead and collaborate. During GSF's Spotlight event, members from Kenya, Pakistan and South Africa led and facilitated sessions, sharing their approaches to effective hiring and professional development of principals.



GSF Members & COVID-19

The last six months have been dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It has demanded innovation and flexibility on the frontline, and our members have been tested to the limit. However, they have risen to the challenge with new strategies and programmes to support their communities and keep children learning during this time. In doing so, they have demonstrated great tenacity and shown themselves to be valuable collaborators with government and other partners.

GSF has been humbled and impressed by the incredible work that all our members are doing to support the children in their care, along with their wider communities. We want to share a few examples here, but this is just the tip of the iceberg! There are numerous stories like these from our membership that we have showcased in our newsletters and through scheduled webinars and meetings.

Showcase



Rising on Air, International Response

Learning from experiences during the Ebola Crisis, Rising Academies adapted to the pandemic by creating a distance learning solution called [Rising On Air](#); a 20-week programme of free, ready-to-air, radio scripts and SMS content. The programme leverages Rising's proven, high-quality structured curriculum content, re-designed for delivery via existing, widely available technologies. The initiative is available via an open-access web portal and has a growing community of partner organizations and governments around the world, currently spanning more than 25 countries. It has reached upwards of 10 million children and has been translated into [French, Arabic](#) and 10 other languages.



SPARK Schools, South Africa

In April, SPARK Schools made all of their instruction materials open source to help schools and students grappling with remote learning amidst school closures. Additionally, they have established ways to provide targeted support to parents of their students who are struggling financially due to COVID-19. SPARK partnered with [Ignite Education Fund to raise funds for a relief project](#) assisting affected SPARK families. Relief includes financial assistance with school fees, support to keep children connected to schooling through access to educational tools and materials, and community interventions to prevent dropouts.



The Citizens Foundation, Pakistan

The Citizens Foundation (TCF) [mobilised teachers, alumni and supporters to provide economic relief](#) in the form of cash transfers and rations to communities severely affected by COVID-19. Households who had lost income and were struggling to survive under lockdown were identified by volunteer teams of TCF alumni, teachers and principals in those communities who conducted door-to-door surveys and oversaw in-person delivery of relief. Cash transfers were facilitated by a partnership with a local telecoms provider.

Between April and June, TCF has helped [over 45,000 households in 250 communities](#), the majority of whom are daily wage workers.

“

Hands down the most useful conference I've ever attended... Being surrounded by such smart and thoughtful individuals was really great. They challenged my thinking process in a manner that I really appreciate. ”

**GSF Member,
South Africa
Spotlight Event**



Knowledge-Sharing & Collaboration

The foundation of our Knowledge-Sharing & Collaboration work is a deep understanding of our members' needs. We leverage their expertise and experiences to deliver a tailored offer characterised by principles of adult learning. We know that the GSF network is core to strengthening our members' efforts, so we focus on creating and amplifying opportunities for members to learn and collaborate with one another.

This year, we broadened our offer to include a wider and more targeted range of training and network-building opportunities. We piloted new formats ranging from a facilitated peer review, to a regional 'Spotlight' event, to a member-delivered training series on Early Childhood Education. Our members' experience is our priority, and we have adjusted to their needs, including rapidly pivoting our support with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Highlights

A year ago, we spoke to members about what they needed to strengthen their practice. Two top themes that emerged were Early Childhood Education and Talent:

- We held a 'Spotlight' on the topic of 'Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Development' in South Africa, bringing together 20 participants from 13 member organisations for a deep exploration of issues around hiring, retention and staff motivation. Over 3 days, there were panel discussions, school visits, member-led presentations and a 'Challenge Carousel' where participants could share problems of practice.
- We launched an innovative partnership with Hippocampus Learning Centres to deliver a 6-part training series on ECE, the first training designed and delivered by one of our members. Participants not only learn from Hippocampus, but also reflect together on their practice and apply insights to their contexts.

We also launched our very first peer review. Three school networks operating across Zambia, Uganda, Kenya and South Africa — SPARK, Nova Pioneer and PEAS — met and served as critical friends to examine SPARK's approach to supporting and developing School Leaders.

COVID-19

This has been a difficult season for our membership as they have grappled with: school closures, providing remote instruction in low-resource settings, ensuring children do not get left behind in their education, supporting staff appropriately, meeting practical needs in their communities, and coping with financial pressures on their organisations. We have sought to offer specific support at this crucial moment:

- In March, we surveyed our members to find out how they were coping with the COVID-19 pandemic and held a virtual 'Town Hall' event to discuss their immediate challenges and concerns.
- Based on the survey, we organised 5 webinars featuring information and discussion on key issues raised by our members: child safeguarding, delivering instruction in low-resource settings and virtual professional development.
- We rolled out a targeted offer — Leadership Connect — convening CEOs and leaders to troubleshoot and support each other through the crisis.



At GSF we aim not only to create a thriving global network that supports our members to deliver quality education, but also to strengthen the non-state sector globally to allow more children to access quality education. Our two additional programmes of work — Policy & Advocacy and Data & Evidence — have been established to that end.

Data & Evidence

GSF's ambition is to strengthen data on the non-state sector, making it more widely accessible to inform and influence wider education systems. This year has been critical in laying the early foundation for this work, most notably, securing funding to design and develop a 3-year Data & Evidence programme.

It is a core principle of our Data & Evidence work that the outputs will be high quality, open source, 'global public goods' and that they will be realised through partnerships with research organisations.

The Programme will include:

- A Learning Lab, evaluating interventions in GSF member schools to build the evidence base of what works, and develop public goods to 'nudge' wider education systems;
- An annual census of GSF members generating and analysing valuable data from the sector;
- A bi-annual State of the Sector Report, consolidating the existing evidence on the non-state sector.

“
Especially over the last year, it has been nice to have so many opportunities to grow as leaders and to have a space to communicate with others.”

GSF Member

Policy & Advocacy

GSF is the only membership organisation supporting the non-state education sector at a global level and is in a unique position to be a voice for the sector. Our Policy & Advocacy work focuses on protecting the policy, funding, and operational space for non-state actors in education, to allow our members to continue to do their excellent work and enable more children to access quality education.

Highlights

This year, GSF's advocacy efforts have prioritised targeting key processes affecting the environment for non-state schools and raising awareness of opportunities and challenges for the sector.

We have **engaged with bilateral and multilateral organisations** to highlight the important contribution of non-state actors. This involved: contributing to the UNESCO consultation for the 2021 Global Education Monitoring Report on non-state actors; working with USAID on the design of the new education component of their blended finance initiative, Catalyze; and engaging with World Bank Shareholders to oppose a campaign calling for an end to World Bank funding to for-profit education providers.

We have sought to raise our profile and voice to represent the non-state sector through **participation in strategic events**. We:

- Convened a panel at the September UKFIET conference on the non-state sector and inclusive education, featuring some of our members. Following this, GSF was invited as a discussant to the UNESCO-IIEP strategic debate: 'Taking the Right to Education Seriously'.
- Co-hosted an event in London in January on 'The Complementary Role of Non-State Actors in Delivering Quality Basic Education' with the Education Partnerships Group. The panel featured high-quality speakers, including the former Liberian and current Punjabi Education Ministers.

- Participated in a panel event, 'Fragile States: Public — private sector partnerships as a global solution', hosted at Oxford University in February, along with representatives from Oxfam and other international NGOs.

COVID-19

Since **COVID-19**, we have focused our advocacy efforts on raising awareness of the particular threats and challenges faced by non-state schools as a result of the pandemic and lobbying for much-needed support to the sector through:

- Concerted communications efforts to highlight the role and unique vulnerabilities of the non-state education sector. These included a blog cross-posted on the UKFIET and IEFG websites and another that featured on the GEMR World Education Blog, later cited in UN policy brief 'Education during COVID-19 and beyond'.
- Writing to DFID Ministers drawing attention to the particular impact of COVID-19 on the non-state sector, highlighting the work of our members, and making the case for support.
- Commissioning a rapid research review to document available data on how the non-state sector is faring, including emerging evidence on private school closures and incidences of government measures to support schools.

As the impact of the crisis on non-state schools continues to emerge, we are committed to gathering more evidence on how the sector is responding and raising awareness of its needs.



“The beauty of GSF is that they seem to have a big enough network with enough similarity and diversity to enable rich and meaningful engagement.”

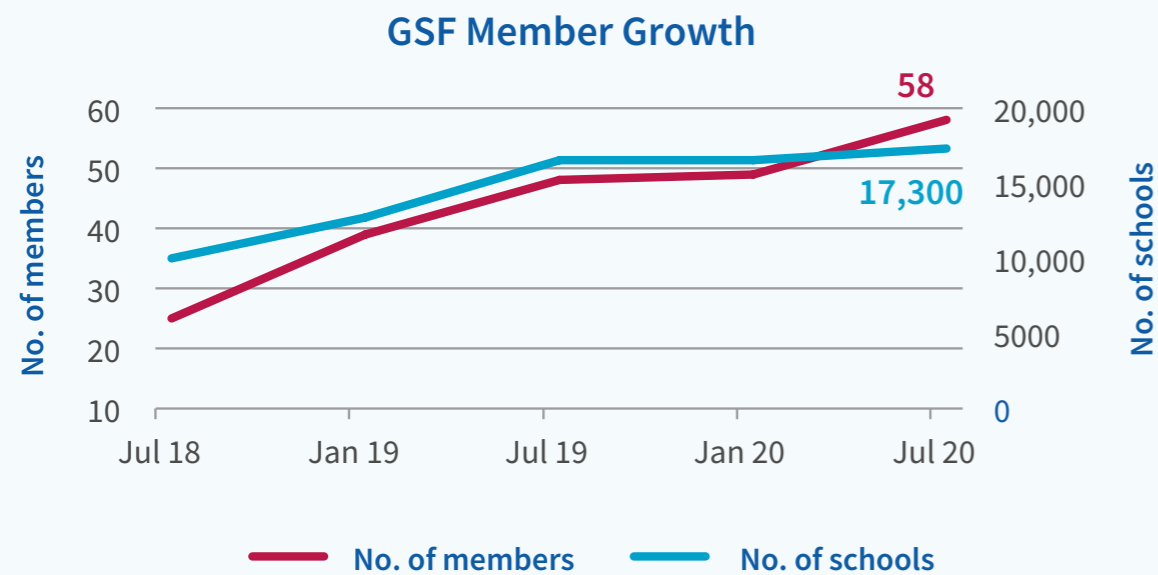
GSF School Operator Member

Our Impact



GSF Growth

GSF membership has **grown by 20% this year with 12 new members.**



Community & Connection

According to our Annual Survey¹, our members most value being part of a community characterised by shared values, and having access to a network of peers and colleagues.

Our members connect with one another regularly. **71% of Annual Survey respondents reported having been connected to another organisation**, either within the GSF membership or an external partner, by GSF. Close to **140 connections** have been made in 2020 alone, the majority between members. These range from one-to-one conversations or visits, to sharing resources, or collaborating on funding bids and project development.

‘What do you find most valuable about being a member of GSF?’

The top four responses:

- 1. Community & Shared Values**
- 2. Access to the Network**
- 3. Products & Expertise**
- 4. Collaboration**

“
It feels like we engage with organisations that understand our work and challenges. We can learn from each other.”

GSF Member

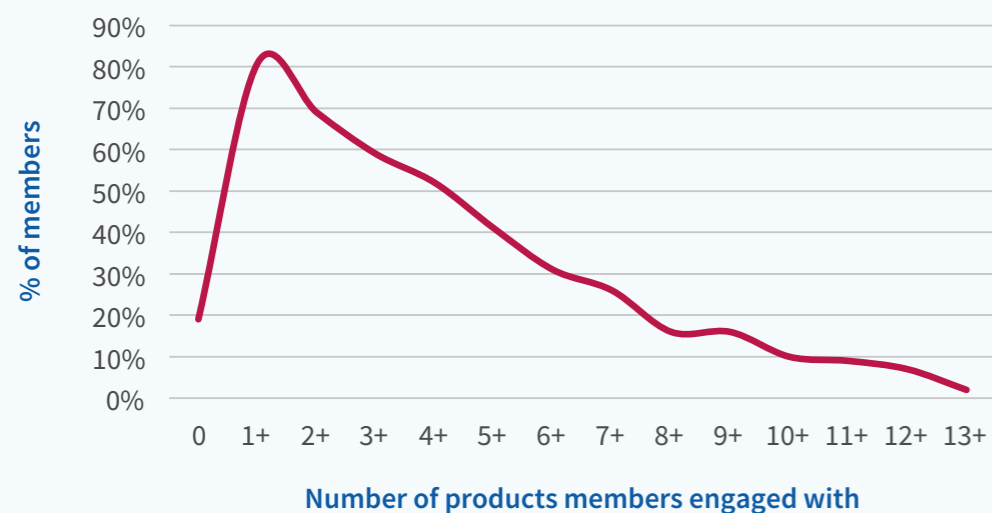
¹ GSF surveys its members in July each year. This year, responses were received from two thirds of members (63%).



Member Engagement

This year, we offered 25 different products — events, meetings and webinars — to our members. Since March, **over 80% of members attended or participated in at least 1 product, and half of our members have engaged with 4 or more.**

Member Engagement March — August 2020



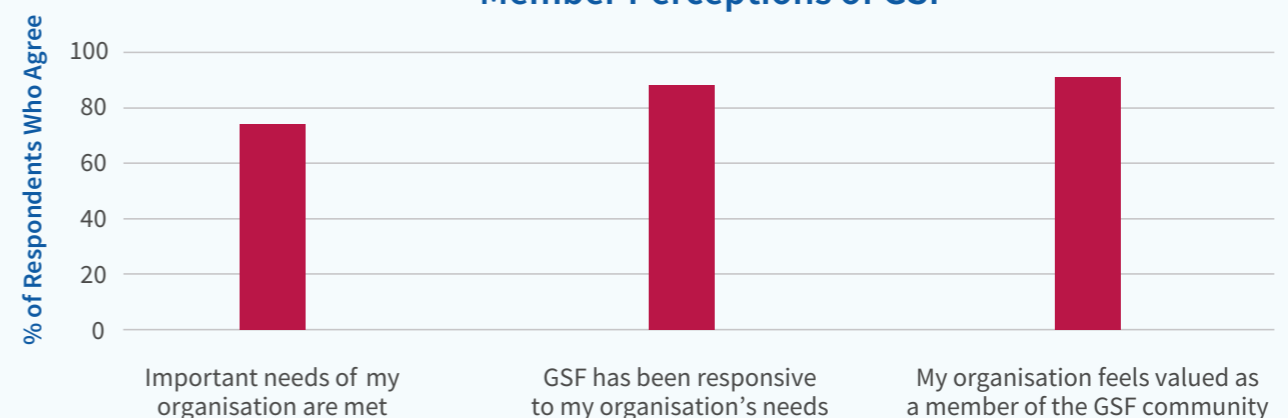
Satisfaction

GSF has a strong reputation and credibility amongst its members. We gauge member satisfaction by measuring a Net Promoter Score (NPS) in our Annual Survey and for each of our offers. Both of these have returned **ratings of ‘excellent’, with NPS scores of 57% in our Annual Survey and an average of 62% across all GSF products** in the last 6 months.

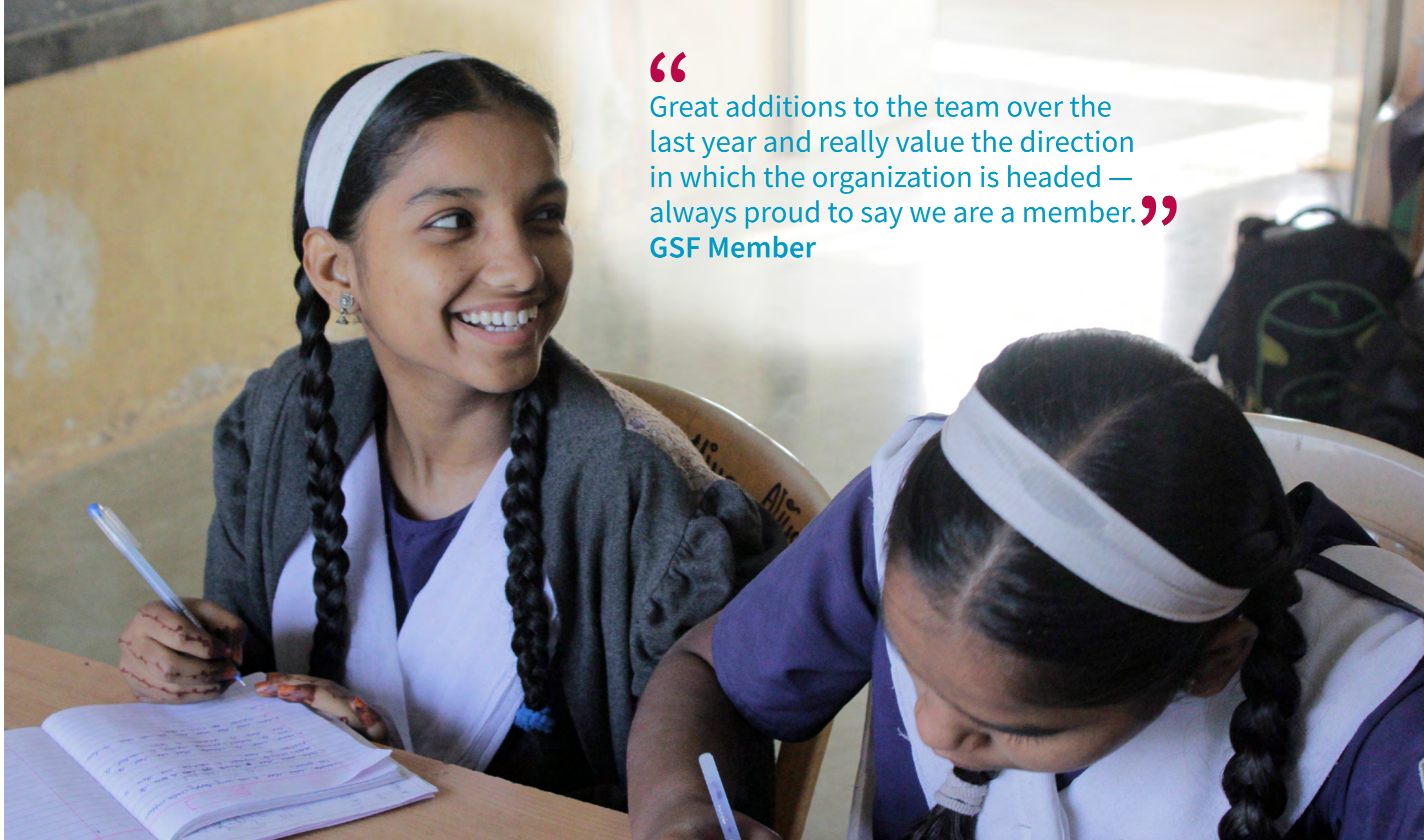
The vast majority of Annual Survey respondents reported feeling that their organisation was valued in the GSF community, and that GSF was responsive to their needs.

Given the challenges of the last 6 months, **88% of respondents felt that GSF had been sufficiently visible and accessible during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Member Perceptions of GSF



GSF Supporters



“ Great additions to the team over the last year and really value the direction in which the organization is headed — always proud to say we are a member.”
GSF Member

Finance & Governance

GSF is currently incubated by Ark Ventures, part of the education charity Ark. Ark Ventures incubates, launches and supports organisations that have the potential to deliver widespread change in education and society. While Ark retains fiduciary and legal oversight for GSF at the moment, GSF intends to spin out as an independent legal entity in September 2021.

With this in view, the last year has seen GSF laying foundations for independence and financial sustainability. The GSF team has expanded with the recruitment of a Programme Manager, Director of Operations and Business Development, and a Communications & Advocacy Manager. With increasing efforts on the data and evidence front, we will be recruiting for further roles in this area.

We have continued to receive generous support from private donors but have started preparations for the introduction of member fees as we move towards a more sustainable financing model. In consultation with members, we have developed a proposed fee structure, tiered proportionally to budgets of members to ensure equitable pricing. With the onset of COVID-19, and its financial impact on our members, we took the decision to delay the introduction of fees by one year to September 2021.

Looking ahead to 2020/21 GSF will diversify and strengthen its governance by expanding the composition of GSF’s board to include representation from independent experts and member organisations, further strengthening their voice in GSF.

GSF Members

School Operators



Intermediary Organisations



Global Schools Forum
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Details correct at time of publication, October 2020